

IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER STUDIES: STUDYING MALE, FEMALE AND THE THIRD GENDERS

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Abstract: Gender Studies is an umbrella term used for the studies on the defined genders in society including the male, the female and the third genders. Queer studies further define lesbians and gays as categories of people who could also be brought under the purview of gender studies. Studying genders based on the biological factors that are predominant and are visibly present in individuals, is an area that is being examined in contemporary research. Gender studies is not just limited to asserting equality and rights for all genders but have evolved into a larger branch of studies focussing on the issues faced by various genders including physical and mental aspects and trying to examine ways in which perceptions can be altered in the changing scenario of life. This study discuss on the gender notions that are prevalent in the society and critiques gender normative behaviours were by a difference in perception of gender could be acquired drawing inspiration from the proponents of various theories on gender studies including Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Simon De Beauvoir and Judith Butler who have considerably contributed to the field of gender studies and women's studies in particular.

Keywords: Gender Studies, Gender Normative Behaviours, Gender Perceptions

Introduction : 'Gender' like 'sex' are complex words that define the identity of any human being. Gender studies is the field of enquiry that focuses on understanding the factors that determine an identity to the individual whether it be the male, female or the other. Lot of debates are ongoing in the field of gender studies identifying the real identity of an individual. Gender studies branches out to fields of studies including feminism, studies on masculinities, third gender studies, bisexual studies and queer studies including gay and lesbian studies (Nagarajan, 214). Hence, it is an umbrella term that has larger connotations.

Gender rights have its evolutions from the Western feminist movements in the early 15th century. The stalwarts of the movement later included Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and Virginia Woolf, whose *A Room of One's Own* (1928) focussed on the need for gender equality and rights mainly focussing on feminist ideologies. The contributors to this movement at a later stage includes Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Sarah Lucia Hoagland's *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value* (1988) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1989). Other contributors to this field includes Kate Millet, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Helen Cixous.

The inception of gender studies as a field of inquiry begins from the feminist movements. Feminist movements has seen many waves of change including the First wave feminism, the Second-wave feminism, and Third-wave feminism. It further branched out into other feminist fields of inquiry including radical feminism, gynocriticism, eco feminism, Marxist feminism, dissident and anti-feminism, liberal feminism, individualist feminism, Black Feminism,

French feminism and Post-Feminism. Feminism has moved from its earliest movements, beyond focussing on the need for rights of women, to the equality of all sexes. The need for such a change was the need of the hour. This study discuss on the gender notions that are prevalent in the society and critiques gender normative behaviours were by a difference in perception of gender could be acquired.

Discussions: Inclusive of feminism, in the contemporary society, gender rights is discussed and debated. The International Bill of Gender Rights 1995 provides the right to define and express freely one's own gender identity. (Shabbir, 101) Gender studies has now spread across to other zones of studies on humanity including masculinity studies, lesbian, gay and bisexual studies.

As sex is a biological construct, gender remains a social construct. Assigning characteristics to individuals based on the roles played by them in the society has given a firm foundation to assigning gender identities to individuals that further has biological implications. Judith Butler, a renown gender theorist, talks about the heterosexual matrix in her work *Gender Trouble* where she identifies this as a "grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized." (Butler: 2) The social system has made specific regulations and laws for each gender which when one abides become a gender normative behaviour.

Accepting the normative sex and rejecting other manifestations of sexuality is a trend seen in many cultures. "Sexuality of an individual is often ignored or not given much significance until it is a cause of thought or threat to society." (Pannikot: 83) Any behaviour presented by an individual that does not conform to the norms of the society is treated as

unusual or abnormal. De Beauvoir talks about the “performativity” of genders when she mentions “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” (Beauvoir: 295) The gender traits presented through body, mannerisms, sexual behaviour and instincts create this gender identity that is presented as a ‘natural’ behaviour of a specific sex. There are a certain queries that Butler emphasises through her critical arguments that include: “Can we refer to a “given” sex or a “given” gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given, through what means? And what is “sex” anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal...? Does sex have a history? Does each sex have a different history, or histories? Is there a history of how the duality of sex was established, a genealogy that might expose the binary options as a variable construction? Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests?” (Butler: 6, 7). These are some relevant questions that any studies on gender need to address.

Sex, though considered biological, is used as a way to relate or differentiate an individual from the other, based on the biological features. The terms Bisexual, lesbian, gay and straight defines the sexual identity based on desires that are more psychological and physical in nature. Transgenders or the third-genders are another group of individuals whose identity is neither limited within the biological features nor within the psychological desires that they possess. Hence, the process of understanding gender identity is a more complex task as the notions of gender are unlimited with the body, the psyche, desires and passions of individuals. Normativity in sexual identity remains a cultural construct. When one talks about gender rights all these aspects need to be taken into consideration simultaneously. This could be the reason for the marginalized genders to gain more relevance in the present.

The rights of different genders are defined by the Indian constitution. The third genders could recently draw more attention of the Indian Government

towards their problems. The Universal Declaration of 1948 provides right of a different kind to the transgenders. “Article 21 gives the right to take part in government, further article provides right to education; right to work, to form trade unions...for equal pay for equal work...for a standard of living adequate to the health and well-being of himself and his family...security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood...to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits and what is even more novel, the right to rest, leisure and ‘periodic holidays with pay.’” (Rameshwari: 46)

The biological element of the male and female hormones in its varied levels reframe and re-create an individual’s cultural identity and gender identity. The *ardhanarisvara* (manifestation of the half male Lord Shiva and half female Goddess Parvathi) concept in the Indian tradition brings in the duality of these identities. This further implies that both the qualities are present in any individual. Gender identities hence should not be limited to the physical appearance of an individual and should be understood as having more psychological (thoughts, ideas and beliefs), physical (body structure and the presence of variations in hormonal levels) and emotional (feelings, associations) relations. With the advent of sex transformation surgeries, identities are further being disputed. The choice of adopting any sexual identity is possible though science has to still progress towards the possibilities of reproduction capabilities of different sexes. This would further deconstruct all gender notions that one has and will help in accommodating all genders with equality.

Conclusion: Gender notions that are prevalent in societies are human constructs and one need to look forward to have equality and harmonious co-existence among all genders. It further affirms that gender identities are gendered perceptions of the society that are performative in nature and one’s gender depends on the identity that the person is interested in manifesting to the society of which the society might or might not make sense of.

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