

## The Gender Equation In Stereotypic Representation Of Women

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### ABSTRACT

*Gender issues still exist as a perennial source of apprehensions regarding the oppressions of women though the feminist struggles continue to be waged against the patriarchal representations of women in the literary works produced from centuries back to the contemporary scenario. The canon formations and the privileged status to certain works are not free from gender equations. Critical and theoretical approaches are always needed to have serious reflections over the gender issues in ever changing socio political milieu that constructs, reconstructs and deconstructs the entire literary corpus.*

The formula of ‘means to end’ dates long back, as early as the origin of human kind. It assumes its significance in a plethora of discourses. The discursive structures and practices in art, literature and culture determine these formulae. Since Performing arts is always a vibrant and active medium of the enactment of the reality in a societal frame work, the gender equations too practiced in a social context are found signified in the performance theatre. So, the gender equations analysed in a social reality are approximately analogous to those of the performing culture. Gender issues is one of the moot points surfacing on the deliberations involved in the artistic, literary and performing aesthetics.

It is a fact that everything including religion and family has been transformed to sheer means for maintaining the end of power. Machiavellian politics, Gandhism, Marxism, marriage, literature, psychology etc accommodate the elements of this ‘means to end’ formula. Most often, the women community is rendered the status of the means for the end of the male community.

As far as the position and the representation of the women are concerned in the current consumer culture which does not exempt the discipline of arts and literature too, a different outlook is needed towards the gender issue. Generally, the patriarchal discourses always relegate women in to the background and those counter discourses standing for women’s liberty and emancipation from the shackles of dominant patriarchal system.

It is important to trace the root cause of the issue by pitting it against the current profit-motivated social milieu in which, the identity, faith, religion, arts, politics, literature etc are commodified and institutionalised. So, the absence of the women's voice or the representation of the women under a negative light is to be looked from the consumerist cultural scenario. Advertising, films, performing arts etc are often manipulated and misused for sexualisation of the women. These media only focus upon the peripheral and external paraphernalia while rejecting essence or self of the women. It is to be noted whether the cheer girls represented in sports (Indian Premier League) are really cheerful. They must not be essentially cheerful. But they are paid to be cheerful for the sake of male dominated sponsors and players of the match. This performance does not go in line with traditional performing arts which gives an opportunity to reveal one's artistic faculties and aesthetic tastes, whether it is man or woman.

Metaphorically speaking, the Political scene has become one of the great stages of false and fake performance in our real life, which is corrupted by the hypocrisy shown towards women. There is a lot of analogy between a politician and gender biased male theatre manager and, Shakespeare's famous line *All the World is a Stage* supports this holistic approach towards the stage where enactment of all the world affairs takes place. One (theatre manager) plays the gender politics of false representation on the stage while the other (politician) does the same off the stage. Both project their activities as ostensibly objective and sincere in representing others. It has become natural and ubiquitous for political parties to allot women's representation in politics for the name sake to falsely consolidate a public opinion that women are also given due consideration. The ultimate motive behind this is not the sincere approach towards the issue related to the representation of the women community in politics, thereby materialising the political empowerment of the women, but it is a 'a strategic essentialism', as coined by Gayatri Chakroberthy Spivak in her "*Can the Subaltern Speak*", through which the possibility of the dominant community coming to the power is broadened. Here, the women community then is used as a mean or tool of vote bank politics to the end of patriarchal society for capturing or maintaining power which opens up the possibilities of corruption and other financial irregularities. So, rather than representation, it is the motive for the representation that is to be put to test. The issue of this motive remains insoluble question as in the case with false representation or under representation.

It is a fact that women are used as a mean to the end in literary works too. For instance, in the genre of detective fictions, women used as '*femme fatale*' are mere tools to the end of identifying and trapping the criminal as well as other rivals. Nevertheless, she is not raised to the level of the detective who uses her as a tool. Some metaphysical detective stories portraying women as the main detective figures like Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* or Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* are not considered under classical detective conventions, though exceptions may be found. So, in detective fictions too, Woman is a mean to end. In ghost stories too, the representation of the women as ghost or source of mystery or an exorcised one or the demonic personality is common because there has been a general conception that the role played by the women in the ghost stories is the only mean to achieve the end of maximum effect in the audience. Woman is objectified as a mere tool for maximum artistic effect. The representation of a woman in the form of ghost often with a male's voice problematizes her own identity. She is oscillating between man and woman. The Malayalam film, *Manichitrathazhu* is an example. The fluctuating nature of female identity has been theorized by Julia Kristeva, which will be mentioned here.

Way back to the history of English theatre, women's representation is far from satisfying. For instance, in *Macbeth*, though Macbeth has got the tragic flaw of falling victim to the towering ambitions of usurping the throne, his inherent sense of criminality was initiated by the witches and then boosted by his own wife, Lady Macbeth who is represented as easily prone to the mental disorder. So, the witches are not only the mystic and demonic ladies inscrutable to the human rationality but also represented as the dangerous creatures with feminine inclination, capable of instigating violence thereby destabilising the whole country. In *King Lear*, the cause of Lear's entire pathetic condition is none other than his merciless and impertinent daughters, Goneril and Regan. The entire nation was tormented by these daughters. If Shakespeare had replaced the daughters with the sons for Lear, it would not have had a desired artistic effect from the perspective of Electra complex which accentuates the father's excessive love toward his daughters. So, the daughters are the better means to be instrumental for Lear's pathetic condition which evokes the entire attention of the audience. So, women characters are represented as the apparatus for the cause of men's emotions and feelings like affection, desires, sadness, ambitions, happiness etc.

The institution of family and marriage and other related domestic affairs are the perennial themes for dramatic performance. Women are construed as tools of reproductive necessity of the patriarchal desire. Her domestic and public space is limited and she is left to the carnal pleasure of the audience, though some glimpses of her values are portrayed. Her silence is falsely glorified as her patience though it could be out of fear of repercussions if the voice is raised. Women are represented as those who elope with her boyfriend or lover bringing dejection and degradation to the family, or those who are susceptible to wooing, leading to the loss of husband's trust in her, or those incompatible to chaotic social circumstances, falling victims to psychological disorders. The audience has reached a state where they are capable of enjoying even a rape scene. It is not that the viewers have to be emotional to such scenes; but that they neglect the gravity and seriousness of the scene. It can never be out of context, if the former CBI director, Ranjit Sinha's controversial statement on rape is quoted. He stated that, "If you can't prevent rape, enjoy it". (Hindustan Times, Nov 13, 2013). (He has apologised for it later and concerned that his statement was taken out of context)

Art and literature are different forms of media through which social issues are projected according to the taste of the audience. The case of rape is sometimes represented as if it was a rare incident in society though it is a rampant social issue we are destined to know. For instance, the media representation of notorious Delhi gang rape shows that it is the only rape that has ever occurred in India. The incidents of rape as a recurring issue corrosive of the moral and cultural tradition of the country were perceived as a political failure also the existing government has to burden. Rape was set for the formation of public opinion against the government which is already corrupted. Then it was looked as both shifted a gender issue and a political one too. So a public awareness of social justice was formed in this particular case. Yet it is not always the case since the political helm of affairs is male dominated. It is an instance where media is capable of contributing to assuring to social justice to the women Justice.

In the representation of the women, the feminist theoretical concerns also are manipulated. The pre-mirror stage of a girl child, as Julia Kristeva says, is semiotic which is tied to feminine and associated with the emotional, the poetic, the rhythmic and the music, which lacks meaning, order and structure. The child identifies herself with the mother. Even after entering the mirror stage which helps the child to distinguish between the self and the other, and enter the realm of shared cultural meaning and world of language, known as symbolic stage in which the

development of language allows the child to become a “speaking subject” and she develops her own identity separate from the mother. Yet, contrasting to Lacan, Kristeva argues that even after entering the symbolic stage, the subject continues to fluctuate between the semiotic and the symbolic so that the female child both rejects and identifies with the mother figure, thereby leading the concept of fixed identity “in process”. So the female audience also can identify with what the female character rejects the mother figures in the performance where as the male audience can sexualize the mother figure (mother figure is the embodiment of all the feminine qualities) from the perspective of Freudian Oedipus complex. Since the female identity is not fixed one, the mother figure in any artistic and cultural representation cannot be attributed the respectful values and dignity. It follows the lack of necessity of valorising the woman figure so that she is reduced to mere an enjoyable object with no fixed identity. She is represented as the figure of the semiotic in origin that is evocative of her inherent emotions, rhythm and music and is only meant for or tool for balancing the masculine rationality, order and intellect. So, the women’s emotional inclination is manipulated to arouse maximum effect of sympathy and identification from the audience since the emotional tendency of the women characters are not mere external dramatisation, but an inherent element lying in them.

The objectification of the women has a lot to do with the theoretical frame work of French feminist, Luce Irigaray, for whom the women assumes both the use value and exchange value. In advertisements, the women are assigned both exchange and use value. She is treated as a commodity in high demand so that their exchange value soars. As per the theory of Irigaray, there are three types of women. They are mother (with only use value), virgin (with only exchange value) and prostitute (with both use value and exchange value). Here, the women in advertisements can unfortunately be construed as mere prostitutes. They are used as well as exchanged by the capitalist and neoliberal forces controlled by male dominated system. Irigaray’s the *Speculum of the Other Woman* puts forth the idea that male projects himself as subject while woman as the objects.

In performing arts like cinematic dance, the frequency of men wearing the attire of women’s dress is far less than those women appearing in the attire of men, though the specificity of the dress assigned to each sex in the postmodern contemporary social scenario is problematised and called in to question. In the performance of these dances, the women presented as those trying to be equivalent to be that of men in terms of attire is shown “natural” in the performance while the

reverse is shown comical. Luce Irigaray is critical of the end of equality since it is like becoming equivalent to men. So, it shows that women are the defective variation of her counterpart dancing on the stage.

The social function of the art and literature, no doubt, is not meagre. They can serve as a conduit for a bloodless revolution bringing desirable social changes. Women and children can participate in this process, in contrast to bloody social revolution in which women's participation is comparatively less. Gandhian mode of protest and resistance with mass women participation against social evils is finding a parallel to the peaceful stage performance against the social malice. But, it is doubtful how far the gender issues and patriarchal repressive practices are an eye-opener to male dominated theatre business.

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