Chapter V

Identity and the Markers of Agency

Identities are changeable and unstable and unfixed but this does not make it a poststructural claim. The phantasmagoric level of poststructuralist work on gender and sexuality "without delivering the concrete, situated, and materialist understanding of the body" does not constitute the "trace" of identity (Davis 169). Again, this instance of leaving the terrestrial for the more ephemeral – is a luxury in an unequal world. The sexual, national, or racial identification, if as unstable as poststructuralist's claim to be, it would never gain the much needed collective voice to mount resistance or even usher in a politics of identity in literary scholarship. It is the importance that is placed on these criteria's of identification, at a particular time in a particular period and place that they gain a voice uniform enough to mount resistance upon a ruling establishment. Identity, may not be a stable and secure an entity over a period of history. However, synchronically, observed over a particular moment of radicalization, in a particular geopolitical sphere, it can and has produced a collective voice against established oppression. The manifestation of collective identities still contains revolutionary potential for change. And it is this latent understanding of identity politics that is on the rise in English academic departments. Identity studies can effectively and ethically be both responsible, and intervene politically in debates of the oppressed where literary theory seemed to meander around its own ontology. Identity studies, in terms of its agency is therefore driven by a political materialism, towards its teleology of justice.

Critics in the past have theorized identity as the "outcome of a complex series of social processes. It does not arise spontaneously but is learned and relearned over time. It is clear that identity does not express an essence but rather an acquired set of characteristics. It is also clear that aspects of identity admit of multiple readings/presentations" (Gellner, 1964, 1983; Giddens, 1991, in Preston 4).
Therefore, what identity acquires is usually based on cultural as well as temporal considerations of a collective group situated in a particular geographical location. Therefore, identity is the product of a dialogue between agents and their sociopolitical collective existence.

The collective is a political affiliation between individuals but not a private construct. "The particular person will confront a dense sphere of relationships with others, and in the background will stand the collective. One could think of identity as a shifting balance between what is privately remembered and what is currently publicly demanded. Identity is thus always shifting" (Preston 5). Jonathan Culler has identified the importance of language in constructing identity in a collective groups articulation. Culler remarks that "Each language articulates or organizes the world differently. Languages do not simply name existing categories, they articulate their own". Without moving into more textualization based on language which is so emblematic to Culler, I would simply like to emphasize here the aspect of the real lived experience of identity through the articulation of language and in the patterns of thought and action. It is not fixed but made and remade in thought and action (Preston 7).

Agents associate themselves as members of political collectives. This understanding is institutionally embodied and expressed in the routine and formally legitimated in the public sphere (Preston 54). But it is not only a question of where agency is located, but also where we wish to place the workings of agency. The need to act has become a recurring trope especially since 9/11. Not necessarily in search of quick fixes but at least on the path of eventual fixtures, by identifying the areas in desperate need for fixture. Affirmative action is of immense importance here, as the past few decades show that, it is only when the oppressed speak for themselves that things begin to change more rapidly. For instance, even writers striving for the emancipation of colored people and the elimination of apartheid rules and legislations around the world, cannot really be the torchbearers of a movement against racist laws by only writing novels, it can however be done through participant activism. Similarly, psychoanalyzing discrimination can certainly raise awareness of its
psychosis but it cannot be a substitute for a more vocal politicization that is necessary for change. The rendering of identity with some form of agency is not only the politicization of identity but also imperative to counter forces of oppression and the unjust.

What I have tried to show so far in this work is that the formulation of literary theory as a discipline and the dissension that it has drawn, is diverse, arising from disparate locations and conditions and undergoes a continuous dialectical process. This can be seen in the junctures where it has been challenged by its detractors. At some of those points, it tries to reshape and redefine its methodologies sometimes arriving at completely new methodologies of analysis. I have also tried to show how the reception of a theoretical premise and its export or acceptance at the disciplinary level is not always a question of epistemology. That historical and political events, social conditions and popular affinity all become important criteria's for its subsequent acceptance. It also shows how epistemology itself is influenced by socio-political ideas. This I have tried to emphasize in the last chapter in relation to the growing importance of redefining identity, from the perspective of oppression, which according to Iris Young, relates to the inability to fulfill and express human capacities.

Literary Theory as a part of English literary studies, as I have defined it, has come a long way, and has changed its disciplinary course by a great deal. As a part of literary studies, as shown in the first chapter, it rode on the seemingly secular. Gaining stimulus from nationalist and rights movements around the world. Reacting against post-enlightenment projects, gaining impetus first from the linguistic and then the psychoanalytical body of knowledge. It was propagated by the metropolitan academic centers of the USA, which over took Britain as the metropolitan centre for English studies. And since the mid 1990’s and much more after 9/11 it is incurring a tremendously paradigmatic change in form. What I have tired to show, is the roots of theory in the discipline of literature, and why the English department was the best place for it to flourish, this has been the life and times of theory. Constantly moving in and out of questions of identity and agency, in trying to relate itself (theory) to the
human condition, and to subsequently better the condition of the human subject in society. It is this aspect of theory which keeps it ever open to interpretation and meaning.

As I have mentioned earlier and would now like to recall here, the idea that much of literary theory which tried to bring down the structures of power, have tried to do so by making power irrelevant. This is seemingly achieved in poststructuralist thought by ‘placing’ tropes of power in a semiotic play or in the realm of the psyche. By doing so, theorists have tried to undermine power structures by trying to do away with structures completely, in order to make knowledge and possibly the world a little more egalitarian. Unfortunately, it has not been able to accomplish the task and only created an elitist niche for itself, which becomes a source of power in its own way. My assumption here is that we need not really bring down the idea of structures in totality, just to contain the structures of power and make the world a little more equal. Identity studies is the proof of a project that pivots itself on structures and draws closer to a more practical egalitarian goal.

Identity studies, in terms of the study of ethnic minorities and other marginal communities, which are not a part of “main stream” societies, have always been studied. The vast area of archeology and sociology over the centuries have documented such studies. In the past few decades, the study of multicultural societies and multiculturalism per se, has dealt with the intermingling of various groups forming a working composite society (Parekh 350). But the specific understanding and study of oppression and forms of discrimination imposed upon various groups, has gained in profundity in modern academic circuits only after the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). The latter is a study that can be included in the working structures of a politics of identity.

The ethos of multiculturalism, seem to massage the rough edges of difference with a continued Liberal Humanistic zeal of underscoring commonalities between cultures and ethnicities relative to their contemporary situation and location. The latter is a patronizing notion, since cultures (collective individuals), not only have a developed
sense of their own survival tactics but also a sense of understanding, and responding to their cultural Other. Multiculturalism inevitably, through its own homogenizing agenda, would shy away from the tenacity and rigors necessary to interrogate difference as well as oppression. Such a path of rigor and tenacity needed to interrogate these questions are provided a platform in the renewed areas of literary scholarship which have been brought under the label of identity politics. Of course the purpose of identity politics cannot be to only identify difference and oppression, as the latter also calls forth a need of these various groups to understand themselves, and to project meaning in their own ways of existence in order to justify a mounting resistance to oppression.

Research in archeology and sociology has always taken a third person perspective in its approach to studying groups on the margins of history. While unchecked, the latter always had a propensity to become hegemonic in scope and objective, imposing its own paradigms of knowledge upon the studied group, as conveyed in Orientalism. Conclusions reached in such studies in the past at times have been audacious enough to remark that these groups reflect little or close to no added value to the vast scopes of established knowledge. Although the multiculturalists and cosmopolitans are careful enough to use a rhetoric more sophisticated, cultural differences are always viewed as being less important than cultural similarities, while actual cultures themselves, more often than not, both define and pride themselves on their differences. Therefore identity politics becomes a more pragmatic approach in its objective.

It is therefore not surprising that the new ‘breed’ of identity studies and disciplinary boundaries formed recently in institutional departments, enter academic discourse from the level of difference and identifies injustice and oppression with a will for change. The importance to understand different people within national boundaries and from other parts of the world, whose well being becomes a necessity to have a more secure world, becomes a realization which gains more and more momentum, the further we move past the occurrence of 9/11. Identity politics therefore becomes important today, much more than multiculturalism and globalization. To understand
the other, means today to see it the way it sees itself. Of course, to believe that the Self can know itself in a pure sense of the word (know) maybe completely manufactured. However, this manufacturing is based on a prime human desire for dignity and justice. Therefore, any inquiry into the area of identity studies shows first and foremost, the way a collective group would like to perceive themselves, and how they wish to be politically defined in temporality, geography and history.

The moment we talk of politics, one infers that it is a search for political power. However, the academics and the activist and the academic/activist who may struggle for the emancipation of oppressed groups, are not looking to overthrow the existing power structures and replace themselves in the position of power. But rather only wish to represent themselves the way they feel comfortable. The struggle here is not really about power or the regaining of power, as much as it is about justice.

**What is justice, and Whose Justice is it Anyway?**

There is a present day decline in theorizing justice as critics, commentators and supporters of liberal capitalism shift their attention to human rights. According to Tom Campbell, this may reflect the fact that the discourse of justice is tied to theories of the nation-state and particularly the concept of a welfare state, which itself is on the decline in a world of global markets and entrepreneurial capitalism (254). In the realm of theory, justice is seen as another overriding hostile meta-narrative, which is rejected by the postmodern disinclination of the latter, based on the perception that it is manufactured by discourses in the position of power. A more neutral analysis of justice rejects the commonly held view that justice is always the prime social and political value (Campbell 5). Studies in justice have become tangled with notions of legality and varied ideological constitutional frameworks, while the question of justice fluctuates between an atomized notion of the individual, and the much too broad and lofty universalized essence. Either of these extents of justice is hardly of any practical use to anyone. It horrifies many to speak of the concepts of justice in fear of being called a 'naive over simplifier' or being accused of lacking in any substantial commentary.
However, the concept of justice is probably as old as the idea of what it means to be human. The Hebraic tradition of justice is probably among the oldest traditions that has attached a great deal of importance to the concept of justice. Each religion and ethnic community on the face of the planet, with no exceptions, has their own notion and criteria of justice. The very concept of justice seems intertwined with social existence. Western Christian thought draws its lineage, whether in agreement or detraction, to the Hebraic descriptions of justice. (Amstrong “Battle” 104). The supposedly more rational and secular concepts of justice are said to be founded in the ancient Hellenic principles and philosophies, and also are said to draw its roots to Plato’s Republic.

In the Republic, justice is defined as the “constant purpose to give every man his due” (Campbell 24). Therefore, with all things being equal “people ought to receive that which is due to them as a matter of right, not of grace and favour” (24). Of course, over the past centuries or so, the concept of ‘due’ becomes very problematic to assess, and very well continues to be problematic. It is therefore not surprising that the concept of justice has always been an enigma for scholars and critics of each period. Therefore, the definitions that have been used in defining justice have most always reverted to self correction or external attack. It is usually too broad to become statements of contention and of any real use and at other times too obfuscating. Scholarship on justice always seem to appeal to a sense of heightened morality, and upright conscience rather than epistemological roots. It rests on the premise that defines the human being as responsible-moral agents. In Campbell’s words, “it is therefore important, when analyzing the concept of justice, not to cast its net too wide, so that justice becomes indistinguishable form the sum of social and political values” (11).

To counter the generalized breadth and scope of justice and to reduce it to a size more manageable and accountable, various theories of justice have been formulated. Since the 19th century, the concept of a social contract in political philosophy becomes the backbone for a liberal social theory of justice. This comes as a replacement for a non-
theoretical moral foundation for an emerging modern and therefore secular nation state. This particular idea of justice has gained a predominant position over other theories of justice over the centuries due to the colonial endeavor (Campbell 93). A great deal of the colonial enterprise, as mentioned in Chapter I, for instance, the idea of the “white man’s burden”, had been influenced by the writings of the great liberals such as John Stuwart Mill, Locke and other Enlightenment scholars who also shared these notions of social justice based on the idea of a social contract. Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume saw justice as a conventional device with its sole purpose being the preservation of social order and helping to stabilize the existing political structure by settling disputes. A change in political view therefore, would lead to a change in the criteria of justice, and not vice-versa. In fact, these very ideals helped to justify colonization based on aspects of liberal social justice. For instance, Vishwanathan writing in the context of English education being imparted upon colonial subjects, says:

after all, state intervention in Indian education came about as a demonstration of justice and moral concern in an inherently unjust and immoral system of colonial domination. British education was dedicated to the elevation of a so-called effete population by making available to them the advanced knowledge of the West, with its promise of removal of caste and religious barriers, increased social mobility, and enlightened participation in the administration of their own country. At the same time, official statements like Wood’s dispatch clearly articulated the material interests of a capitalist society and endorsed an educational system whose role was to reproduce division of labor directly and caste structure and social inequalities indirectly. This conflict between producing greater equality through the diffusion of Western culture and Western knowledge and reproducing inequality through the occupational structure is inherently in the very institution of modern Indian education, as indeed it can be said to inhere in most
Institutions structured according to class, race, and gender within a society in conflict (Viswanathan 164-165).

In other words, justice can very easily be manipulated into being used as a pawn for disseminating power, which is why it is imperative to ask, whose justice is being served. But must justice always be in the hands of power? Or as an alternative, does it have to take the path of deontology as commentators have placed ethics and morality to do so. Although it is not my intention here to provide a theory of justice, through my working postulate of justice and its relation to identity studies, the area in question that has evolved, I would like to explain that, the renewed post literary theory interest in identity studies in recent years, is a complete rejection of the century long held perception that Man’s sole pursuit has been his will to power. Identity studies in its present day context does not rely on this principle. However, I will try to show how this principle is not only subverted but done away with completely, so much so that, the sole pursuit of an oppressed identity is driven by a will to justice.

**How does Justice Arise in the Question of Identity?**

Theorists of justice have tried over centuries to come up with fundamental pure ideals of justice, but have hastened into forming concepts of justice, that only caters to specific values of communities forming a collective agenda, in a given time and at a particular location, making any concept of justice difficult to extrapolate from a political position. In other words, justice is never just justice. It is always a political justice or a political formulation of justice in a constant process of becoming more and more just. It is never completely just in its very first existence. Therefore, justice can only be political, identity based and agency driven. Any fixture in this process will inevitably surmount to injustice: a situation in which a person or a collective group wrongly receives less or more than other persons or group (Campbell 16).

Today, social liberal theories of justice have their claims based on a range of issues such as distribution, merit, equality and equal opportunity. It has reacted against
inequalities of income, employment opportunity, disparities in property ownership, deprivations, which arise from unemployment, disablement, illness and old age, class, caste, race, gender and state oppression. This liberal tradition has based its tenets on the constructed universal individual rights of man, and the limitations that these rights place on government rule and other forms of power (Campbell 2). There are a few commentators whose works have been instrumental in shaping the views of justice in recent times in western academia. In order to understand the intricacies of justice it is important to be familiar with some of the specificities and overarching debates of their concepts of justice.

The Concepts of Justice: Definitions and Interpretations

One of the well known liberal thinkers on justice is John Rawls. The distribution of benefits and burdens becomes the focal point of Rawlsian liberalism, where the process of attaining justice is seen to be as important as the final outcome (Campbell 7). The working assumption in Rawlsian justice is based on an individual’s independence and autonomy, while using the language of justice to criticize existing power relations (Campbell 8). Here, benefits are not deemed to be maximized until a fair level of distribution is ensured to all. Rawls in his theory advances a particular subjectivism of the individual, which becomes extremely problematic and brings out some of the alternative principles of justice (as will be seen shortly). Although, in order to support his argument, Rawls postulates that his is a political theory and not a metaphysical and therefore universal rule to be applied to the human condition in general. In fact he specifies that his models can only be relevant to liberal societies such as the USA (Campbell 114).

Another thinker of the liberal tradition is Robert Nozick. In Nozick’s view, the paramount conception of justice rests on possessions of property and holdings. “Justice is then broken down into the acquisition of holdings, the transfer of holdings and the rectification of past injustices” (Campbell 60). This is close in line with the economic theory of justice grounded on the product of one’s labor and the outcome of voluntary agreements, by Richard Posner, another thinker in the area (Campbell 135).
The theory of justice provide by these thinkers mentioned above are grounded on the notions of utility, and the intimate need for justice to serve society for its integration, and survival. Ronald Dworkin, another theorist therefore, divides theories of justice, into three groups. The first consist of teleological theories, which are ultimately based on goals (states of affairs that may be advanced or preserved by political acts). Utilitarianism is one such theory. The other two theories are deontological ones where ideas of ‘rightness’ becomes an idea based on the conviction of a right act (Campbell 71).

Rawls, Nozick, Posner, and to an extent Dworkin in his own theory of justice, all follow a liberal utilitarian approach to justice. This is more political and based on the specific models of Western societies. A standard objection to utilitarianism is that it leads to unequal distributions and thus perpetrating injustice, in that the interests held by the majority group will always be at the cost of the smaller groups, if unchecked. Another theorist who too can be seen as part of the liberal tradition who takes a deontological approach in her theories of justice is Martha Nussbaum. For instance, she argues that, “if child female circumcision and child marriage are wrong for one child in one society, they are wrong for all children in all societies” (in Campbell 39).

Dworkin in his theory tries to combine both the utilitarian and deontological aspects of justice. For instance, Dworkin tries to apply the idea that people should be treated equally through practical means. Although the details of his findings are beyond the scope of this work, the reasons provided for the conclusions that are reached are not sufficient and can be used to attain and generate wide and contradictory outcomes under the similar circumstances (Campbell 179).

Within the liberal tradition of justice, which is hailed for being utilitarian in nature, another tradition is the communitarian view of justice. The communitarian notion of justice, states that each community conceives its own structures of justice. These structures are in turn based on cultural and geo-political constructs. Claiming that a
particular communities conception of justice cannot be thrust upon other social groups and like wise, individual conceptions of justice cannot apply to communal groups in which the individual maybe positioned.

In other words, there really are no consistent standard of constructing theories of justice within a particular social tradition. This is a problem that is constantly faced by theorist’s of justice and a problem that also breaks down many of their theories once it is put to test. At the fundamental core, there is agreement on surprisingly many ideas, however, with no strong epistemological reason as to what leads to this agreement. For instance, no theory of justice proclaims that murder is acceptable and that inequality is just. No one would say the murder of a savage tyrant, an assassination, is completely unjust. Very few would contest that heavy taxation of the filthy rich maybe seen as a sign of inequality. The argument continues almost never ending. The prime acceptable conclusion therefore reached is that concepts of justice varies in different political and ideological systems.

In the Marxist tradition, justice or any study of justice and equality are seen as ideological concepts which express and further the position of the dominant economic class within capitalism. ‘Justice’ itself being no more than ‘the ideologised, glorified expression of the existing economic relationships’ (Marx and Engels, 1958, vol. 2 p. 128 in Campbell 177). For Marx, justice was not deemed to be a significant attribute for social change or in explaining the social structure. All ideas including moral ideas are part of the ‘superstructure’ (Campbell 178). Justice therefore is seen as a bourgeois concept and therefore becomes redundant and looses its value in a true communist society.

This of course does not mean that there is no concept of justice in Marxist analysis. The greatest distinction between the liberal concept of justice in the West and the Marxist notion of justice that can be extrapolated from Marxist literature and quite simply distinguished based on their core ideology. For instance in the view of justice constructed in the liberal and welfare but capitalist societies, more emphasis is placed on the distribution of goods and services. The Marxist theory therefore concentrates
their own conception of justice on issues of power and its manifestation in social, economic and political quarters (Campbell 21). The Marxist conception of justice would then fall on the corrective measures taken against oppression that permeate within capitalist social order and lead to the inequalities which arise between the rich and poor.

However, some Marxists have been prodigious in their own unique formulation of theories of justice. For example, Habermas, like Nussbaum, sees justice from a deontological perspective. By identifying justice with 'morality' he sees justice as a universal component of the human species, and therefore a norm that transcends individual group preferences. "Habermas accepts that any principle of justice must address the question of what constitutes quality and what is permissible in terms of relevant differences when we seek to apply the maxim of treating equals equally." (Campbell 239). Thus in Habermas one finds a more metaphysical search for valid objective claims for justice, rather than the more political formulations of other theorists.

In this very short sketch of some of the contentions that are held and debated, in theorizing and defining justice and that which is just, in the western context, it may be clear that conceptions of social justice will always be controversial and imperfect. Only a few things are clear and come to dominate most discussions, which are otherwise disparate in degree. However, it is most certainly clear that notions of justice are mostly connected to the ideological and political, with the hope of improving the human social condition. This actually says valuable little except that justice has all the right intentions, and that it is agency driven.

**Literary Theory, Identity Studies, Justice and Injustice**

The question of agency in relation to justice is clear in the work of a more recent theorist of justice, Iris Marion Young. In her quest of interpreting notions of the just and therefore social justice, she introduces the question of oppression or that which
defines the unjust. Young not only prefers to stay focused on concepts of domination and oppression as opposed to distributions of burdens and offices, but also feels that this would entail a more meaningful conception of justice. According to her, such a shift incorporates issues of decision-making, division of labor, and culture that bear on social justice but are often ignored in philosophical discussions. It also exhibits the importance of social group differences in structuring social relations and oppression; typically, philosophical theories of justice that have operated with a social ontology that has no room for the concept of social groups (Campbell 200). She claims, the concept of justice is coextensive with the political’ in that “when people say a rule or practice or cultural meaning is wrong and should be changed, they are usually making claims about social justice (in Campbell 202).

The ‘five faces of oppression’ mentioned earlier in this work is very important from the perspective of justice but also in the construction of identity. Her views are based on the principles that injustice may not arise from the intentions of a particular group or individual to subjugate or dominate others, but rather from social arrangements that may well be unintended and beyond the scope of control of other groups within the social fabric (Campbell 204).

Iris Young regards the entire enterprise of theorizing as a form of oppression which must be avoided. In fact, the postmodern articulation of theory is considered to have a male guise and must be rejected from the feminist perspective. Young says, “I do not construct a theory of justice. A theory of justice typically derives fundamental principles of justice that apply to all or most societies, whatever their concrete configuration and social relations, form a few general premises about the nature of human beings, the nature of societies, the nature of reason’ (1990, p.4 in Campbell 205).

She seeks the non-theoretical and thus the practical to articulate injustice and therefore focusing her analysis on the social and political manifestation of oppression upon groups in society. And thus she is not on a search for universal moral truths. To her, “the call to “be just” is always situated in concrete social, and political practices
that precede and exceed the philosopher" (1990, p.5 in Campbell 205). It is for this reason that a study of identity, even if one would like to refer to it as an atomization of the local individual perspectives and experiences, it is best suited to articulate oppression better than any homogenizing all pervasive theoretical account. It provides a sense of agency to the oppressed subject in order to perpetrate change in inegalitarian conditions. According to Campbell,

Young is here articulating the position of an acceptable type of theory, critical theory, which takes its starting-point from a value-laded commitment to a particular social experience in order to find within it the basis for a transformative response which makes that situation more acceptable. This is a process which is highly intellectual but not separated from emotion. It requires conceptual clarification, but not an appeal to timeless or objective conceptual essences (Campbell 205-6).

Thus, with or without any agreement upon the definition towards the meaning of justice, Young's approach appears to be from a seeming reverse, i.e. from the viewpoint of injustice. Since defining justice is seen to be quite a time consuming intellectual feat, approaching questions of justice from the point of that which is the unjust, seems not only more approachable but also more practical and a more immediate requirement from a socio-political perspective. It is this very approach that is taken by proponents of identity based studies. Identity studies, therefore approaches the concept of justice from the position of the unjust lived experience of the marginalized individual. To contrast identity studies from literary theory, from the perspective of my definition of the latter, approaches the questions of justice from the position of the philosophically informed.

Young's approach to injustice and therefore the formulation of justice, from the point of view of oppression exorted upon social groups by the dominant power structures, is a step towards formulating a political dialogue for radical change based on the unequal living conditions and life experiences of others. At the level of grand theories, as we have seen in the previous chapter, philosophical reflections can be
seen as a hindrance towards both political dialogue and radical change. Young’s notion of approaching questions of justice from the point of injustice and much of the core of identity studies today, is quite similar in scope and nature. Neither one is a completely intellectual procedure like that of striving to find the epistemology or the core fundamentals of grand narratives, which are too ambiguous, elitist and abstract to be useful to those who need it most. Identity studies and Young’s approach to justice is a procedure that basis itself upon an agency for change. To those who are in search of the fundamentals of justice, like Habermas, one may ask, what will happen when one finds the “fundamentals of justice”? The very fact that they remain unfound is another point in the making. Of course, even in such a hypothetical case the question of implementation of justice would arises at some point, which must still be solved politically.

The movement from questions of what is justice to questions of targeting the unjust in terms of oppression and domination brings into consideration the idea of fairness. It raises questions of policy and therefore politics, and in particular, a democratic politics, which involves oppressed groups to work out new structures of empowerment. This constitutes Young’s vision of a “politics of democratic dialogue” in which individual interests are considered (Campbell 212). In order to illustrate this politics of dialogue Young says:

democratic procedures alone are often insufficient to ensure just decisions; thus democracy must be constitutional, limited by rules that define basic rights and norms. Democratic decisions about criteria for job qualifications and about who is qualified should be limited by fairness. As I understand it, fairness in such decisions include the following: (1) Criteria for qualifications should be explicit and public, along with the values and purposes they serve. (2) Criteria should not exclude any social groups from consideration from positions, either explicitly or implicitly. (3) All candidates for positions should be given consideration according to formal procedures which are publicly announced. (4) People with particular group affinities, social
positions, or personal attributes may be preferred, but only to undermine oppression or compensate for disadvantage and never to reinforce privilege (Iris Young 212).

Young's model is therefore based on a communicative model of democracy in which differences are not in play, or in a position of hybridity, but rather recognized as real and lived, and represented by the oppressed groups in such a system, and therefore must be protected as well. In the communicative model, the oppressed group is in a position of agency and can negotiate terms and conditions. Although it may seem naïve to think that once this is achieved, or if it is ever achieved, equality will prevail, but a replacement of the hybrid position with that of political representation for the oppressed subject is quite a small step in theory, but it is quite a leap in terms of a politics of identity. Such a concept, therefore runs contrary to the postmodern outlook, which dominates literary theory since the representation of a political identity and any unified concept of injustice are seen as formula's for the manufacturing of truth claims and thus grand narratives.

Concepts of literary theory such as poststructuralism and postmodernism may have been used to react and respond to an implicit social and cultural oppression administered within the structure of enlightenment and liberalism and modernism. However, the eclectic and elitist nature of such theory itself has led to an oppression of its own nature, as seen in the issues expressed in the previous chapters. Theory requires, specialized training in European philosophy and specialized metropolitan institutions. It follows a top to bottom movement of knowledge, where the philosopher teachers holding the top positions within an institution, write about the bottom strata of society, to which they seldom have any physical link. Identity politics as an institutional curriculum, on the other hand, does not need to follow this route, even though the same philosopher teachers may very well be among the torch bearers of the identity politics, which is why there is a predominant movement away from literary theory to identity politics in recent literary scholarship. Opposition to discriminatory laws and rules are met at the place of their execution and implementation and not at the level of formulation. The lived experience must be
privileged over philosophical stratagem when it comes to questions of oppression. Of course rules and laws maybe formulated after dialogues and debates, but the performance of the actual rules or laws must await implementation, until which it is still at the level of polemics and pedagogy and not part of the realm of the performative. Thus the shift in theory to identity politics can only come, and has come at a point when there is a greater force of opposition from the position of the locals (a movement from bottom to top). When there is no new opposition there would never really be any need for the change, and change would seldom come in such a situation. In fact in such a situation, maintaining the status quo becomes the real challenge.

In other words, philosopher teachers holding the top positions within an institution can continue to write their theories, only as long as there is no real opposition from other local areas. With opposition from collective groups, the disruption of theory takes place particularly because groups are not seen as unifying wholes in theory, creating new instances and paradigms and maybe much later, new theories. In this case, the shift from theory to identity studies, is a replacement of the anti-foundational by the foundational. A foundation that pivots itself on difference and reacts to the manifestation of oppressive policies. The anti-foundational quality of theory was not sufficient to correct or even satisfactorily explain the discrimination and oppression forced upon less privileged sections of society.

Thus, literary theory is based more on the speculation of these philosopher teachers and external critics, and intellectuals who certainly do not share the lived experience of the oppressed and are not part of the ground realities – or who are fully a part of an oppressive system. But does this necessarily imply that one must be oppressed to understand oppression and fight it? This point can be raised for an open debate, however, after almost four decades of literary theory, it is very clear that such theorizing certainly doesn’t help.

The regrouping of oppressed individuals such as ethnic minorities or lesbians, based on a uniform aspect within their community that they identify and wish to legitimize
or recognize for the betterment of the future of their collective groups will not necessarily take an epistemological path to convey their message. Affirmative action becomes a better method for such groups, to represent themselves and advance their claim. Identity studies is capable of recording this appeal.

Identity Studies in the Department of English

Thus in the very historical progression of literary theory, there is a projection towards a need in formulating a collective identity, based on aspects, lived experiences and day-to-day sufferings and struggles of groups that have faced oppressive measures from dominant discourses and socio-political structures. Continuous systemic depravation based on racial, religious or sexual differences, elements of insult, hampered opportunities all become part of the ingredients to manufacture inequality. It is not at the level of theory but at the level of identity politics that these ills can be exposed and condemned. If the sufferings of such minorities are not given the same weight as accorded to the sufferings of the privileged groups then wrongs have been identified and this calls for rectification (Campbell 87).

Identity studies has a role in empowering human agents in critiquing institutional arrangements and disciplinary boundaries. By doing so, it accords respect and dignity to agents not only to foster their agency but by evaluating the choices and actions that had brought out the collective expression of agency in the first place. It is not only a coherent, but also in principle, “an attractive idea that human beings need to be treated as autonomous agents who are responsible for their actions and answerable for their conduct” (Campbell 194). A disciplinary formulation of identity studies ranging from the likes of African-American studies, Dalit literature to eco-feminism and queer studies, which all group or regroup around essentialist qualities (however constructed they may be, since their fight against oppression is never constructed) seek liberation from their secondary status within the disciplinary framework of literary studies. So much so that, in disciplinary selection or articulation, privileges like dominant location – the metropolitan, concepts of modernity, ethnicity, tradition, other alternative philosophies and even concepts such as the secular (Religious-Statehood...
divide, which have all become a defining principle in Western academia, and thrust upon academia around the world), which are used to form disciplinary boundaries must be made irrelevant. Identity studies is therefore like the Civil Rights movement in literary scholarship, where postmodern theory is the 'concerned' but inactive civil society. The search is for equal rights in terms of disciplinary status, at a closer look, are a politics of identity. It reveals as I have already mentioned, a claim for the need of justice from the entry point of injustice. And therefore its overriding search is not of a will to power, but that of a will to justice. Identity politics is a search that recognizes the will to justice. As Iris Young so eloquently says in her “enabling conception of justice” that “Justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation” (Iris Young 39).

And therefore once again, the practicality of shifting to identity studies is that in order to confront oppression, it is recognizable that political dialogue is much more effective than philosophical reflection, which primarily bases itself on a will to power. It is for the above reason that there is, not a subtle but a rather, emphatic movement away from theory to a study of the politics of identity. Identity politics provides greater political dialogue by responding to everyday scenarios of discrimination based on cultural and social differences as I have shown in the previous chapter.

The Will to Justice

The will to justice is a desire for social justice and not an ontology of justice, that may or may not precede social formations or the human condition. In identity studies, justice becomes a key political concept, since identity studies itself is a political study of not individuals but of collective formations of identity. And thus more suited in the 21st century, given the compulsion and rapid nature of the growth towards a more integrated world.
The will to justice should not be seen as another grand theory on justice. It is a pedagogic critique to liberal forbearers based on the will to power. All grand theories have an element of the will to power. The will to justice is therefore not really a theory, but a condition, if at all, prior to any will to power. The 'human being' cannot be an empty entity, even in its solitary existence it is the embodiment of the cogito. The 'being' however cannot only be embodied by a Cartesian thinking self. With the cogito, it is the thinking self or the human, without it, it is only an animal, which is encompassed by the constant Freudian desire for sexual, or other instinctual, gratification. The latter definition of human continues to remain partial. For the human or 'thinking self', contains a basic desire to be treated well and be seen as equals, prior to any egotistical desire to overpower, and this is even before his animal instincts are fulfilled and set at ease. In fact, 'compassion' can be more instinctual than religious or social. For to be 'animal' can never be a singular entity, in its most primordial state, it is plural. Thus, the human self has to be the animal, that not only contains the cogito but also has a will to justice. This will to justice, should not be seen as human conscience or the ability to differentiate right from wrong, but an inbuilt agency to desire dignity and equality for the self vis-à-vis the other. I am aware here that this may sound like a moralizing appeal to the metaphysical and even more, to the transcendental, however, this is central to the act of narrativizing the self which is a requirement for the sustainability of any collective identity. Much of identity studies can be seen to rest on this premise.

The ability to narrate the self is part of the process of recounting one's life, and to be able to understand life as being re-countable is part of the human condition. It is what raises us above the purely animal-existence. It is through this very act of narratability that political activity is inscribed in the experience of the broader community (Davis 133). Although much poststructuralist work has been done on the act of narration, it has usually dwelled on the psychological relations between the self generating itself and the other, along with the interrelations of power dynamics within these spheres. Such deviation becomes unnecessary from the perspective of the individual self, groping to understand its own experiences and relation to its community. In the act of narrating, the self respecting identity, is understood when it is recalled, witnessed,
recounted or acted upon by others who also relate and concur and see value in connecting themselves with similar ideas. The narration opens the action to interpretation, making it a potential for meaning to a wider audience (Davis 134). The formation of identity is therefore not really based on a matter of consensus, but rather based on issues in which consensus is sought, in whatever way this maybe achieved, this becomes part of the cohesive force for the group.

Therefore, disciplinary structures in Identity studies like African-American studies and others almost always identifies with agents that constitute or reveal or struggle with certain commonalities which are unique to their socio-political-time and location. This in turn becomes the defining principle of the disciplinary boundaries. The psychoanalytical becomes less important here than the lived experiences articulated in everyday life.

Thus with identity studies, it is not surprising to find evidence and continuously observe that collective groups strive hard to identify a literature or a body of literary works that can identify, not in the absolute, which may never be possible but rather deal with issues potent to their ground realities and the projected future of their welfare, if not as their own, at the very least, speaking about them or their struggles and hopes for a better future for themselves. Thus the compartmentalization of areas of literature, such as Jewish literature, African-American writings, queer studies, gender studies, ethnic studies, eco-feminism, cyber feminism, and other areas are all appeals to connect the self with his/her own lived experience. The self finds agency in the everyday and seeks coexistence and not the denial of the Other. It is to understand itself, by identifying what it has to offer to its own posterity and so should not be seen as the atomization of individuals but rather a communalization of subjects not searching for power, but rather fairness, equality and justice. This is the embodiment of the will to justice.

To further illustrate my idea of the will to justice, the concept of the performative encounter proposed by Mireille Rosello can be helpful. The area of Identity studies
exposes crucial areas of literary discourse to which Rosello terms performative encounters. According to him, a performative encounter is an encounter:

that coincides with the creation of new subject-positions rather than treating preexisting (pre-imagined) identities as the reason for, and justification of, the protocol of encounter – whether it is one of violence or trust, respect or hostility. ... A pre-established script (notion of identity) will prevent the encounter from becoming performative because it will impose the language of the encounter, the subject-positions from which each protagonist meets the other, and therefore the protocol of the encounter will force itself upon the subjects. A performative encounter would be this exceptional moment when, in spite of an international or national conflict, in spite of the violence that reigns and imposes its rules, an unknown protocol replaces the script. A performative encounter is a multidimensional event that creates subjects because a protocol of exchange suddenly functions as the precondition of the emergence of the encounter. New subject-positions, a new language, and a new type of engagement appear at the same time, none of the elements depending on the preexistence of the others. (Rosello 1-2).

Although this may sound like a poststructural rendition of identity; at a closer look it becomes evident how it is anything but the latter. As I have mentioned earlier, identities are not essential entities but are rightfully political. The political is always an assertion in time or temporality. Discriminatory markers of identities, which are imposed by external hosts of power, for instance an orientalist's perception, are challenged constantly, as are local perceptions of self identity (that which a community may hold dear of themselves). However, during the performative encounter, the nano-filaments of oppression at work, keep antagonistic groups (marginal versus the central) apart, but the overriding desire for justice and not power can still be seen at work. The performative encounter is important for two reasons, firstly, it shows how the synchronic study of identity, is much more useful and more
appropriate for literary studies. And secondly, it shows the will to justice and not the will to power at work.

In order to illustrate his point, Rosello cites the Maghrebian writer, Assia Djebar's work, titled "Annie and Fatima" (in the collection titled Oran, Langue Morte). Fatima, is the daughter of a divorced Franco-Maghrebian couple. Her mother is French while her father is a Berber. The story begins with an encounter between Annie, the French mother and her daughter Fatima, after a separation of ten years. Annie learns the Berber language thinking that it is the only way that she will be able to communicate with her daughter. The girl on the other hand speaks little French. During the actual encounter between mother and daughter, both are careful and quite rigid carrying with them much of their own cultural baggage and prejudices.

Although the setting seems to pave way for a romantic encounter much like that of the Journey of the Magi—the scene proves otherwise. The mother terms her daughter's French as being "scolaire, emprunte" (229). Rosello points out that "scolaire" refers to the girl's learned French, which in turn postulates that her French curbs any childlike spontaneity and thus limits her expressions. Emprunte refers to being "gauche" and "clumsy", and also literally means "borrowed". In other words, her French is clumsy, borrowed, limiting for her own expressions, and does not belong to her. It will be used for her encounter with her French mother, and then "returned" (Rosello 9). However, Rosello says, "The encounter is performative because the two subjects must abandon the comfort of positions that could dictate the form of their dialogue. Instead of witnessing a daughter-mother relationship and a conversation in the mother tongue, the story presents us with the emergence of a new subject who speaks a new tongue" (Rosello 10).

The mother too would like to connote affection and love in her learnt Berber tongue "but the story refuses to erase the violence of the situation, to erase years of separation and absence". Symbolically, the separation between the French and the Maghreb. "The narrator suggests that the daughter is hurt by the sentence (the mother's speech)."
The little girl perceives the sentence as ... “an avalanche, torrent, a rain of little stones, but not caresses, oh no!” (in Rosello 10).

“The “stones” and the “avalanche” are the traces of the historical violence and injustice that separates the two identities. It would disappear if they simply refused to talk to each other, but peace would amount to capitulation” in such a case, and the injustice in keeping mother and daughter separated will prevail (Rosello 12). The human faculty of language and speech an expression of emotion between mother and daughter would not be a satisfactory experience. But the power of Djebar’s writing shows that this is in fact the complete experience of the situation; to be able to experience the pleasant and the unpleasant. For the experience of just either one would tantamount to an incomplete experience.

However here, there is another level of silence, the silent struggle of a soul trying to shower sincere affection upon a daughter, which is striving to over come centuries of French oppression and Maghrebian separation. It is not a power dynamics that strives to overrule the Franco-Maghrebian relation, through the agency of the maternal desire to reconnect to the child, even though the mother is constantly striving to break away from the latter. But in its own way, it seeks an agency of justice. This can be thought of as a will to justice. Thus, the micro clutches of oppression are at work even within the deepest levels of love in the mother and daughter encounter. The agency here is “motivated by a violent desire to go beyond the constraints imposed by the conditions of the encounter” (Rosello 12). This however should not be mistaken and simplified as just another form of power, striving to overcome differing structures of power.

Rosello makes a very important point about this performative encounter. He says, “The language that emerges in the presence of performative encounters will blur the distinction between participants and public (and between reader and writer), because it will require from each subject a heightened level of attention to the storytelling practice” (Rosello 13).
In such a performative encounter, there really is no will to power, there are no agencies of power but only superstructures of power, the mother in all her sincerity wishes to connect to the daughter, but rather, both end up becoming “victims at the mercy of history”, or culture or language, which are some of the power superstructures, the pillars and the arches that separate the child from its mother (Rosello 15). Embedded within the performative encounter therefore is what I would like to call, the will to justice. The French mother, striving to overcome the injustice meted out to the daughter due to her long absence and separation, a gap in time, a loss that a mother incurs by not seeing her child in those early years. This is not the same as a vengeful blame game against the father for keeping the daughter away from the mother and identifying the father as the cause of the injustice. Similarly, the French mother tries to overcome the injustice of the language and cultural divide that separates the mother from the daughter. Both mother and daughter, given their own oppressive situation, the rift between mother and daughter, have the agency (driven by a will to justice and not power) to reclaim their desired projected identity of mother and daughter.

Rosello, goes on to suggest that “performative encounters are not plausible” except in the realm of fiction or unless “discourse is used in innovative ways” (Rosello 18). Similarly, identity studies unlike literary theory, requires in practice a heightened level of attention towards forms of oppression pressed upon minority groups.

At the level of identity politics, this can be seen, in its most pertinent form. For example Fanon writing in Black Skin White Mask recounts his encounter with his white patients, who he, as a psychiatrist would treat. A grateful patient would be unable to spew out the usual racial vibes (exclaiming, to the black doctor, Fanon, that he is indeed ‘white’). Fanon draws a sharp contrast to this expression, with the expression of the white child in the mothers arms, who sees him (Fanon) as the horrid black man, and is afraid. The performative encounter does not allude or symbolize the individual’s “solution to the tensions generated by the colonial situation”, but details the oppressive measures (Rosello 52). The performative encounter is not condemned to be relegated to being an incessant aporia like a hybrid position in
ambiguity. It rather shows the tension's embedded within an agent's position, striving to overcome external stereotypes imposed upon his/her own consciousness which he/she wants to use in order to assert those qualities which he/she deems missing in the judging other. This is a yearning for a particular identity of the self.

The teleology of identity studies is not really to identify where or when a performative encounter takes place. Identity politics is much more active, its role is that of a dialogic affirmative activity based on the will to justice. It is a creation of pressure "points" that must be exhorted upon a violence of ignorance, lived out in everyday existence and not like a condition challenged in the realm of psychoanalysis. These pressure points are not power enforced but based on the need for justice against oppression. The situation of the performative encounter shows how centuries of racial prejudice seep into the level of the minute and the mundane of everyday life causing blockades of misunderstandings and incoherence that are glossed over. The grateful patient of Fanon, continues to be grateful until he retrieves back to join his social setup. The French mother, who tries to learn the daughters language and half Berber daughter, who speaks in her mother's language, after their encounter, leave the site of the encounter, and its feelings and passions, would naturally revert back to maintaining the status quo of their respective locations.

However, the site of the performative encounter becomes the site, where the will to justice is at its best, striving to bridge the gap of discrimination and centuries of historical, political, linguistic, ethnic, social and even religious injustice, pivoted on the working of the will to justice.

In order to emphasize this point once again, the task of identity studies is not to record or even celebrate the performative encounter, these encounters have and continue to take place. Identity studies which may or may not sound or articulate itself, like literary theory (poststructuralism) is, unlike literary theory, embedded in the foundations of a collective identity in temporality. A collective identity of course does not refer to a homogenous identity. For example, if we refer to the word African-American, and take two towering figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and
Malcolm X. We refer to two very distinct men with millions of followers in their own respect, having very distinct ideologies, not to mention two very distinct religious beliefs. And yet in the context of the Civil Rights movement in America, they do represent a common view. Identity is not therefore a trans-fixed criteria, and cannot really be studied diachronically, but is better studied synchronically, in its most contemporary settings.

In order to illustrate the advantages of a synchronic approach over a diachronic one in relation to identity studies, we can refer to the notion of the much cited postcolonial "migrant" identity. The Migrant as a diasporic identity is a diachronic understanding of the Migrant condition, where the Migrant is connected to a lost world. Therefore, Diasporic literature is an identification of a common yearning for the homeland (that is if the etymology of the word is to be given any value). For the person who has migrated to new areas – the migrant – on the other hand, the challenge is about making the present location a homeland, and not really looking back at fossilized good memories of the past, as much of diasporic theory postulates. In other words, identity studies does what poststructural theory does not deem necessary to do. It tries to define and therefore assess its own values and ideals as a community, not from any external philosophical or metaphysical viewpoint, but from its own contemporary point of view. This certainly would include a level of self aggrandizement or mythical creation and the manufacturing of unity of a bettered self to build pressure against oppressive forces which constructs itself in a position that is lesser than the Other. But like the human concept of dignity and respect, discrimination, may not be a quantifiable substance but it is nevertheless a working social postulate with real underpinnings and ramifications. As a non-quantifiable substance such as discrimination can lead to social oppression which can be quantifiable. It is at this particular juncture, from discrimination to oppression that literary theory loses its charm, while identity studies empowers and strengthens agency.

In Assia Djebar’s story, the clash of identities between mother and daughter, comes across with no real intention of difference or discrimination, but prejudices are challenged by the implicit bond of love, or in this particular case, blood bond.
Identity politics as a discipline is bound to constantly face such performative encounters. It is up to the agency of the Selves and the Others, to both establish and seek the challenges found within the performative encounters between identities in both the position of power and the margins.

To illustrate further the concept of the will to justice; within relations between father-son, saint and disciple, teacher-student, which would mostly be reduced to an over simplified version of power relations, is it possible to view these relations in an alternative way. For instance, there can be saint and disciple relationships not embedded in power. In theory of course love itself can be seen as an assertion of power, possession and what not. But this still does not eliminate the idea of revered love or as what we in the Sub-continent refer to as Bhakti (which comes close to meaning 'devotion'). These are in no way imaginary and metaphysical or religious entities, but lived expressions, which leave impressions in the grooming of individual identity. My point here is not make a virtue out of exceptions and possibilities but to give an example of a performative encounter that exposes the subversion of an all encompassing will to power. The will to justice in identity studies, is to illustrate that unlike literary theory, which still has a basis on a will to power, identity politics in literature and where discourse is most innovative/creative, expresses not a will to power but the realization of a will to justice.

The mission that theory came with to make things better for the oppressed by diffusing the effects of power, now has identity studies advancing its mission. Identity studies can be seen as a change incurred in the course of literary studies, a renewed development in the ‘life and times of theory’, that may have been the outcome of a reaction to theory. The task of identity studies has just begun.

Identity studies constantly tackles encounters both at the macro and micro level, between individuals, communities, rules, legislations, dogma, from the sites of defining principles deemed important to itself. It is for this reason that I refer to the trajectory of identity studies as a movement from bottom upwards, or from the location of the individual and his/her particular communal ideas, to the all
encompassing general theorization. In other words, the movement is from the local periphery to the metropolitan global and not the other way round, as seen in literary theory. For any trajectory of ideas, moving from the global to the local, have greater chances of becoming oppressive. Of course the local can also gain hegemonic proportions and control other local's. But this is only when one is stretching the theoretical implications of the trajectory. In identity studies, for instance, cyber feminism or queer theory or even Indian writing in English for that matter, are not in contestation with each other to hold the dominant platform of English studies. But rather, these areas are all striving to hold ground for themselves, to explore and celebrate their own real existence, and not hybrid or imaginary positions. In fact, the performative encounter between Indian writings in English and say British literature in terms of disciplinary boundaries would inevitably emanate a multilayer of a politics of identity based on the agency of a will to justice. For even when literary theory is superimposed on students of English literature, the performative encounter itself becomes a politics of identity, whether or not it is accepted or rejected. At these points of interaction, “one must expect imbalances, frictions, the desire for equality, for union; hegemony will not be able to get rid of the historical layers of hierarchies” as Rosello contends (72). However, it is in the very assertion of these predicaments that one does not claim a will to power, to gain dominances over the other, but in the expression of the inequality and injustice of the relationship, created in the everyday mundane events, a will to justice is claimed.