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GOD, MONSTER, HUMAN: INTEROGATING THE NATURE AND SHIFTING RIGIDITIES OF CULTURE

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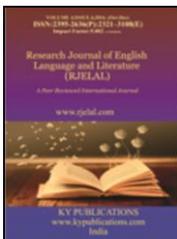
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ABSTRACT

Transgender theory tries to break down the binaries of gender assigned by the society. The theory is an in-depth study which denies the existence of binary opposition and extends the possibility the possibility of crossing over. As used as an umbrella term for all pre-operative, post-operative and non-operative gender identities, the theory draws its strength from theories of Post structuralism and anti -foundationalism. The fluid nature of gender poses an open challenge to the concept of defined gender construct.

Key words: Transgender, Queer, Homosexuality



Religion, myth and its discourse from time immemorial has played a definitive role in framing the Trans as the other. On the other hand Queer theories argue and question these trying to redefine gender identities. Queer theory gives an open arena to voice issues like identity, marginality, authenticity and epistemology of homosexual. It rejects an essentialism of identity politics and the binary opposition of heterosexual/ homosexual in favour of a more fluid and impermanent nature of the same. Identity is a switching of roles, a role that is not closed, stable or unitary thing, which is separate from the other. The self and the other are not mutually distinct species. The other encompasses the self to frame identity. In short the self contains the other within it. The concept of the 'self' fused to the 'other' rules out the theories of binary oppositions.

The mention of Hermaphrodite conjures up a reclining figure in myths of different regions. The paper attempts to unearth the rigidities of nature and double standards of culture in the portrayal of the divine, monster and human.

Transgender theory is a novel theoretical orientation that discusses the nature of gender and identity by understanding the lived experience of transgender or a trans -sexual individual. Monique Wittig opines that language creates 'socially real' and that people are "compelled in our bodies and minds to correspond, feature by feature, idea of nature that has been established for us" The power of language to work on body is the cause for sexual oppression. Language has a plastic action upon the real through locutionary acts, which repeated become entrenched praxis and ultimately institutions.

Human beings of the western world perceive the world in the framework of binary oppositions. Day/light, good/evil, black/white man/woman so on and so forth. Those that do not conform to either are relegated to margin and in due course of time obliterated. Freeing oneself from this coerced and compulsory conformity, the transgender opens their horizons to the prevailing expectations of gender norms. Gender is not an essence, nor does it constitute stability. Gender is rather a fluid term which is tenuous and provisional

and that can never be demonstrated once and for all opines Judith Butler. Gender exists only so far as they are performed and re-performed. In a society where sex is seen or understood on terms of the binary, the hermaphrodite, trans sex, the other, the third sex, becomes an aberration. Homo sexual fluidity challenges the traditional heterosexual binaries. It's interesting to note that Robert J Stoller uses the term 'gender role' and 'gender identity' in order to indicate ones inner and out life, wherein he contests that the gender role one plays need not necessarily talks about his gender bending. He maintains:

"Gender Identity starts with the knowledge and awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, that one belongs to one sex and not the other, though as one develops, gender identity becomes much more complicated, so that, for example, one may sense himself as not only a male but n effeminate man or even as a masculine man or as a man who fantasies being a woman." (Stoller, 10)

With this statement Stoller argues about the uncertainty in the existence of gender. It is a himalayan task to demystify gender as religion and myths plays a major role in affirming the same. It stabilizes the roles assigned by the society or is ambivalent while doing so. As stated earlier when the hermaphrodite tries to perform the role assigned to it, the ancient society marginalized it either as a perfection of the divine or a monster. Thus in literature Hermaphrodite was narrowed down basically as an idea than a person shutting the existence of human out from the main stream society.

Hindu mythology exults in queerness with stories of man who became woman, woman who became man, men who mothered, women who fathered, neither those who are neither this nor that, but a little of both, like the Makara, Varaha, Vyali, Narasimha.(nature trans or metaphysically taken as the manifestation of the divine)

The Indian archives hold immense examples of discourse around queer sexuality. The ancient myth plays it safe by giving the garb of friendship to same sex love. When the relationship

between Arjuna and Krishna is taken into consideration, the relationship goes beyond marriage and procreation. In fact Krishna reiterates their inseparability in many situations and reveals his divine form to his friend. The revelation of the divine form itself is self explanatory for the Trans existence of Krishna. The divine form is the self the 'Satva' or the very essence of person which he gladly offers to Arjuna. Krishna's love for Arjuna is revealed in many other occasions in The Mahabharatha. His unrelenting support for Arjuna, his choice of Arjuna over Duryodhana, the way in which he takes the fury of Balarama upon himself to protect Arjuna, all these talks a lot about Krishna's love. The collected conversation between the two is the Bagavat Gita. To be more specific during the earlier phase of Krishna's life he shows clear signs of transgression. The Rasaa leela which Krishna inadvertently enjoys in the presence of gopi's, his braided plait and nose ring validates the argument. The proclivity with which Krishna offers himself to God Aravan is braced in by giving a pure metaphysical stance.

Devadutt Pattanaik tries to deconstruct the idea that questions the fixed notion of masculinity and femininity in the re-telling of The Mahabharatha. He shuffles power of hierarchy; blurs gender distinction and reconsider all social practices, In a Foucauldian style he narrates the body from the periphery. The myth safe guards the case of gender bending that never asserts on a third sex identity. The transformation taking place in the puranas is often temporary. Arjuna feigns as a Eunuch dancer in the palace of King Virat during the thirteenth year of his exile which is only a temporary guise he comments: "Please don't ask me to remember that year... it is terrible to appear as a woman and still have a man's heart." Amaba embraces in a deal with Yaksha to switch sex only to be reborn as Shikandi and that too for a limited time. Such examples from myths rather opening a new perspective shuts the possibility of the existence of the third gender which is detrimental. The immanence nature of the boon and the life saving guise of the thirds gender is waded off by asserting its temporal nature.

In the Pregnant King (2008) Pattanaik delivers the story of Yuvanashwa, the King of

Vallabhi. The story is about the impotent king who ends up drinking the magic potion which offers him fertility. The young king mothers a child who is kept under wraps. Later with the magic potion he impregnates his wife who gives birth to a son. Interestingly, King Yuvanashwa has both fathered and mothered sons. Society sees gender identity as an inseparable and entwined with ones anatomical constituent- a male is undeniably masculine and woman feminine. Any kind of threats to acculturate the body is meted out with severe punishments or is silenced.

Yuvanashwa with his pregnancy is treated pejoratively by the society. Shilavati, his mother with all respect for femininity labour utter disgust for the life that grows in his son, she strips it off its humanity and tries to kill it. "What if it's a monster? A parasite... Cut it out, get the monster out of his body." (194) Yuvanashwa faces persecution in the hands of his own family, denied to glance on his child while the other woman, remarks "let motherhood remain with woman," adhering to hetero-normative code which is sacrosanct.

Heteronormativity, as Jillian Todd Weiss puts it is a power to define our place in the hierarchyTo step out of the hierarchy is to lose power and control, to lose congruity. To separate sex and gender is to disassemble the coiled binary structure from which our power, control and sense of congruity derives. (Weiss 2001)

Pattanaik leaps ahead unfurling the politics of religion maintaining: "Children born of a man are fit only to be raised as monkeys. Their very lineage make them unfit for human society.

It's exciting to observe how myths tamper the reality for social convenience. Fact that jeopardizes the foundations of the society if not distorted is at its best systematically effaced from records. Society provides no room for the innumerable possibilities nature offer between the binaries of masculine and feminine. In the story of Yuvanshwa after experiencing the joy of motherhood when he expresses his urge being called a mother, he is silenced by his wife and later he implores: The Dharmasastra say that roles and responsibilities of a Manava are determined at birth

by his biology....You are born a man... you are forever a man..."

The society employs various strategies ranging from voluntary submission to forceful oblivion and primitive measures aiming at sustaining the existing power structure. Breaking such boundaries of compulsory sexual identity, the Trans community claims their right to live a distinctive life demanding respect. The post colonial influence and the aversion of East for the western culture treated such differences equivalent to Sodomy which invited death sentence. Later in 1860 the anti Sodomy law liberalized the punishment to imprisonment. But they still believed it to be an anomaly.

Nehru opines "that heterosexual behaviour was an aberration introduced into India in the British colonial period." Failed to realize the essence of their existence Nehru tries his best to rewrite or obliterate India's past with normative purity. This normative purity that we have tried to maintain through out has created the marginalized, the oppressed and the subaltern. The so called cultural heritage claimed by the Indian, has a deeper story to narrate about certain sacrifices made and identities manipulated by power discourses. The royal courtesans in some centuries used to be trans women, who were a part of the main stream culture. The undercurrents created by the patriarchal norms could possibly have taken away their identity that is; their reason for existence and in due process marginalized them towards the periphery. The grand migration of these human population to forests, suburbs and finally towards invisibility cannot but make us realize the depravity that they are in.

Let me conclude my paper quoting Pope Francis Holiness, "this is the epoch of sin against God the Creator, He's intelligent! God created man and woman, God created the world this way, this way, this way, and we are doing the opposite." The statement made by Pope Francis Holiness resonates the old conventional saying as that God created Adam and Eve and Not Adam and Steve. The ambiguity with which he says 'God created the world this way' can be easily contested as it invites loads of questions. Ambiguity in the statement is a constructed one as it's never easy for the public lot

to accept the fact that there can be in-betweens. Religions like Hinduism, Greek, Buddhism etc argue out for the trans gender by giving them a metaphysical bend but in reality they are highly critical in their approach. The element of temporality nullifies the reality of the Trans. They remain a myth rather than the real.

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