



## IDENTITY AND PERFORMATIVITY OF AN INDIVIDUAL: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

*Harsh Verma*

*Assistant Professor,*

*Khalsa College for Women, Civil Lines, Ludhiana, Punjab, India*

### Abstract

*Identity has always been referred to the social construction which evolves through the learning experiences and adapting the norms prevailing in the society where an individual belongs and dwells. Identity comprises of the extrinsic factors more significantly than the intrinsic as there is a shift from private domain to the public sphere where identity is shaped on the basis of the judgments of the other people. The study of this paper emphasizes upon the evolving status of an individual in a society which exemplifies the repositioning of cognitive abilities to social construction of the identity. The social construction emerges with gender binary (ies). The study centralizes the attention how this gender binary (ies) performs its role in particular society and the construction of the same leads to the representation of superiority of one over the other. The research study outlines the gender inequality- a set of beliefs about the proper order of society in terms of the roles of women and men should fill. Women are disadvantaged relative to men, both at structural level of power and at interpersonal level. It at once signifies the research agenda and constitutes a persistent problem pervading feminist analysis itself.*

### Keywords

*Identity, Performativity, Feminism, Discrimination, Androgyny etc.*

### Full Article

For centuries, gender binary has been seen as a concept that is valid and immutable in the society. The binary assumes heterosexuality and cisgender identity. People have gender expectations in this society as they are encouraged and even demanded to fulfill those roles to maintain social order. The strength and depth of these roles is apparent upon examination: Masculine and Feminine traits are applied to the children right after their birth. In social sciences, the term sex is used to refer to anatomical and physiological differences that define male, female and other bodies of individuals. As gender is reflected in whom they are or how they behave; it is something that individuals possess as a part of themselves and that accompanies them as they move through life. This 'something' may be understood in terms of masculinity or femininity, or it may be defined more specifically in terms of gender binary(ies). It is considered to be a reservoir of connotations which helps to develop the gender category. This is called a Gender-Schema, a filter, through which everyone processes, everything they experience and learn. This initiation works placidly to codify social stimuli as male or female oriented. During 1990s, it was argued that 'men' and 'women' are social categories that can only be defined in relation to each other. Influenced by deconstructive thought, the writings of Judith Butler embody a Post-modern view of gender. Butler (in 1990) argued that far from being a set of fixed and stable values and roles assigned/imposed by society, gender was a 'performance or a role' enacted by individuals. The enactment of gender performance is social in nature which is ultimately substantiated by the



society. But what is important is that the role is also open to negotiation and alteration, to conflict and contest.

The gender performance is the validation provided by the theorists that it is not determinate category to analyse. Its meaning depends upon the location, time, cultural frameworks within which it is performed. In the other words, gender is a continuous performance whose meaning can never be fixed for all the time or as universal. This 'Performance' is the repeated citation of the role in particular contexts. As Judith Butler put it: "Identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be the results" (Butler, 24-25).

These "expressions" are discourses and representations. To put it differently, men and women use language and clothing as signs of their being men and women. This is 'Performance' where wearing a particular kind of clothing, is the use of language to declare one's gender. The Post-modern views of gender are Anti-essentialist. Critics like Butler do not believe that there is an "essential" woman or man because 'Woman' and 'Man' are meanings that emerge in performances relative to each other. The gender roles continue to be in a state of flux to some extent. Socialization is the process by which individuals learn to differentiate between what the society regards as acceptable versus unacceptable behavior so to act in a manner that is appropriate for the needs of the society. The socialization process for teaching gender roles begins almost just after the birth.

When it comes to the gender roles, traditional instrumental behaviour for men and traditional expressive behaviour for women are not the only two options that are accepted and tolerated by the society today. As in the traditional or conventional society, they play of binary opposition of genders emerge to the fullest where male/female are being confronted. In this contest of binary opposition, female was declared to be the second sex as the male gender hold the supremacy. So ultimately, female termed out to be "the Other". Various feminists opposed to the term affixed against the woman as "the Other" and one of the most influential feminists Wollstonecraft in her writing "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" has ardently rejected the idea that women are born weaker or submissive to men. The unequal nature of gender relations was because the lack of education kept the women in a secondary position.

*The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir represents the epitome of the fact that how men successfully befuddle the women in the stereotyping. This bewilderment crucially paves the way for patriarchy. This is not the only objection raised by Simone De Beauvoir in her penned work. She admittedly claimed that woman's surrender and acceptance for such submissiveness devices their own fate of oppression. Women are measured by the standards of men and found inferior. Men and women, therefore, constantly engaged in the Subject-other relation where man is the subject and the woman the other. Beauvoir's major insight was that there is no 'essence' of a woman as a woman is constructed as such by men and society. As she puts it: "One is not born a woman but becomes one" (De Beauvoir, 267).

This statement of De Beauvoir has deep root meaning in the novel *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande. The protagonist of the novel truly portrayed the stereotype role of women. The novel is a first person narrative, one story is unfolded by Jaya-symbolizing victory, but in reality in actual life situation, she has to lead on a traditional, passive, obedient wife's role. Jaya is sufferer right from his childhood days, which continues even today. Jaya has been constantly admonished by her grandmother for her obtrusive nature and she has been advised to be presaged in her words: Her grandmother has continuously chided her for her inquisitive nature and further cautioned her saying that, "for everything's question, for everything a resort what husband can be comfortable with that?" (Deshpande, 137).





She further added and conditions towards the comforts of the future life partner that “a husband is like a sheltering tree” and that “the happiness of your husband and of your home depends upon you” (Deshpande, 138).

Some often repeated maxims for the “*would be wives*” reveal how women are viewed in the society controlled by men and the traditional women of the family. The female has been bounded with some predetermined goals of life which she needs to satisfy to be labelled as “Sarvgun Samapana”. She has to comply with the set norms, be it the other side of the husband as a winning partner, to continue his lineage through the birth of a male child etc. Shashi Deshpande as a feminist writer concentrate on the tortures and sufferings of middle class Indian women who are educated, sensitive and are conscious of their legal, social and conjugal rights. The writer significantly portrays the domestic conflict between the couple that devastatingly manifesting at various levels i.e. emotional, intellectual and sexual one. The novelist being fully aware of the patriarchal set-up of Indian society does not plead for any kind of confrontation or militancy between men and women, between husband and wife. As it is often said and practiced that “Silence, tolerance, sufferance is golden” and though the novel is in the feminist framework, the novelist doesn’t cross the limits of Indian socio-cultural reality. The metaphor of silence under which the novel is organized helps to impose a quietude and discipline; the inner dynamics of the self-cut off from the human communication. The plot of the novel *The Long Silence* does not dive only into the deep silenced world of females but it is the revelation of a silent affinity with the submissive which need to be voiced.

The new women are transforming the attitude of adapting their roles in oppressive system which provides them with equality of gender roles. The prevailing stigma or notion of patriarchy cannot afford the viability of modern women who are determined to come up with all the means to abolish societal oppression and voluntarily channelizes their energies towards development and personal growth. This miraculous transformation leads them to self-actualization in their life.

In the twentieth Century, it was Virginia Woolf who provided the first critiques that we can recognize as making feminism as we know it today. In her works like *A Room Of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*, she explored the gender relations. It was Woolf strived hard and presented a notion of education and reading which is totally women-centric. She presented this argument that women have been deprived of their rights in the patriarchal education systems and this education systems and practices of reading obliterate women to read as they are (women). The writer categorizes this relationship into three interrelated dimensions: women and what they look like, women and literature they reveal, woman and writings about them. She was careful to ensure that she was not privileging the female way of thinking. Her idea of androgynous creative mind and perhaps one of her most controversial ideas, was an attempt to go beyond the male/female binary. The psychological theories of Carl Jung has justified the argument made by Woolf on this point that: “in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man’s brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman’s brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating” (Woolf, 102).

Woolf makes a clear complaint in her *A Room of One’s Own* about the restricted role of woman in society; she also makes clear one aspect: she doesn’t think that woman is superior to man. She thinks that both the sexes are genres of different nature and she even believes in a possible intellectual mixing of both. She believed in the equality of these genres: “so imperceptibly I found myself adopting a new attitude towards the other half of the human race. It was absurd to blame any class or any sex, as a whole. Great bodies of people are never responsible for what they do. They are driven by instincts which are not within their control. They too, the patriarchs, the professors had endless difficulties, terrible drawbacks to contend with. Their



education has been in some ways as faulty as my own. It had bred in them defects as great” (Woolf).

With the passage of time, it was seen that the role of gender binary (ies) has always been shifting from one place to another. From the beginning of this universe, as per Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, we have these gender binary (ies) as Adam and Eve. But again, here too, the female has not been exempted from the curse of being female or the other. So in conclusion, gender Binary (ies) is an important part of culture and society where both the sexes have equivalence. But the social construction of these genders limits its possibilities to explore their roles. In any society it is required to maintain the balance otherwise *the other* would not be participating in this gender performance show to signify its role. As she has to go through a lot just being a female but with education, emancipation and enlightenment females paved their own ways.

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