

Gender Studies: The Construct of Society and Culture

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Abstract

Gender-study is an analysis of the phenomenon of gender, where sex is subsided by the social and cultural construction of masculinities and femininities. The sexual orientation is the main characteristics of lesbian /gay criticism. Gender criticism is mainly designated by Lesbian feminism. Lesbian feminism emerged during 1980s as an appendix of feministic criticism before being separated from Gay or Queer theory, it emerged because Feminism failed to accommodate the subtle differences between homo and bisexual, gay and Lesbian and Black and White. The present paper tries to explore the matrix of society where man and woman are two carts on which the family rolls but the cart of fair sex gets a subaltern status all the way.

Keywords:

Social construct, feminism, lesbianism, lesbian continuum

Gender-study is an analysis of the phenomenon of gender, where sex is subsided by the social and cultural construction of masculinities and femininities. This concept of literary criticism is based on the concept of Simone de Beauvoir, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman...it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ...which is described as feminine.” (Beauvoir, 267) As a distinct theory gender criticism emerged after 1990s but the seeds can be traced in “lesbian” and “Gay” sections of women studies. If women studies are concerned with gender, Lesbian studies concerned with sex and sexualities. The sexual orientation is the main characteristics of lesbian /gay criticism. Gender criticism is mainly designated by Lesbian feminism. Lesbian feminism emerged during 1980s as an appendix of feministic criticism before being separated from Gay or Queer theory, it emerged because Feminism failed to accommodate the subtle differences between homo and bisexual, gay and Lesbian and Black and White. According to Beat writers Feminism has ignored these differences. Bell Hooks condemns feminism in the book *Black Woman and Feminism*.

In the essay “What has never been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism” Zimmerman attacks the Essentialism which prevents the consideration of Lesbian issues in establishing feminist writing she argues that lesbian should be regarded as the most complete form of feminism. This conflict between Heterosexual Feminism and Lesbianism was partly reconciled by Adrienne Rich's concept of “Lesbian Continuum” in her book *Blood Bread and Poetry*. The Lesbian

Continuum suggests the inter connections among women by various ways. Paullina Palmer says that Lesbianism in this way becomes political act rather than sexual orientations. These concepts have introduced the notion of choice in matter of sex and gender. Thus, sexuality is not something natural and unchanging but constructed and it could be changed. Thus, Lesbianism departs from feminism and touches Gender which transcends the ambit of sex and sexuality and makes this concept of an interdisciplinary one, which not only focuses on both male and female but also covers the issues on class, race, ethnicity and location.

The world may have progressed and shown new panoramas but status of the fair sex is still underdeveloped. Gender study unearths these intricate fabrics of our society and culture. Ignorance becomes the trademark of this gender, they mould their wish and outlook at the behest of their father or husband. The writers like V S Naipaul explain this structure of gender in our society with the help of their characters. *The Mystic Masseur* and *A House For Mr. Biswas* show this social fabric of gender in the society. The protagonists of these novels treat their respective wives as indentured labourers. These male characters think that their wives are meant for serving and respecting their husbands and this is the only work assigned to them by this society. They negate the idea of equality in familial relationship. Mr. Biswas who keeps himself busy in search of a house, carries the idea of masculinity. He identifies the feeling of manhood in the ownership of a house. This house will provide a feeling of master or lord who is in possession of something which provides shelter to his subordinates. This feeling will enhance and satisfy his male ego and make him feel superior. Naipaul's characters focus on the concept of "gender". This concept of gender explains, this is a man's world where a woman can assist in 'his' individualistic search and feel happy in 'his' happiness.

In the social construct of gender, 'violence' is also treated as an inalienable part of human psyche. State power itself is maintained by repressive structures, as Althusser points out. Institutions like the police, the army, prisons and courts operate by external force. But the power of state is also maintained more subtly by seeming to secure the internal consent of its denizens, by using ideological structure. For women this ideological structure is cataclysmic. Patriarchal societies consider women as assets or belonging. Pt Ganesh of *The Mystic Masseur* and Mr Biswas of *A house for Mr Biswas* inflict violence on their wives. They often assault them and project it as a form of affection because they own them as one can own a pet in one's house. For instance: "Leela, I have a good mind to take of my belt and give you a good dose of blows before I even wash my hands..." (Naipaul:54).

Here, the noticeable point is that these women characters neither oppose nor complain of their husbands' action, or rather, they feel it quite natural. They take it as a trend of patriarchy which leaves them to bear alone the pain and agony of their life. The social construct becomes

apparent in the writings when the male characters are shown busy talking and musing over politics, females prepare meal and nursing the kids. All these reflect the fragile and vulnerable condition of women who have no identity of their own.

In terms of gender this condition of women is nowhere related to their biological structure, it is the aftermath of the social and cultural construct they live in. In this social fabric the power is acquired by the male and the females are treated as a subordinate. But there are some writers of Indian origin who are revolting against this age-old trend of male dominance and they are trying to project the revolt of the fairer sex. Shobha De is one of this lot, who projects a new and candid woman who stands at the equal footing with men. De's intimate understanding of the psyche of women and their problems gives a new fillip to this emerging gender-study. Her women characters show the tendency to assert their potential as human beings struggling to have an identity. These female characters seek to diminish the age old myth that women activities are essentially confined to certain spheres of life. It is believed that women ultimately ignore the flaws and cruelties of their husbands. But the characters of De show some unforeseen reactions against the atrocities of their husbands. De tries to establish a new image of women who is revolutionary and throws away the cultural binding associated with femininity. (Dodiya & Dhawan, 3)

The narratives of De appear to bring out different forms of women behaviour to astonish and startle the readers. *Socialite Evening*, *Sultry Days*, *Second Thought* and *Sisters* project a different picture from the established patriarchal mentality and set up. These characters are not painted just as a subordinate of males but they have their own identity. These narratives and characters of De not only reveal the male dominance but also show the sense of revolt from this fair sex of society. Gender study becomes predominant in her writings when in spite of expressing a particular dislike for male attitude against women, she directs her attack against the system and social fabric which generates all these differences. She exposes the subtleties of male behaviour that tends to marginalize and suppress woman's existence.

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