Chapter V

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To conclude my thesis, I would like to say that this thesis makes an endeavour to highlight the powerful mechanism of the hegemonic societal norm that often manipulates human life. Confronting the binary becomes highly problematic for individuality, since the towering normative structure snatches away individuality from individuals. The normative structure of gender makes room only for those who tries to maintain a conforming kind of existence, while the non-conformists are forced to confront severe state of stigmatization and social exclusion. The taken-for-granted concepts associated with the gender structure that constitutes the hetero-normative binary and the norm of patriarchy are highly valorized and within a particular social structure are conferred the status of being *The Truth*. But this grand narrative of the gender structure or the societal norm could very often be seen to have subverted which tends to question the fixity associated with it. For instance, the binary structure of gender believes that human beings are unambiguously ‘male’ and ‘female’, having ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ desires respectively. But such reductions or fixities in terms of gender identity get subverted by the undeniable presence of a eunuch having an ambiguous body or a gay man whose desire may not conform to the ideal of ‘masculine’ desire as designed by the hetero-normative structure. Nevertheless, could they be disqualified from being human beings? Moreover the common believe against patriarchy is that male oppresses a female. But instances of surrogate patriarchy – female oppressing female could also be encountered very often. Mahesh Dattani has tried to highlight such issues in his plays.
Since my thesis attempts to explore the issue of the tussle between the self and the society, while discussing the intricate issue of performing one's gender identity amidst the binary that demands conformity and tends to curtail individuality, I would like to take note of the theoretical insights put forward by the social thinkers – Talcott Parsons¹ and George Herbert Mead² and Georg Simmel³ before winding up my thesis. These thinkers have provided valuable ideas regarding the issue of the self as a social actor—the intricate relationship that exists between the self and the society.

To begin with Talcott Parsons, we may say that he has provided some noteworthy ideas regarding the crucial relationship of the self that possesses individual likes, dislikes, needs, desires or aspirations and the society that prioritizes conformity to the norm and enforces it on the social subjects through the process of socialization in such a subtle manner that the self or the social “actor”⁴ (as Parsons terms it) seldom realizes the effect of socialization. The self or the “actor” internalizes the norm to such an extent that it ultimately takes the shape of his/her innate nature. Parsons has focused on the process of socialization and the internalization of societal norm as a major concern of his analysis of the social system. Parsons is interested in the ways by which the norm and values of a particular social system are transferred to the “actors” located within that particular social system. He is of the opinion that in a successful socialization process, the norms and values are internalized by the social “actors” to such an extent that they become part of the actor’s “consciences”⁵. Parsons made a very important observation that while pursuing his/her own interest the self or the social “actor” is actually pursuing the interests that are actually sanctioned by the social system:

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The combination of value-orientation patterns which is acquired (by the actor in socialization) must in a very important degree be a function of the fundamental role structure and dominant values of the social system. (Parsons, 1951: 227)

Parsons posits that in the process of socialization, the “actors” are passive recipients of the norms, values and morality of the society. Socialization, according to Parsons is a lifelong process, where the “actor” spontaneously learns to conform to the societal norms and values pertaining to various situations that the “actor” encounters at various points of time in life. Parsons says that a number of social control mechanisms are employed to induce conformity.

Regarding the issue of internalization of societal norms and values by the individual consciousness, Georg Simmel has put forward a very modern notion. He puts forward the conception that social norms and values are not some externally imposed things to which our ‘inner’ self submits. It rather exists both externally and internally:

...explains the dual character of the moral command: that on one hand, it confronts us as an impersonal order to which we simply have to submit, but that on the other, no external power, but only our most private and internal impulses, imposes it upon us. At any rate, here is one of the cases where the individual, within his own consciousness, repeats the relationship that exists between him, as a total personality, and the group. (Simmel in Ritzer:157)

Simmel further points out that the social structures and institutions that constrain human thought and action are created by human beings themselves. Simmel’s observation opens a new vista of thought – the norm or the oppressive social structure is not
something merely imposed from outside to curtail individual freedom, aspirations, wishes and desires. It is also something internally present in us; we internally make arrangements for its imposition upon us.

As a textual illustration of this theoretical insight, we can bring in the case of Bharti in the play *Tara*, which I have analyzed in my earlier chapters. In this play we can see Bharti eager to sacrifice her children, especially her daughter Tara before the altar of the societal norm. She could have defied the norm for the sake of her child’s life but she instead showed her loyalty to the social norm. We may say that in a sense their remains no division between Bharti the individual and the social structure. No inner conflict is shown in Bharti while taking the cruel decision of separating her conjoined twins at the cost of causing harm to both the children and fatal harm to the girl child. Bharti and the social structure thus seem to be the two sides of the same coin. Bharti or the self becomes an extension of the social norm itself. She has internalized the norm to such an extent that her ‘inner’ voice and the outer environment becomes one.

Last but not least I would like to look at George Herbert Mead’s conception of the self and its relationship with the social structure. In his illuminating work *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Mead puts forward a discussion of the self and the society. He is of the opinion that people often try to live up to group expectations, they are more eager to avoid the inefficiencies that results from their failure to do or perform what the group expects. Mead identifies two aspects or phases of the self – the “I” and the “me” (Mead, 1934: 178). Mead says that the “self is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases” (Mead, 1934: 178). According to Mead, the “I” is that aspect of selfhood or individuality which is beyond the scope of social control. The “I”
is the incalculable, unpredictable and creative aspect of the self. It is the “I” that enables us to think and act against the social order; it enables us to bring in social change.

The “me” according to Mead is the conventional, conformist aspect. He says that the degree of conformity may vary from person to person but he/she has or must have substantial “me”. It is through the “me” that the society dominates the individual. According to Mead, the idea of social control is the dominance of the expression of the “I”.

To bring in some textual illustration of Mead’s theoretical ideas, we may refer to Mahesh Dattani’s play *Bravely Fought the Queen*, where we can see the conflict between the “I” – the individual or private aspect of selfhood and the “me” or the social aspect of selfhood that often pressurizes the “I” to conform to the dominant social patterns. People often needs to hide the “I” behind the “me” that pretends to perform in a conforming way. This is the case with most of the characters portrayed in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*, which I have analyzed in my earlier chapters. In the opening scenes of the play, we can see Dolly appearing with a mask on her face with the purpose of perhaps introducing us to the theme of masked identities – pretend to be or perform oneself in a socially acceptable way. The other characters like Nitin (a gay who pretends to be heterosexual, married person), Praful, Jiten are all pretending to be something other than their private self. The image of the bonsai used in this play perhaps symbolizes the distance between the “I” and the “me”. The bonsai has to acquire the shape designed by its creator, no matter what was its original or actual shape. It shows how we have to live or perform ourselves according to the demands of the social structure or how others want us to be – the “I” is overshadowed or
overpowered by the "me". The bonsai and the characters represented in this play, show the predominance of the "me" over the "I".

Returning to Mead’s conception of the self, we can further take into account his opinion that if the "I" is absent, the social actors or individuals living within a particular social system would be reduced to become passive actors dominated by external societal force. But we often hear voices that try to break the shackles of social control. Some individuals often point out the irrational or severe forms of social control that result only in the marginalization of certain individuals or class of people. In the context of my thesis, Mead’s conception of the "I" that tends to transcend societal borders and enables one to think or speak against the rigidity of the social structure seems to be very relevant. This "I" is that aspect of selfhood that enables one to think on an offbeat mode or in other words think differently from the ‘normal’ or ‘common’ trend. According to Mead the "I" reacts against the "me" which is the “organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes.” (Mead, 1934: 175)

In the context of my thesis, Mead’s theory seems to be relevant in the sense that the thinkers or theorists like Foucault, Butler and several others, (whose ideas prepare the theoretical framework of my thesis), the playwright Mahesh Dattani and the film makers (whose plays and film texts respectively that are analyzed in my thesis), all of these individuals are prioritizing the "I" or the private/personal aspect of the self rather than the "me" or the social self. It is the predominance of the "I" that enables them to question the established ‘realities’ of the social world by marching against the ‘normal’ stream of thought.
Despite the rise of innovative ideas in the theoretical domain that has raised its voice against the essential social structure in the hope of creating some space for those who are different from the majority, the binary structure of gender continues to dominate the social world. The belief that man and woman are two exclusive ‘natural’ options of the identity called human being and that man and woman should exhibit specific behavioural patterns sanctioned for these two discrete gender categories predominates human thought. Since the system is not open ended difference has no place in it and one who differs from the majority is banished from the social world. Our adherence to this system indicates the oppressive social structure and our submission to it. In this regard it would be relevant to quote Monique Wittig:

By admitting that there is a ‘natural’ distinction between women and men, we naturalize history, we assume that ‘men’ and ‘women’ have always existed and will always exist. Not only do we naturalize history, but also consequently we naturalise the social phenomena which express our oppression, making change impossible (1992: 10–11).

Undeniably a human being possesses a biological body but this biological body is read only in terms of the socially valid possibilities and the body is conferred a meaningful existence by the socio-cultural milieu in which an individual is located. In order to earn membership of the society in which an individual is born, one needs to imbibe the socio-cultural norm and to tailor oneself according to the demands of the society. In order to maintain a socio-culturally intelligible identity, one tries to imitate the cultural values and behavioural patterns approved by the social norm and while doing so there
seldom remains any space for the existence of individuality. Individuality is often overshadowed by the portraiture of a socially desirable image.

Thus to be oneself perhaps remains a difficult task, since one has to be what others allow it to be. Individuality does not remain confined to internal expression of individuals but rather extends to external factors. Therefore the act of representing oneself does not remain an exclusively personal or individual matter. One leads one's life or projects one's gender identity in his/her own way, but it is always done within the limitations set forth by the societal norm. The power structures as Foucault says is so powerful that it seldom offers any scope for resistance. The disciplinary organization that is often vested with the charge of maintaining order of the societal norm demands uniformity from all its inhabitance. Therefore leading one's life or representing oneself on the social arena becomes a matter of 'reiteration', an act of repetition of the normative behavioural patterns in a personal way (performative theory).

Human life acts as a projector of the conflict between individuality or individual aspirations desires, tests and temperaments and the censorship of societal norm that sets in motion the parameters of a civilized social-culturally intelligible human identity. Therefore, amidst such situation there seldom remains any space for the expression of individuality and the collective image of human identity censored by the dominant ideology gets the upper hand. Within this hegemony structure non-normative entities are often stigmatized and the socio-culturally approved stereotypes are labeled as the yardstick of 'normality'. But the question that tends to problematize the idea of fixity that predominates the social ambience is that the stereotypes could often be subverted
and that the stereotypical facades are often imposed on the "real" faces with an aim to camouflage oneself and thereby assimilate with the surrounding societal ambience.

These facts often tend to challenge the essentialist structure of gender that posits gender as an expression of inner essence. The arbitrary behavioral patterns assigned to discrete gender categories and the differences that very often makes its appearence within the norm pertaining to various social milieu, tends to destabilize the entire systems and attempts to subvert the entire notion of gender as an essential category. The stereotypical roles assigned to discrete gender categories varies from one society to the other and the taken for grantedness associated with the societal stereotype and the norm often gets blasted and thereby weakens the entire consolidated structure of the norm, the concept of normalcy and gender. The dominant ideology that exercises hegemonic power over the denizens inhabiting a particular geographic location having specific socio-cultural milieu could often be challenged by putting forward the variations that are often found to exist within the pattern.

A keen observation or a penetration into the inner domain of individual life situated in a particular social context often tends to expose the hollowness and paradoxes of certain socio-cultural norm and the stereotypical roles that people are compelled to lead at the cost of sacrificing their individual desires and aspirations. In other words the subject or the ("I") fails to be itself and as Lacan says the ("I") enacts itself according to the prescription postulated by others inhabiting that particular socio-cultural milieu.

In my thesis, I have used the theoretical insights of thinkers like Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Freud, Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Simon de Beauvoir and such others in
order to construct the theoretical framework of my thesis and thereby discuss the above mentioned issues in a thought provoking manner. Along with the theoretical framework, I have attempted to read the plays of Mahesh Dattani that works as an illustration of the theoretical inputs. Dattani is a modern Indian playwright who is seen to be trying to highlight offbeat issues and is often found to be a spokesman of the marginalized section of society. Moreover he often tries to dismantle what is regarded to be "the truth", "the real" in a social milieu. In this regard there seems to be a similarity between the ideas of Dattani and that of the theorists like Foucault and Butler. All of them seems to think in a way that is very different from the usual or general mode of thinking. They are not satisfied with the taken for granted truths or realities and as such tries to probe into what lies behind the accepted mask of social truth and reality.

Mahesh Dattani is the only Indian playwright who writes in English. There are other playwrights whose plays are available in English but they are basically written in vernacular languages and are later translated into English. Mahesh Dattani is the only playwright who is found to be endeavouring to represents Indian Sensibility in an alien language that is English. But a perusal of his work shows that the English language that he issues vehemently carries with it the flavour of the Indian Social life and to say in his own words, it is an "Indianization of English Language".

It could perhaps be seen as a tendency of the majority of work of art to represent the socio-cultural landscape of the society in which it is entrenched. The works of Mahesh Dattani, a contemporary Indian English playwright is perhaps not an exception in this regard. His plays are mostly rooted in the Indian socio-cultural milieu, and they depict the sensibility of Indian life. But Mahesh Dattani slightly deviates from the ordinary
tract of depicting cultural values in the sense that he tries to bring to the centre stage, those issues and beings that are often swept under the carpet on the pretext that they are not part of the 'normally' acceptable mainstream culture.

The social issues that Dattani discusses are of an offbeat nature but they need to be highlighted for the sake of redressing the marginalized beings and social abuses. He makes an attempt to penetrate into the undiscovered areas of the socio-cultural milieu and thereby try to excavate 'unseen' and 'unheard' 'realities' that are very much there but apparently not visible. Dattani’s works are found to be discussing fringe issues like those of gays, eunuchs and are also raising some sensitive questions regarding the concepts of the discrete gender categories that constitute the binary. His plays also highlight the predicaments of individuals while confronting the mighty social structure. Individual desires, hopes, aspirations get shattered as they strike the power structure of the society. Gender structure is a vital organ of the social system and it operates on the basis of the binary structure that exercises hegemonic control over the individual subjects. Violation of the terms and conditions provided by the gender structure may lead to severe consequences that might even take the toll of one’s life. Thus in the world of gender, transcending the binary is never allowed and if done is sure to be followed by punitive consequences.

In the world of gender and the society at large, the stereotypes are immensely valued and individuals inhabiting a certain socio-cultural matrix are expected to act out or perform the stereotypical role traditionally assigned to them. The socially approved stereotypes are infused or inculcated in the minds of individuals through the process of socialization which operates through family, institutions and the pressure from society.
Gender stereotypes help to perpetuate gender norm and they often become so ingrained that the observer cannot realize the extent to which they are socially constructed. Conformity to the gender norms thus acts as a form of social control to ensure that the rules are obeyed.

Internalization of gender norm has been consolidated in such a manner that an individual can actively or passively enforce the rules on the non-conforming other and even on himself or herself. Disapproval from society frightens an individual and consequently he/she becomes afraid of breaking the stereotypes and thereby transgresses the norm. Right from the time of birth the child is brought up in a gendered way and with the passes of time it tends to accept the social stereotypes as ‘reality’ and lives with those beliefs and customs all throughout his life.

There are two types of stereotypes that are seen to be actively operating on the socio-cultural plane—positively valued stereotypes and negatively valued stereotypes. The discrete gender categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are for instance positively valued stereotypes. Being placed in any one of these categories entails that an individual is performing the acts, signifiers allotted to that role since a long time. On the other hand if one is placed in a socially unacceptable category for instance the hijras, one is engaged in a performance which is viewed in a pejorative sense in the society. Thus the categories called man and woman are positively valued stereotypes while the category called hijra is a negatively valued stereotype in the context of a bi-gendered heteronormative society.
These stereotypes that are valorized by the society could be exposed to be some socially constructed phenomenon that could be blasted or subverted and this very notion questions the authenticity or fixity of the structures that entertain such stereotypes. Along with the task of revealing social abuses, Dattani’s plays are accomplishing another task of subverting or puncturing the existing stereotypes that are often thought to be fixed ideologies. In the play *Dance Like a Man*, the playwright is subverting the stereotypical notion of patriarchy which views only woman at the receiving end of the oppressive power structure of the patriarchal set-up. In this play, a man Jairaj is being oppressed by Amritlal the male patriarch. It is often assumed that in the patriarchal society only a woman is dominated by man. But the play subverts this notion as well, and exposes that Amritlal, a man, tries to dominate another man, his son Jairaj. Jairaj cannot pursue his heart’s desire. The ‘fact’ of his being a male does not seem to empower him to participate in any activity that he likes. Jairaj is seen here as the victim of a social system of which Amritlal is the emissary, who constantly keeps on telling him what will be acceptable as manliness and what will not.

In the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*, the playwright is demonstrating surrogate patriarchy, where a female is acting as a patriarch and is dominating another woman. Baa the mother-in-law of Dolly, keeps on instigating her son Jiten to beat his wife Dolly even when Dolly was pregnant. Dolly had to give birth to a spastic child as a consequence of this violence indirectly inflicted upon her by her mother-in-law. Dolly’s husband Jiten who fails to bear the harsh reality of his daughter’s physical disability, admits the guilt of his mother who kept on asking him to beat his pregnant wife.
Jiten: “I didn’t mean to ...you know I didn’t. It was Baa! Blame her but not me! She is my daughter” (Crying) Get her back!” (Dattani, 2005:312).

Jiten presents himself to be a strong, dominating, stereotypical male figure but at the end he is exposed to be an escapist, weakling who is unable to bear harsh reality—the fact that his daughter is a spastic child. It is his wife Dolly who appears to be a strong character who in spite all the odds of life manages to maintain a tranquil existence. “Bravely fought the manly queen” a reference to the Queen of Jhansi in this play is perhaps a compliment to Dolly’s bravery in conquering life’s struggle. The playwright is again playing with the concept of the stereotypical notion of man or masculinity which signifies that man are both mentally and emotionally strong whereas females lack this quality. But the situation of Dolly and Jiten tends to puncture this stereotypical notion. These two plays Dance Like a Man, and Bravely Fought the Queen, questions and attempts to deconstruct the categories of man, masculinity and patriarch. The play projects weak man, strong woman, female patriarch, oppressed man.

In the play Tara, also we can see that one female is oppressing the other female. In this play Bharati the mother of the Siamese twins Chandan and Tara, takes a biased decision that while separating her children, the leg that ‘naturally’ belongs to the body of her daughter Tara should be given to her son Chandan. The surgeon makes it clear that there is greater possibility that the leg might become useless if it is detached from the body of the girl child and reinstalled in the body of the male child. But in spite of the warning of the doctor Bharati insists on giving the leg to her son and consequently both the children lose the leg and become crippled. The father of Tara and Chandan, Mr.
Patel tells his daughter Tara that the decision of detaching the leg from her body was taken by her mother Bharati.

Patel: "...Your grandfather and your mother had a private meeting with Dr Thakkar. I wasn’t asked to come. That same evening, your mother told me of her decision. ---I could not believe what she told me---that they would risk giving both legs to the boy. The doctor had agreed I was told. Chaudan had two legs for---for two days. It didn’t take them very long to realize what a grave mistake they had made. They leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have—might have---been Tara.” (Dattani, 2005:378)

Bharati is also seen here to be a part of the patriarchal set up that always prioritizes a male child. She even did not hesitate to jeopardize her daughter’s life for the sake of placing her male child on a better plane. The leg that could have provided Tara an wonderful life was unethically snatched away from her by her mother. It is a woman turning a blind eye to the welfare of her daughter.

Apart from breaking the stereotypes, Dattani’s characters are engaged in a quest for identity within the little world in which they are situated. A constant struggle can be noticed in his play between the individuals and the unconquerable social structure. Dattani’s characters are constantly struggling for their identity within the familial or social context. Dattani himself clarifies that his characters are not worried about sublime thoughts. They are instead common people trying to survive in a suffocating and oppressive society that had always tried to put an end to their dreams of personal emancipation.
Dattani: “I am not interested in characters asking existential questions in a limbo. My characters exist in a definite space and time, in a social context that’s what stimulates me” (Chaudhuri 2005: 77).

Dattani’s protagonists are constantly searching for their space within the oppressive power structure. His plays are exploring two important aspects of identity—the power structure of the society and the often repressed aspects of the self. The hidden cravings and desires of a self that perhaps constitutes one aspect of his identity and the reshaping and refashioning of a self to fit into the socially acceptable identity is one of the major concerns of Dattani. The tussle between the ‘true’ self and the socially approved identity is perhaps best portrayed in plays like *Muggy Night*. This play portrays the problematic identity of a gay man who even visits a psychiatrist to rid himself of depression, until he said that “I would never be happy as a gay man. It is impossible to change society he said, but it may be possible for you to reorient yourself...” (Dattani, 2005: 69).

Being situated within the oppressive social structure, the growth of the self gets stunted, as is signified by the image of the bonsai in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*. A grotesque looking tree, acquires whatever shape its creator gives and turns into a dwarf, stunted in every aspect, yet surviving and even bearing fruit. Its roots are being constantly trimmed. Most of the characters in this play are compelled to assume identities that are alien to their nature. Both the characters and the bonsai are playing roles. Nitin a gay is hiding behind the acceptable identity of a married heterosexual. The ‘weak’ Jiten is hiding behind the garb of a dominating male figure. Dolly’s longing for love takes the form of Kanhaiya a figment of her imagination. In the play *Tara*,

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Chandan leads a life of despair after losing the other half of his selfhood, his sister Tara with whom he shared the same womb and was born as a unified self.

And in the play Seven Steps around the Fire we can see that the fulfillment of individual taste is perhaps impossible. Subbu’s act of marrying the beautiful hijra took the toll of his and his bride’s life. They are killed for the cause of violating the norms of discrete gender categories. One who cannot fit into the categories is deprived of the right to be identified as a ‘human being’. Parenthood, marital bliss are meant only for ‘normal’ human beings and not for those who are other than man and woman.

Discrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished”. (Butler 1998: 522).

Another important point to note here is that in most of his plays, Dattani highlights the shared spaces between women and some kinds of men—gays, eunuchs and ‘womanly’ man. All of them are under the hegemonic patriarchal structure that forces them to conform and live lives that are alien to their nature. ‘Womanly’ man refers to the type of man that Jairaj signifies. Jairaj is being constantly forced by his father to become a “manly” man. Dance Like A Man, Seven Steps Around the Fire and Tara, that highlight how all is caught up in the web of the hegemonic structures of gender. Every one shares the same fate and has to perform within the limits of socially intelligible possibilities of gender. One cannot go beyond the scope of ‘normal’ comprehension. Mahesh Dattani’s plays are situated mostly in the ‘Indian’ socio-cultural milieu and the task of reading gender issues entrenched in ‘Indian’ cultural matrix with the help of Western theoretical
tools seems to be difficult. But as I have stated earlier, both the theoretical inputs and
drama and film texts that I have analyzed, tends to offer a critique of the hegemonic
normative structures and thereby asks for individual space. This common factor tends to
bridge the gap between Western theory and the texts rooted in Indian socio-cultural
milieu.

'Culture' is a loaded concept and it encompasses a wide range of human affairs like
customs, beliefs, ideas, language, taboos, dress codes, institutions, rituals, ceremonies,
food habit and other related components. A specific kind of culture reigns in every
human society and it exerts immense influence on an individual entrenched in that
particular culture. It seems to be a mandatory task for all cultural systems to proffer
certain norms and every individual is expected to conform to the existing social norm.
An act of non-conformity on the part of an individual often results in an individual’s
banishment from the 'mainstream' society. He or she will be regarded to be a 'misfit'
and will be pushed back to the periphery.

The socio-cultural milieu, where one grows, make one perform the idea of a
stereotyped 'man' ('masculine' in nature) or a 'woman' ('feminine' in nature), since a
contrasting way of performing oneself may bring in unpleasant consequences. In this
context, I have used the term 'stereotype' to signify an image or idea of a particular type
of person or thing that has become fixed and even legitimate through being widely held.
It is often found that ambiguous bodies or beings are seldom given a place in the
society. A meaningful social existence demands one to perform one's life or body in a
socially approved way. Bodies are made to acquire desired shape and function in a
desired way. Since difference is often labelled as 'abnormality', surgery is often imposed on bodies in order to 'restore' 'normalcy'.

According to Butler, as we have discussed earlier, gender is a correctly coordinated set of acts and gestures that demands the subject to perform within socially defined parameters of normal identification. Thus to be masculine or feminine does not necessarily mean to give expression to some naturally developed interior truth. It rather means to perform or represent oneself in a socially expected way that gives the impression that one's interior life is organised around the acceptable roles of gendered being. The inner essence, even if there is any, does not count. What counts is only the correct performance of the dominant idea of gender.

Such acts, gestures, enactments generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the 'integrity' of the subject (Butler 1990:136).

According to Butler, gender is a regulated system of performances which is built upon the correct repetition of socially sanctioned behaviours. Yet each of us, in some small or trivial way, sometimes fails to repeat the socially approved behavioural patterns perfectly. This failure of correct repetition indicates the artificiality of the gender
system. It also shows that there is inevitably some accidental or unplanned resistance to the norms of gender. Although all are subject to the norm, violation or subversion of the norm often raises its head.

Before concluding my thesis, an important observation needs to be stated regarding the theoretical stance of Judith Butler whose ideas regarding gender identity has helped me to a great extent in constructing the theoretical framework of my thesis as well as making the textual analysis of the plays and other cultural texts. As I have discussed in chapter IV Butler, in the theoretical works has extensively talked about the problems embedded in the social construction of gender identity, and the problem of categorizing someone as either ‘man’ or ‘woman’ and the subsequent stigmatization of those who fail to fit into the socially approved categories for instance a hermaphrodite who cannot be categorized either as a man or a woman—it's both and none.

Butler uses the concept of Drag as a means to parody the notion of essential ‘reality’ or inner essence and brings in the notion of imitating the existing idea of gender roles. By the act of imitating the dress code, make up and modes of behaviour an individual can earn membership of one of the gender categories. The Indian Hijra serves the purpose of being a good example of drag—man performing as woman and this very act of performing in a strange manner alienates them from the world of man and woman. But the important point to note here is that Butler has not incorporated the Indian hijras in her works that highlights the hermaphroditical identity, the concept of ‘drag’ or cross-dressing and the marginalization of those who does not fit into the categories of so-called normal man and woman. Although the Hijra identity seems to hold a very
relevant position in the theoretical ideas of Butler, yet in her theoretical domain, there is no mention of the Indian hijra. This seems to be a gap in the theoretical works of Butler and a hypothesis could be surmised that the western domain has very little space for oriental subjects.

In order to conclude my thesis I would like to say that the theoretical and textual analysis undertaken in the chapters of my thesis attempts to show that gender is an act of performing oneself according to societal directives. Since this act to performing oneself according to the normative ideas, is often given the name of naturalness or normality, those who fails to live according to the normative ideas of gender are often compelled to face stigmatization and marginalization. If we think of gender as a performance then the issue of gender as real essence will lose weight and thereby there will perhaps be space for every individual. We may here refer to Judith Butler’s observation:

Genders, then, can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent. And yet, one is compelled to live in a world in which genders constitute univocal signifiers, in which gender is stabilized, polarized, rendered discrete and intractable. In effect, gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control. Performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all. That this reassurance is so easily displaced by anxiety, that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism. (1988:528)
End Notes

1. Talcott Parsons - Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) is regarded to be the Grand Old Man of World Sociology. Talcott Parsons did the great deal of theoretical works on structural functionalism. His famous theoretical works are “AGIL” system, “Action Frame of Reference” and “Social System”.

2. George Herbert Mead

3. Georg Simmel – Georg Simmel (1885-1918) is best known as a microsociologist who played an important role in the development of small-group research, symbolic interactionism and exchange theory. His theoretical insight reflects his notion that the sociologists should study primarily forms and types of social interaction.

Work Cited


