



FLUXING GLIMPSES OF DICHOTOMOUS GENDER NOTIONS: FEMALE MASCULINITY AND MALE FEMININITY

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Abstract

This paper articulates the rethinking viewpoints regarding gender and masculinity which propel us to realise the fact that gender is not a fixed ideology, but rather a continuous flux. This paper analyses two dichotomous gender notions -- female masculinity and male femininity along with its fluxing glimpses from literature and movies. In fact, it upholds its viewpoints from four configurations. First three configurations are included within the 'Literary Overview' part and the rest one is within 'Glimpses of Movies' part. At first, there are fluxing glimpses of dichotomous gender notions of the English Renaissance (the period of Shakespeare, where he questions, emulates and modifies the stereotypical gender notions throughout his works). Secondly, there are illustrations from Victorian novelists' portrayal of their fluxing glimpses over femininity and masculinity. The third configuration consists of contemporary literature, deals with dichotomous gender notions. Lastly, it illuminates about glimpses of movies (both from Hollywood and Bollywood specimens). Eventually, this paper aims to construct the viewpoints that masculinity should not be viewed as a uniform figure, but rather as a complementary figure in relation with femininity and causes its sure termination present society and above all the whole world need to feel the essentiality to rethink about gender and masculinity.

Keywords: Gender, Masculinity, Flux, Female Masculinity, Male Femininity.

1. Introduction

The notion of gender ascribes to those behaviours and attitudes that are deemed to belong to one sex. A simple dissimilation between sex and gender would be that "sex is biological, whereas gender is social" (*Mayes-Elma*). Humans are born with a certain sex particularly known as --- male or female, but gender is something they acquire over time, depending on the society they grew up in and acclimatise with the flowing of time. Gender "may also refer to society's evaluation of behaviour as masculine or feminine [gender role]" (*Basow*).

Gender identity can also be described as one's self-cognition as either being male, female, or transgender. Indeed, there is a close association between sex roles and gender uniqueness where the former is an outward expression of the latter (*Rathus, Nevid & Fichner-Rathus, 2005*). We behave, walk and talk in ways that fortify an impression of being a man or woman but the 'appearance' of gender is simply mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth. In reality, gender is promoted by indispensable norms to be one gender or the other, usually within a strictly binary frame, of which

resemblance we can get in Judith Butler's concept of 'gender performativity'.

Traditionally, masculinity and femininity have been conceptualized as dichotomous ends of a single dimension, with masculinity at one extreme and femininity at the other. Traits that are attributed on the masculine end of the dimension are: superior, leadership abilities, emotion free, logical and rational, competitive and very forceful (*Borgatta & Montgomery, 2000*). By this delimitation, high masculinity implies the absence of femininity and vice versa. But in contemporary time this typical gender notion compels us to rethink about gender. This typical notion proposes that masculinity and femininity are separate dimensions, allowing for the potentiality that individuals may simultaneously possess both masculine and feminine attributes which culminates into the female masculinity and male femininity. This fluxing dichotomous gender notion glimpses over both in literature and in movie (popular form of the media) to its extend.

2. Rethinking of Masculinity

In international studies numerous scholars have focused to a large extent on 'male' masculinities. Some researches on masculinity have concentrated on poststructuralist thinking, arguing that masculinities are not monolithic but socially situated and discursively produced (*Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2001; Berggren, 2014*). In this respect Daniela Gennrich elucidates that 'masculinity' refers to what it means to be a man as defined by specific socio-cultural contexts (*Gennrich, 2013*). Several socio cultural norms impact on societies, diverse views of what it means to be a man of which vary, and often include sexual identity, family life as well as religious and cultural beliefs (*Gennrich, 2013*).

For Connel, gender is the end-product of ceaseless interpretations of definitions placed upon the reproductive and sexual capacities of the human body. Therefore, masculinities and femininities can be discerned, as the effects of these interpretations and definitions: on bodies, on personalities, on a society's culture and institutions. In Connell's representation, masculinity annexes a higher ranking than femininity in the 'gender hierarchy'. The social alterations of twentieth century have

undermined the gender hierarchy, and the position of hegemonic masculinity within it. In this context, the politics of masculinity have developed: 'those mobilizations and struggles where the meaning of masculine gender is at issue and with it men's position in gender relations' (*Connell, 1995*). In place of essentialism masculinities are argued to emerge from the social contexts in which men live, for example, from their positions in the various grounds and organizations of their society and in the context of the socially attainable discourses about gender.

Connell posits four types of masculinities --- hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalized. According to him, a lot of different masculinities are in existence, even though hegemonic masculinity is the most prevalent one. Hegemonic masculinity affects the behavioural aspects of men in today's society and still has most men attempting to sustain their bridle on society. The repercussion of the fact is that men still must substantiate to the world and other men that they are just as manly. Indeed, the way that men cope with up the changes in the world is something that a lot of future sociologist and gender ideologists will be studying.

Fluxing glimpses of different sort of masculinities govern different levels of power. With a view to evaluating all other forms of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is considered as a benchmark to describe a social construct. In the society, hegemonic masculinity is not the prevailing form of masculinity; rather it is a standard, endorsed by the society, against which men are measured (*Schipper, 2009*). Waling (2019) argues that although hegemonic masculinity effectively recount societal power relations between different groups of men and women, this theoretical tradition does not illuminate men's authoritative and affective encounters with gendered expectations. In fact, as an ideology, hegemonic masculinity layouts the manner in which all people experience and realize their world, although those experiences vary with fluxing glimpses as both men and women are diversely situated by race, class and sexuality. Complicit masculinity includes those who are aware of the both positive and negative traits and dispositions of hegemonic masculinity as well as its

impact on society, but do not challenges its presence or advocate any form of social change (Morrell, 1998). Subordinate masculinity refers to those boys and men who evidently laps to achieve or live up to the dominant notion and expectations of what it is to be the "ideal man/male" (homosexual men [frankly to say 'gay'] and effeminate men fall into this category) (Morrell, 1998). Lastly, marginal masculinity imparts manifold traits, ascribed to hegemonic masculinity (lack of compassion, competitiveness, avoidance of weakness) except they appear in males who belong to exploited and oppressed groups (men who are degraded, unemployed, immigrants and in gangs) (Morrell, 1998).

MacInnes argues that masculinity does not exist as the property, character trait or aspect of individuals but should instead be understood as an ideology about what men should be like, and this is developed by men and women in order to make sense of their lives (MacInnes, 1998). Indeed, discursive approaches to masculinity, influenced by post-modernist/ post-structuralist perspectives, have become increasingly prominent within gender studies which propel us to rethink about masculinity. Causes its sure termination, as essential parts we have got a glimpse of dichotomous gender notions -- female masculinity and male femininity. These glimpses shake the static concept of so called masculinity and provokes that gender is not a fixed notion, but rather a notion creates newly in a continuous flux.

3. Literary Glimpses

Masculinity is a new texture especially to tilth the field of literature. Numerous researchers have done innumerable researches on femininity so far. Yet, masculinity has never been studied fully neither as a concept nor as a movement. This implicates the expeditious need to study masculinity as a phenomenon both in society and literature. In point of fact, masculinity is not an antonym of femininity. It is an independent area similarly as femininity is. Masculinity is not a static concept, but rather it's an ongoing process, involves in a continuous flux like any other process of human behaviour. The term masculinity appertains with men's traditional

manners, customs, habits and attitudes, which constitute the patriarchal system of order in society. It conducts the relationship both among men themselves as well as between men and women in society, where women in general are marginalized to men. However, masculinity like many other abstract terms is not so facile to pin point accurately. Even the social glimpses of understandings are not the same. As an effect we have different kind of masculinities in literature --- female masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity, sticky masculinity, gentleman masculinity and also male femininity.

In literary genre, even though Shakespeare reflects and at times clinches the English Renaissance stereotypes of men and women and their various roles and responsibilities in society, simultaneously he is also a writer who questions, emulates and tempers those representations which manifest as relevant even today. It creates opportunities not only to comprehend Renaissance culture better but also to confront our own contemporary generalizations about gender. Shakespeare, even by standing on his era, seems to have been elevating questions about dichotomous gender notions of masculinity and femininity, about how each gender possesses and acts with both masculine and feminine attributes and dispositions, and also about the temperament and impact of hegemonic patriarchy. In English Renaissance period women as the feminine represented the following virtues as obedience, silence, sexual chastity, sanctity, pliancy, patience and steadiness, which significantly have their meaning in relationship with the male. However, gender characteristics were socially constructed and there was a mellifluous cross-over of masculine and feminine traits to both genders.

By following the fluxing glimpses of dichotomous gender notions in his writings, Shakespeare paints his male characters with certain 'feminine' characteristics and females with certain 'masculine' characteristics. This mingling of masculine and feminine in both males and females might assist to illuminate and compel to rethink about how easy it was for the Elizabethan stage to employ and acknowledge all male casts and utilize

men to play strong female characters like Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, Juliet and Kate, the Shrew. Whatsoever, contemporary audiences are so imposed on separating female from male, would have great inflexibility rethinking to this inveterate practice of the Renaissance.

In Renaissance society, men were expected to partake in public affairs (as politicians, activists, soldiers, leaders) to be speakers, making any decisions, moving any events forward etc.. They wield their lives which were liability bounded (especially to the state), heroic, invective and self-conciliating; and most importantly “Bellona’s bridegroom” like personality of which instance we can get from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. On the other side, women were expected to assume a more phlegmatic and sliggish roles. As for instance we could remind the commencement scene of *Romeo and Juliet* where the boys were loitering around the streets of Verona and passing dirty parlanes about girls; Sampson (one of Capulet’s servants) remarks in this respect “And therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall; therefore I will push Montague’s men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall.” The passage is fruitful with stereotypical Renaissance thinking: women are feeble (physically, emotionally, intellectually, and morally) and they subsit nothing but for male sexual gratification; they are only good for ‘thrusting’ to the wall. In *Macbeth*, with a view to give ‘active’ participation to her husband’s dreadful deeds, Lady Macbeth feels necessity to pray --- “Come, you spirits/ That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here./ And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full/ Of direst cruelty!” which is an indirect evidence of a womanly meakness lurking somewhere with her iron strength. Yet Shakespeare rises above the stereotypical prospects of Renaissance society as he imprints women more than passive vessels. For example, Lady Macbeth bears the new empowerment of female masculinity of her relationship with Macbeth. In fact, she deems herself more ‘manly’ than her husband and calls Macbeth (having his softness and passivity) as “Hie thee hither”. We get fluxing glimpses of wonderful heroines of Shakespeare in his romantic comedies -- Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Beatrice in *Much Ado*

About Nothing, and Viola in *Twelfth Night*. All these female heroines reflect the new blending empowerment of feminine and masculine attitudes and behaviours. Portia, for example, controls the ultimate scene of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* by inducing the degeneration of Shylock through her conciliation of justice with lenity and by regulating the forces which enable her to live with Bassanio happily ever after, creates a notion of female masculinity. Viola in *Twelfth Night* propagates some glimpses of female masculinity by acting literally as both female and male and prudently manipulating the Duke’s relationship with Olivia. Rosalind, in *As You Like It* also dominates the action like Portia. She is coherent, rational and strong enough to create her glimpses of female masculinity against stereotypical conceptual flow.

Based on the fluxing glimpses of dichotomous gender notions there are also some specimens of male femininity. As an instance take the act of weeping. Although both genders are ‘allowed’ by the culture to weep (reminds us of all the tears men shed in *Julius Caesar* over the deaths of other men) but tears are generally assumed as the characteristic of ‘feminine’, but not exclusively female. In *Hamlet* when Laertes gets to know about the death of his sister Ophelia, his masculinity does not confind his tears and begins to shed with genuine feelings, but also simultaneously exclaims, “The woman will be out, meaning his tears represent his ‘womanly’ part that can not be suppressed or allayed by his masculine strength.

In the Victorian period, women novelists like George Eliot, the Bronte Sisters and most importantly Jane Austen portrayed their fluxing glimpses of femininity and masculinity as they were smeared with the gender notions of that era. Basically, female masculinity can be prescribed as a series of masculine coated identity that occur in a woman’s body. In other words, women with female masculinity are women who do masculine performative. This masculinity represent the power and domination of woman that promising of the desirable social privilege. The internalization of masculine values can be expressed in the women’s body through the form of personality, behaviours and interests (*Prorokova, 2016*). Halberstam in her

book *Female Masculinity* (1998) determines the fact of fluxing glimpses that woman is not always identical with feminine and man is not always identical with masculine. So, both man and woman can have femininity and masculinity; depend on which role is more dominant.

The heroines of *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* represent their quest for fluxing glimpses on new woman identity. And this quest of feminine identity leads to search of a new masculine identity. Jane Austen's female characters are not only objectifying the men, but also prudently construct and adapt to the male gaze. At the inception part of the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet represents her glimpse of feminine masculinity by rejecting the marriage proposal of queer Mr. Collins (as women were anticipated to marry propertied men in order to become reasonably self-sufficient). As we know that masculinity is not a static concept, so for instance this notion glimpses over Mr. F. Darcy for his fluxing behaviours of masculinity which is perfect specimen of of gentleman masculinity, throughout the novel. Indeed, the fluxing relationship of Elizabeth and Darcy impersonates that sexualisation by women does not threatens his (Darcy's) masculinity; rather it permits him to realise the demands of his lover and adapt to her needs. Male sexuality is essentially produced through multiple female perspectives, and the female gaze thus becomes integral to the ideal of masculinity developed in Austen's novels.

As a fluxing glimpse of dichotomous gender notion we can find the male femininity in Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights*, being represented by Edgar Linton. He is shown in his dichotomous masculine traits as a lover (of Catherine) and a loser, passionate and attractive, but also vulnerable and funky having "a soft-featured face, exceedingly resembling the young lady at the Heights, but more pensive and amiable in the expression. It formed a sweet picture. The long light hair curled slightly on the temples; the eyes were large and serious; the figure almost too graceful" (Bronte). This statement illuminates the lack of so called masculine traits in Edgar Linton's character and propel towards the notion of male femininity, which is is opposed to rude and strong

masculine character Heathcliff. Mr. Linton was ridiculed in some occasions: "Cathy, this lamb of yours threatens like a bull!" – Heathcliff said. It is in danger of splitting its skull against my knuckles. By God! Mr. Linton, I'm mortally sorry that you are not worth knocking down!" Indeed, the masculinity of Edgar is not the same as Heathcliff.

In contemporary literature, the representation of masculinity has also in its continuous flux. For instance, J.K.Rowling's *Harry Potter* series create many quintessential glimpses. We can discern that Harry uses his intellect and not his physical strength, dominant nature to demonstrate his masculinity. It is because of his intelligence he wins the 'Triwizard Tournament' over other. Hermione, in *Harry Potter* also shows her intelligence, intuition, quick wit and urgent thinking which are supportive enough to rescue the group when it faces any critical situations; thus, illustrates her characteristic glimpses of female masculinity. Side by side Bellatrix Lestrange (prominent female villain), Minerva Mc Gonagall are some of the strongest fighters in their universe to illustrate the same glimpses.

In the first part *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* when the Troll left the dungeon and encounters with Harmione at first (Harry and Ron join afterwards), it was Hermione's intellectual masculine instruction by following which Ron was able to overthrown the monster. All time it was Hermione's intellectuality and her bookish knowledge (ex. Herbology) about various spells which protects the group from troublesome situations with her masculine caliber. For instace, it was Hermione who saves both Harry and Ron from 'Devil's Snare' by her masculine instruction and spell. Hermione was in remark for her "cool use of intellect while others were in grave peril." Hermione consists of with severe mental endurance (like masculine endurance), when Malfoy gives her always mental affliction by pointing her out as 'filthy Mudblood'. It was in the part *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* Hermione, like young detective, leave a letter of instruction for Harry before get her petrifying and by following the instruction Harry was able to found the chamber of secrets. On the other hand, Prof. Quirrell denotes his male femininity in

the first part of *Harry Potter* series by expressing his docile, submissive nature and let other (Voldemort) controls himself.

In another contemporary literary piece, the main female protagonist in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, Katniss Everdeen represents her masculine and feminine characteristics whilst her counterpart Peeta Mellark is evidence of marginalised masculinity. Katniss has a feminine body, but her actions, alacrity exhibits as masculine. She is independent, undaunted, stubborn and always ready to face any situation and ultimately find a way to come out from conundrum.

Above all through the whole literary overview, we get the implication that away from the theoretical background, masculinity is a performance rather than rules to be followed as a particular ideology. So, unambiguously the literary glimpses propel us to rethink about gender and masculinity which culminates into the various fluxing glimpses of dichotomous gender notions --- female masculinity and male femininity specifically.

4. Glimpses of Movies

In an age of rising social awareness, there is an increased demand for movies which explore and challenge the norms, standards of society immensely those which influence one's way of life on the basis of their gender. As for instances of female masculinity in Hollywood and Disney movies, we could mention the names like --- *Captain Marvel (2019)*, *Wonder Woman (2017)*, *Frozen (2013)*, *Tangled (2010)*. *Captain Marvel* is an American superhero film based on the Marvel Comics character Carol Danvers; directed by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck. In long past, society was accustomed to see the male masculinity as only superhero. But with time's progression it compels us to rethink about gender notion, of which repercussion we can get a glimpse of female masculinity in the movie *Captain Marvel*. *Wonder Woman* is an American superhero film directed by Patty Jenkins, symbolizes a breakthrough from all the masculine superhero franchises. The leading role Diana is a warrior, princess of the Amazon who possesses courage, bravery and selflessness. In one of the most memorable scenes of the movie, Wonder Woman

rises from the Allied trench and blusters into no man's land alone as she deflects a rain of bullets from the German forces in the adverse trench. This act of heroism is significant enough to represent the fluxing glimpses of masculinity.

As for instances from Bollywood, the movies which are worth mentioning for executing the glimpses of female masculinity are --- *Manikarnika*, *Padmabat*, *Dangal*, *Saand Ki Aankh*, *Bahubali* and many more. *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi (2019)*, directed by Radha Krishna Jagarlamudi & Kangana Ranaut, seems to have historically accurate with the concept of Mel Gibson's 'Brave heart'. Throughout the movie Manikarnika wears a dazzling smile like a cloak of masculine confidence and slices down opponent soldiers with an utmost fury and undaunted mind, symbolizes the female masculinity. The central statement "She (Rani Laxmibai) was the only mardani (masculine) among all the Indian rebels" creates a new platform for fluxing notion of masculinity. In both the movies *Baahubali: The Beginning (2015)* and *Baahubali: The Conclusion (2017)*, directed by S.S.Rajamouli, there are important female masculine characters --- Devasena, Sivagami and Avantika. Although they are overshadowed by hypermasculinity, yet they are also strong and determined in their feminine existence. Sivagami is the most powerful female masculine character whose word is the ultimate law and all men and women follow what she says. In fact she is a masculine female who stood up for the sake of her kingdom. Simultaneously, Devasena and Avantika are feminine in their body but masculine in their mind. They are humble, caring but at the same time potent enough to protect their people from being attacked.

As a fluxing notion of masculinity we can get some glimpses of male femininity in the movies like - -- *Hera Pheri* (through the character of Baburao Apte), *Dhamaal* (through the character Manav), R. Balki's *Ki & Ka* (contradicting the stereotypical gender roles revolving around house-husband and a working wife), *Apna Sapna Money Money* (through the character Ritesh) and many more. All these movies illustrate about how men have participated in integral ways in the foundations of contemporary femininity.

Eventually it can be stated that gender roles are the result of interactions between individuals and their environment based on different expectations, and give instructions to individuals about what kind of behaviour is considered to be of particular sex that produce masculinity (men) and femininity (women) (Blackstone,2003). In this respect Paul Smith in his anthology *Boys: Masculinities in Contemporary Culture* rightly makes the statement "...masculinity or masculinities are in some real sense not the exclusive 'property' of biologically male subjects --- it's true that many female subjects lay claim to masculinity as their property."

5. Conclusion

The momentous negotiations and fluxing glimpses of gender which were created by earlier developments, produced particular forms of masculinity and femininity compels us to rethink in a new way that femininity is not only wed to femaleness and masculinity is certainly not bound only to maleness. Male femininity executes a sort of ritual function and frugal banter in male homosocial cultures, whereas female masculinity is generally ordained by hetero and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always just out of proximity. According to Michael Kimmel, the lack of feminine features is the essence of being masculine. R.W.Connell finds that masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices falls on bodily experience, personality and culture. Causes its sure termination, based upon the fluxing glimpses of masculinity we may come to the conclusion that in contemporary time masculinity should not be viewed as a uniform figure of so-called ideology. As an effect, in various contemporary situations and scenarios by the very fact of that ideology, it seems somewhere (from the part of the men) with a view to express outward rigid masculinity like rock, they break down inly for many times as a river bank does; but it create no matters to other persons as they are habituated to see all men as masculine who are to be expected as stoic

enough and could manage everything (even if it reach out of his control).

Indeed, out of the social taboo "Maard ko daard nahi hota!" it seems that the real McCoy of masculine feelings is socially embedded in the deep of the mind, with the flowing of time. So, unequivocally the present society and above all the whole world need to feel the essentiality to rethinking about gender and masculinity. Side by side, we shouldn't have to forget that masculinity cannot be understood well without the study of femininity and femininity cannot be understood clearly without the study of masculinity as well; in fact they are complement to each other. In this respect Sadhguru remarks appropriately that --- "A complete human being is in equilibrium between the masculine and the feminine."

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