

Transsexual : Transgendering and Transcending the gender Discrimination of Patriarchy in KalkiSubramaniam's *Phallus I Cut*

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Abstract: Transgender studies evolved as a separate discipline when writers like Judith Butler in her preface to the second edition of her work, "Gender Trouble" published in 1990 remarked that "If I were to rewrite this book under present circumstances, I would include a discussion of transgender and intersexuality". This marks the emergence of transgender studies as a distinct discipline. Her work, "Gender Trouble" is a foundational work for queer theory and laid bases for researches in gender studies and queer theory. Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* created a lot of controversy when it was published in 2004. The recent reflections on gender and sexuality in the society focuses on breaking the stereotyping role of a gender. *Undoing Gender* answers the issues and challenges raised by *Gender Trouble* published by Butler. The term "undoing gender" is a challenge to the gender norms and gender performativity fixed by the society discussed in *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler. The new gender politics that emerged in the recent years in society and reflected in many literary works focusing on gender issues have paved way to undoing gender in the society. This gender politics has led to transgender, transsexuality, intersex and has led to complex relations to gender and queer theory. Butler has analyzed the terms of recognition and desire in the problem of gender. This research paper analyzes the transgender issues faced by the persona in KalkiSubramaniam's *Phallus I Cut*.

Keywords: Transsexual - Desire to identify with a gender - Patriarchy - Discrimination of gender - Painful trauma - Social identity - Familial identity - Transcending gender

Introduction

Transgender discrimination is the double oppression that the person faces in family as well as society. KalkiSubramaniam, an inspirational writer and transgender activist. As a transwoman, she had a desire to transsexual herself to be a woman. In her poetry, "Phallus I Cut" She shares her personal experience about the family circumstances and society that deliberately disregards her identity as a transgender. The poem portrays the trauma of transgender who wants to be a transwoman but inhibited by the patriarchal society. The title of the poem suggests the transsexual process that symbolizes curbing the dominance of patriarchy.

Kalki shares her journey from the time she was born as Sabari into her family but she has fear of acceptance in the society as a transgender. Her family after great difficulty has been supportive in her choices.

In her interview, she said.

"Of course there was the initial shock and confusion that emanates from a conservative thought-process usually associated with traditional families. But later, all of them simply accepted me for who I am. My mother, sisters, even my brothers-in-law who have been a constant source of strength and support," Kalki says, smilingly. Her father passed away when she was a teenager."

As an adolescent, she always loved her feminine side but suddenly become conscious terms with it. She planned to reassign her sex with a surgery at the cusp of teenage but shattered with it physically and psychologically. Kalki, the avatar according to Hindu philosophy is born to eliminate the evils on earth. The poet, Kalki has renamed herself to eliminate the gender discrimination in the society.

Transsexual - a desire for gender identity

Gender identity is a desire for any human in social setting. Gender identity is the basic identity that a human being can hold. The desire for gender identity is strong in transgenders. The gender discrimination faced by transgenders in the society makes them to raise above the gender identity. Gender fluidity is common in transgenders and to associate with a gender is challenging for them. The desire to transsexual in a person to cross the borders of gender identity and raise above the stigmas attached to gender discrimination especially for transgender. The stigma for woman is worse than a transgender according to Kalki.

The fluidity in gender identity is a common trouble in transgenders. The misconception created by the society in terms of gender performance as a notion has made the society to believe in the social norms governing gender performance. The confinement of gender roles leads to particular socially accepted gender behaviour.

Gender Performativity

Gender performativity is a theory that forms Butler's work. Butler had tried to address gender performativity in terms of Gender Trouble. In Butler's "Gender Trouble" (1990), "Bodies that Matter" (1993) and "Undoing Gender" (2004), she had tried to challenge the essentialist understanding of gender. Gender performativity is an assumption created by society in fixing the gender roles that naturally or biologically, men should perform men's roles and women, their feminine roles and naturally their desire the opposite. In feminist circles as well as gay and lesbian communities, the assumptions had created devastative effect for the people who did not follow the gendered roles.

Gender roles are considered to be norms or values that society fixes on people. Butler uses the term "gender norms" to address the confusion of "what is" and "what it should be". "This prevents us from seeing other possible ways of life as legitimate or even imagining such possibilities at all". Susan Stryker notes on her work, "The Transgender Studies Reader" published in 2006 that Butler "suggests that gender is a mere performance, on the model of drag and therefore somehow not real"

Gender is not simply biological but performative is biological. Performativity does not simply mean performance but refers to the performative utterance as put forth by J. L. Austin. J. L. Austin, a linguist had defined "performative utterance as not truth-valuable action of performing or doing a certain action. For example, when people say "I promise to do so and so" and they are generating the action of making a promise". Marriage as an institution pronounces that "I now pronounce you man and wife" and pronounces gender as a social norms and socially approved roles to be stereotyped.

In *Phallus I Cut*, the gender role is fixed by the society biologically through a woman with an ovary giving birth to a child. The society blames her for not having an ovary and so she is not called a woman biologically. The society fixes gender roles for a woman and she is described as a desolate tree when she is not fertile to give birth to a child. Similarly for a man, the society fixes that the losing the genital part, a phallus for a man is severing the manhood or losing the gender identity itself. The phrases "decayed barks" and "desolate tree" signify both the loss of gender identity in both as a man and as a woman.

"O, you do not have
ovary,
woman, thou art not."
said you.
Well.
" Lo, behold!
as thou have severed
thy manhood,
thou art now
a desolate tree
with
decayed barks.
Thou have dug
the grave of
thy own lineage."

The poet struggles to accept the battle that she faces in her life. She lacks social acceptance as a woman because she does not have ovary. It shows how society is reluctant in treating transgenders as they struggle for identity throughout their lives. Society that discriminates the transgenders denies their rights also. The third gender is fluid gender according to society and never been stable in their gender role and gender performativity. This infidelity exists in society in which the minds are narrowed through the walls of discrimination.

Gender performativity is not possible in this case. According to Butler, society values a human being based on gender identity and their performativity theory advocates that the successful performance of the roles taken by each gender contributes to the gender identity. In case of this poem, the loss of gender performativity fixed by the society is assured by the last line, “dug the grave of thy own lineage”.

Body and Language

Gender roles are determined biologically as well as the language. Gender is not alone biological but also the repeated ways of speaking and doing(performativity). The dress, body language and particular kinds of performance both biologically and socially have stereotyped the roles of gender on basis of body and language.

However, this work of creating and redefining gender is never finished – for gender norms to hold, they must be constantly repeated. This means in the longer term, gender norms are intrinsically open to change. We can never get them exactly “right”, and if we stop doing them, or do them differently, we participate in changing their meaning. This opens up possibilities for gender to change.

Gender - a myth

Judith Butler connects the performance and gender identity and says that the gender is highly imitative in nature. In terms of Freud, in lesbians, one imitate the role of a man and the other, a woman and it is still questionable whether they are attracted to the binary. In this case, gender is a myth and woman imitates a man in lesbianism and man imitates a woman in gays. This kind of imitation biologically terms them under a bisexual. The socially constructed inequality with the stigmas attached to biological nature of a woman or a man cannot reveal the true identity of a person. According to Butler, gender is not just biological but it is a social constraint which is subjected to change. “Because there is neither as ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis” (Routledge, 1990).

Jay Prosser in “Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality” published in 1998 has explored Butler’s idea of performativity in queer theory as a trans embodiment as “Queer theory has written of transitions as discursive but it has not explored the bodiliness of gendered crossings”. Prosser calls it “the elision of embodiment” as the theory valorizes “the subject which crosses the lines of gender, not those of sex”. Viviane K. Namaste in her book, “Invisible Lives” was published in 2000 with the subtitle, “the erasure of transsexual and transgendered people”. Theorizing the drag performances, Butler framed a pure spectacle in gay establishments as trans experience. Namaste has questioned “the variety of reasons why people might choose to cross-dress in a club”.

Discrimination of gender in patriarchy

The crafted gyno-grammar for a woman and transgender by the chauvinistic society does not affect Kalki as she has transcended the gender bias and even transcended the term gender itself. According to Hindu mythology, the Arthanareeswarar, a hermaphrodite figure surpasses the gender difference by adapting both the genders to exhibit equality between the two genders. There, arises the issues of abnormality in transgender to be the third gender. By transformation, she wanted to renounce the religion and denounce caste discrimination.

Trauma and Mental Psyche

The poem portrays the physical, social and mental trauma of transsexual process from a man to woman. The unbearable pain and torment is not just physical but the treatment meted out to her by the society and the verbal abuses that the people had shown her shows the lack of maturity in society. The conventional society

refuses to accept this kind of transformation. The traumatic experience of a transgender is not just because of the transformation but also because of the discrimination in the society in terms of social norms, cultural norms and religious norms.

“No Transcendental Yoga
I performed
to transform myself
in to a woman.
I cut my phallus,
Soiled in blood
and
transcending death
I became a woman.”

The suffering that the transgender experiences biologically is described in these lines that convey the grief as she has severed her manhood to become a woman. She has transcended death through this transformation. The transformation not only affects the person biologically but affects the psyche of the transwoman. The general psyche of the society is non-acceptance of the transwoman as someone not normal and not confined to nature and culture. The verbal throws by the people around her in the society has affected her psyche and has led to renounce manhood. Kalki painfully conveys that the world looks like a desolate tree with decayed barks and she is a woman without ovary and that has made the society to criticise her more.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, narrative and History*, Cathy Caruth commented that the traumatic experience of the transgenders in a particular environment and their struggle for survival would make them either numb resistant or confront it eternally. The trauma theory covers the depression of the individual in traumatic experience deepens into the mind and stays as a permanent wound. The traumatic experience enters the memory lane and affects the psyche. There are people who create survival strategies to overcome this experience.

Kalki had already renounced manhood but transgending herself as a woman had made her incur more criticism as she lacks ovary as a transwoman. She attacks society vehemently by saying that the ovary carries the seeds of religious and caste fanaticism. She doesn't want to carry such seeds in her womb.

“Live, thou may
Till thy roots last.
The earth that bears thee
Shall give up
one day
as thou have not
planted thy branches
below.”
Said, you.
Well.
I do not want that ovary
to carry your excretions
of caste and religious
fanaticism.”

The metaphor of seed germination continues in this stanza through the choice of words, roots, branches and plants etc. The society blames her that the earth that bears her shall give up one day as she has not continued her lineage.

The metaphor of seeds symbolizes the growth and existence of religious discrimination in society. The seeds that are going to germinate spread the bitter fruits of discrimination. She equates the womb of a woman

who carries such seeds to the lavatory. She accepts her as the error of nature but she interrogates the world that can anyone love the life led by the transgender renouncing religion and caste discrimination.

“And I do not want
In my ovary
the gestation of
those seeds
to grow in to a
tyrannous tree.
Many a woman
as she carried
the seeds of your
discriminations,
made her ovary
your lavatory.”

The poet does not want to make her ovary as lavatory by carrying the excretions of discriminations preached by the society. She does not want the tree to grow tyrannous that contains the prejudices of society.

“Luckily,
I am not a woman
by birth.
And that you refuse
to accept me as one
is, in fact,
my real emancipation.
I do not recite
thegyno-grammar
you have crafted.
Call me
an error of nature.
Call me what you will.
I know it myself
for sure
who I am
at any given hour.”

The transgender does not fall under the gyno-grammar recited by patriarchy for a woman. Patriarchy has fixed gender roles for women to follow in the society but she does not fall under the category as the society refuses to accept her as a woman. She is reluctant to respond to the criticism from society and she gives up the battle by calling herself as “an error of nature”. She does not give up her hope but she has overcome all the criticisms that were made against her. The society refuses to accept her as a woman but she finds her own identity for herself which is denied by the society. She realizes her self-identity to overcome the discrimination against her.

“Renouncing religion,
casting away caste,
united as the rejected,”

The poet's identity lies in her community that she contributes to. Her contribution to the community and the community acceptance is revealed in these lines when she says, “united as the rejected”. The community shares the similar experience of discrimination from the society. The concept of sisterhood develops in

community living as transgenders empower themselves through this community living. Many transgenders run businesses in today's world through this community help. While living in community, they renounce religion and caste and share their emotion bond among them.

“Cut the phall-us
of your chauvinism
and then you will know
who you are.
And then,
and only then,
you tell me
that
I am not a woman.”

The poet advocates that by cutting the phallus symbolically means cutting the chauvinism from the society. In a threatening tone, she concludes that she cannot be criticized that she is not a woman.

Community living

Kalki is a part of an NGO named Sagothari Foundation for the upliftment of transgenders. Through her Sagothari foundation, she accomplishes economic, social and political participation of transgender community and aims to empower them through holding their rights and aids them to earn their livelihood through different initiatives. As she relates her experiences with other transgenders in their community, she not only complains about her society but she overcomes the trauma by contributing something constructive to her community. The victims of such community seeks judgement for their identity in society through her organization. Their experiences are shared experiences and the community faced “othering”.

She challenges the world that none can be born a woman without a womb and none can become a daughter without sucking at mother's breasts. But the transgender can turn a woman without these. She can become a mother and daughter for an another transgender without being a mother biologically. The poet celebrates the community living among transgender through this poem.

Conclusion

Kalki believes that she overcomes the role of fixed gender identity advocated by the society. She transcends and transgender through her transexual process. Being a transwoman, she has transcended the biological roles fixed in terms of gender performativity and gender identity. Her poem “Phallus I cut” advocates the punishment given to male chauvinism by cutting the phallus symbolically and biologically. Gender roles are weak and fluid according to Kalki. Even she reflects the idea of gender fluidity through her paintings titled, “Love beyond Gender”, “The Rainbow Queen and “Free Spirit”. She does not conform to the conventions of the society in terms of gender but rather challenges the societal norms through “I am someone who loves to celebrate life and not just get tied down to a mere mundane existence on earth.” Kalki challenges the entire world to overcome the discrimination by contributing constructively to her community.

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