

With the addition of deconstruction of the existing power relationships, knowledge of the condition of women and equality between the genders in male authored texts many literary theorists have transformed feminist insights and have created it as a diversified field of studying literature. Most feminists agree that male-female relationships have a significant impact on our lives and existence. There are many male authored texts in which female characters are of significant importance and the inner thoughts and personalities of these women have been successfully portrayed in those texts. The current study focused on the literature available on the debate of feminist identity. The study discussed the view and ideas of different researchers, authors, and writers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The American feminist Judith Butler (1956-) has contributed much to the feminist theory. She has written several books among which *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) are the two most significant. One point of *Gender Trouble* which is widely taught is “not to prescribe a new gendered way of life, but to open up the field of possibility for gender”. Sara Salih has observed that Butler “ask(s) questions about the formation of identity and subjectivity, tracing the processes by which we become subjects. When we assume the sexed/gendered/raced identities which are constructed for us [...] within existing power structures” (Salih: 02).

Keeping in view the assertions about gender identities Butler continues her investigation of “the subject” as to by which means these identities are constructed? By which process these identities come into existence? And if these identity constructions work or fail then, how? What brings to mind here are a couple of significant queries?

Firstly whom do we oppress by constructing our own identities?

Secondly if these identities fail then will new identities be formed?

Thirdly even if we are allowed to do our identities our own way then to what possible extent will we be granted the freedom to do so?

Fourthly as connected to the second one where Butler talked about the reconstruction of the identity. If the identities are reconstructed will the new one be as suppressive or as oppressive as the old one?

The answers to these questions may be vague and may require several volumes of research to answer but one thing becomes clear about Butler’s epistemology; that her quest is to find out the source of the formation of the proper identity of the feminine, which is, for the purpose of my research, the most significant aspect of Butler’s books *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*. Butler’s theoretical analysis of the subject that is to say the feminine; is primarily drawn keeping in context the Hegelian notion of the dialectic the psychoanalytic theory of the French philosopher Michael Foucault (1926-89) and 20th century French thinker Jacques Derrida (1930-). Foucault’s notion of the “variable constructions of sex and sexuality in different societies and contexts provide Butler with a theoretical framework of her own formulations of gender, sex and sexuality as unfixed and constructed identities.” (Salih: 05.)

If on one side Butler and Foucault describe “subject formation as a process” (Salih: 07) which has to be situated within its historical context to be understood then on the other hand Derrida’s linguistic theory helps to formulate language used within literature for constructing those identities. Along with these Simone De Behaviors’ *the Second Sex* (1949), where

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“framed and formed” (Salih: 147). At the beginning of *Gender Trouble* Butler asserts that feminist critique should analyze how the category ‘women’ is produced and restrained by power structures rather than looking to those structures for emancipation. She sets herself up to the task of investigating “feminist genealogy” (GT: 05) where she has used the word genealogy specifically in Foucauldian sense. As she puts it “genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses, with multiple and diffused points of origin”(GT Viii-ix). Butler is not interested in investigating the cause or the origin rather she studies the effect of gender. Assuming that gender is an effect Butler asserts that “gender is not a noun [but it] it proves to be per formative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (GT 25).

Reading gender identity through a Foucauldian lens Butler gives what she calls a discursive account of the cultural production of gender “in other words, she works from the premise that gender is a discursive construct something that is produced and not a natural fact.” (Salih 51)

Foucault as Hall states is of the view that what is required is not an abandonment or abolition of the subject but a reconceptualization- thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm. It seems to be in the attempt to rearticulate the relationships between the subjects and discursive practices that the question of identity recurs- or rather, if one prefers to stress the process of subjectification to discursive practices and politics of exclusion which all such subjectification appears to entail the question of identification” (Hall:p:16)

Hall in connection to the discursive practices is of the view that

Identification is constructed on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the ‘naturalism’ of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as the construction, a process, never completed – always in process. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be ‘won’ or ‘lost’ sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required sustaining it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference. The total merging it suggests is in fact a fantasy of incorporation. (Hall: pg: 16-17)

The sociologists John Hood Williams and Wendy Cealy Harrison have questioned Butler’s assertion that “there is no doer behind the deed”. They think it is helpful to deconstruct the idea of the ontological status of gender. They wonder whether a new ontology is founded on the equally “foundationalist conception of gender performativity” (Salih: 69).

Gender is a corporeal style an act (or a sequence of acts), a ‘strategy’ which has cultural survival as its end, since those who do not ‘do’ their gender correctly are punished by society. (GT: 139-140)

Thus society in an indirect manner prohibits these altered behaviors and presents before the person an ideally acceptable model to follow like a masculine male and a feminine female. Thus the “stylization of the body” to quote Butler is purely an act which is performed before the audience which is here the society by large. She further says that both sex and gender are enactments that “operate performatively to establish the appearance of body fixity. “(Salih: 58). By using the word “enactment” takes us back to Butler’s concept of performativity as she asserts that there

Is no sex that is not always already gendered? Thus all bodies are gendered by the very beginning of their societal existence; which further means that there is no natural body which leads us to the point of conclusion that gender is not something one is rather it is something one does more precisely a sequence of acts... a doing rather than 'being' (GT 25).

Gender identities are both constituted and constructed, which is hereby to say that gender is preceded by language. Thus it would be rightfully said that "it is not that an identity 'does' discourse or language, but the other way around — language and discourse 'do' gender" (Salih: 64) it is therefore in this sense that gender is performative.

The concept of identity as explained here is "a strategic one" (Hall: p: 17). Which is to say, that the concept of identity" does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change the bit of the self which remains always –already 'the same', identical to itself across cultural identity" (Hall: 1990). It thus means that identities are never unified and what we see before us are the multiple constructed forms of the "one single core", which are manipulated and multiplied, fractured and fragmented through politically manufactured discourses. Thus the process of construction of identification is an ongoing transformation and change. Therefore identities are constructed within discourse and we need to study these discursive practices of the identity formation strategies.

Similarly Hall believes that identity changes with a specific play of power, which may mean to be in the hands of the producer of the literary texts.

Hall proclaims that identities are constructed through difference. "This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the other. The relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term- and thus its "identity" can be constructed" (Derrida: 1981; Laclau: 1990; Butler; 1993).

Identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', objected. Every identity has as its 'margin', an excess, something more. Identity thus is constructed of a form of closure.

Laclau (1990:33) argues and agrees that "the constitution of a social identity is an act of power". Derrida has also expressed that the constitution of an identity is always based through exclusion and developing a hierarchy between two binary oppositions- man/ woman. As it is the same with the opposites of black and white relationship, where the white is associated with strength, purity and black on the other hand with emptiness, vacuum and vice. "So the unities which the identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed with the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality, but of the naturalized, over-determined process of 'closure'" (Hall: 1992). Hall is further of the view that the identities are constructed through the process of 'difference' through the discourse practices which hail or to say Butlerian 'interpelate' into a place as social subjects. "identities are as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representations are always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate- identical to the subject processes which are invested in them" (Hall: 2000:19).

Zamora and Faris have noted that "magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all at oneness encourages resistance to monological, political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers from post colonial cultures and, increasingly to women" (Zamora&Faris: 1995:06) and that "magical realism is a mode suited

to exploring – and transgressing- boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographic or generic” (Zamora&Faris: 1995:05). This nature of magical realism makes it perfect for feminist literary texts in particular and feminism in general. This subversiveness of the Magical Realist texts allows for the writer to let their female characters to “enact” or to use the Butlerian “perform” their selves subversively. Their continued study of the subversive and transgressive aspect of magical realism is very unique. As we can see in the works of feminist Angeela Carter where she has employed the technique of magical realism to subvert from the authority of the British ruling class, or as in the case of Salman Rushdi “who questioned the truth of the British version of Indian Colonial and Post Colonial History” (Bowers: 2004: 64).

CONCLUSION

De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), studies the cultural construction of woman as other which laid the foundations for much of the theoretical work of the 1970s. ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,’ ... ‘No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.’ The category of the other, she argues, is fundamental in the formation of all human subjectivity, since our sense of self can be produced only in opposition to something which is not-self. Men on other hand have claimed the category of self or Subject exclusively for themselves, and relegated woman to the status of eternal other. The category ‘woman’ has thus no substance, being merely a projection of male fantasies (the ‘myth of the eternal feminine’) and fears. But since all cultural representations of the world presently available to us—whether in myth, religion, literature or popular culture—are the work of men, women too have internalized these definitions and learned to ‘dream through the dreams of men’. Indeed, a ‘true woman’ is required to accept herself as other for man: she must ‘make herself object...renounces her autonomy’. In her analysis of how woman became the other, de Beauvoir argued that the key to women’s oppression lay in their cultural construction as other.

Contemporary feminists at the same time like Butler have employed deconstructive strategies in order to destabilize a binary model inscribed in the masculine/feminine dyad. Instead, feminists have provocatively elaborated new frameworks in which to locate the gendered and sexual subject. These theorists have drawn from the Derridean model, which argues that binary structures will always privilege one of the binaries over the other: for example, male over female. Rather than trying to reverse this so that the feminine will be privileged over the masculine, as emancipatory feminism has striven to do, these feminists have attempted to destabilize the foundational structures on which binaries relies. Judith Butler proposed some exciting and provocative ways of re-thinking gendered and sexual subjectivity. She introduces the idea that all gender and all sexual identities are performed. So if we are to accept the idea that the dualism between the masculine and feminine is no longer the reigning discourse in the construction of gender, it would seem that, regardless of their gender, both men and women can and should stay vigilant and participate in developing new ways of constructing or in many diverse and subversive ways perform the contemporary subject.

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