

CONSTRUCTION OF THE 'OTHER': A POLITICS OF SEXUALITY, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FREUD AND IRIGARAY

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Abstract:

Gender discrimination and the politics of gender identity has always been an extremely interesting field for theorists and researchers. Consequently, we have lots of critical writings on the issue of male supremacy and female subjugation. But with much relevance thinkers tend to delve deep to scrutinise the reason behind this and elaborates the process through which women are reduced to the level of an inferior being, a sexual 'other'. Gradually, it is revealed that the entire process engages a complex inter disciplinary study ranging from physiology to psychology. Social and cultural factors are equally instrumental in the process of such politically motivated identity formation. The famous psycho analyst, Sigmund Freud in his writings has shown how a girl child experiences certain psychological complexity due to her physiological difference with a boy child. In his analysis biological determinism is mingled with social and psychological constructivism. Later researchers observe such theorisation to be rather biased in nature. Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin and other feminist critics have fervently gone against this view. Irigaray, in particular, speaks of subverting that gender hierarchy by creating an other subject position, parallel to that of male identity and not in comparison to that.

Key words: politics, discourse, biological difference, other, subject formation.

The social and political history across the world, through a sort of symbiotic relation with feminist activism, has addressed different zones marked by the hierarchical nature of gender politics. An attempt to decodify this politics calls for a mutual interaction between biological determinism and sociological constructivism; because the very concept implied in it is at the same time biological and sociological in nature. The idea assumes a further problematised orientation when the theorists like Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Gayle Rubin shed light on the apparently irresolvable dichotomy between sex and gender. Gradually it becomes clear that they are not synonymous, but the products of identity politics. The terms 'man-woman', 'male-female', 'masculinity-femininity' find their distinct positions in the space provided by discursive analysis. In due course, the question of being and becoming takes the upper hand which brings in the idea of 'Other' in the discussion of sexual politics.

Sigmund Freud in the essay *Femininity* tends to focus that socio-psychologically constructed process through which a girl child becomes woman. Basically he is not interested in the very being of a woman but rather, Freud through psycho-analysis inquires the process of her development in becoming a woman. Here he is not driven by biological determinism specified by anatomical science, chromosomal differences or physiological appearances. He marks the journey of a child starting from a 'bisexual disposition' through complex psychological orientation to its attaining of 'femininity'. By the term 'bisexuality' Freud means that, initially, certain features of male sexual apparatus are present in female body and vice-versa and it is only a complex psychic trend that remains instrumental in constituting masculinity or femininity. Freud further problematises the issue by showing that like the initial bisexual nature; both the male and the female share some common traits that create the 'riddle' to specify 'femininity'. Citing the process of the union between 'active' sperm and 'passive' ovum Freud says that though this basic behaviour of sexual organism may act as model for male activity and female passivity in general, it is not universal. A mother takes active role in rearing up the children while the father remains somewhat inactive. Accordingly, masochism which is supposed to be a feminine trait, is also exhibited by men.

To solve this riddle Freud scrutinises the 'early phases of libidinal development'. A child from his boyhood to manhood maintains the same practice in relation to both his erotogenic zone and love object, while the girl child has to renounce both these in favour of new experiences. For the former penis remains the object to derive sexual pleasure throughout and his mother remains his love object from pre Oedipus to Oedipus stage, the girl's initial clitoral pleasure makes way for vaginal pleasure and she turns away from her mother, her first love object to her father. Her Freud goes on complicating the idea when he marks this shift by saying it a shift from 'masculine phase to feminine one' for the girl. This change in her psychological response to herself is practically the beginning of the process of her becoming woman. Freud brings into context the idea of 'penis-envy' which a girl feels with the discovery of the anatomical distinction between the sexes. Her resentment against her mother increases with it and she holds her mother responsible for this lacking and wishes 'to have something like it too'. Through psychoanalysis Freud says that, this consciousness regarding the 'castration complex' may result into three possible developments – sexual inhibition or to neurosis, a sense of masculinity complex or finally to femininity. With this moving away from her mother, the girl moves to her father with the desire for penis. Later, this wish for a penis is replaced by her desire for a baby. This zone of her psyche is marked by Freud as 'feminine situation'. Freud justifies his argument when he says that a boy child is more welcome to her, because he brings 'the longed-for penis with him'.

Freudian psycho-analysis and his inquiry into the process of becoming woman may primarily focus his locus standi on femininity, but actually he tends to establish that women suffer a sense of insecurity, a sort of inferiority complex in the absence of penis. He marks a dangerous psychological alienation for women as a result of sexual difference between man and woman. In his analysis it is the male who are constant, the standard maker, while the women are looked upon in comparison to them, as an inferior class because of their supposed anatomical inadequacy. Consequently, in his psycho-analysis women occupy a secondary position, relegated

to the strata of 'Other' which has been severely critiqued by the later thinkers. When Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal work *The Second Sex* remarks that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' she actually intends to interrogate this androcentric justification. At the same time Beauvoir also addresses those sociological and psychological processes which are responsible for relegating women to the strata of being 'other' in the social hierarchy. In his discussion Freud seems to be preoccupied with the sexual difference between male and female only. Other forms of sexual identities which are emphatically dealt with by Foucault and Annamarie Jagose, remain often unnoticed by him. Moreover Freud himself appears to be biased in his attitude while dealing with the issues of sexual differences. For example, when he says that in the Oedipus situation the moving away of the girl from both her erotogenic zone and her love object is actually her journey from masculine phase to feminine phase, uncontroversially he invites critical question. Why should the previous phase be called 'masculine' in the life of a girl? Such critical interrogations remain conspicuously absent in Freud's postulation.

This idea of female as the 'Other', not essentially a part of the centre, has been critically considered by Luce Irigaray in her seminal essay *The Question of the other*. She demolishes the concept of singular subjectivity and speaks in favour of multi subject position, with no comparison between them. Historically, there has been only one subject, 'masculine' and all other beings were merely imperfect imitation of that singular subject. At best female were the 'second sex' in the social hierarchy. Simone de Beauvoir's refusal to concede women as the 'second' sex was a great blow to that century old conception. But Irigaray goes even one step further to say that, Beauvoir's postulation for women to emulate the male is a type of 'regression'. Because, in doing that she is actually posing a comparison with that already present, firmly established subject hood. Unknowingly, she implies a negation of a distinct other, another subject.

Here Irigaray problematises the concept of 'other'. Her search for another is emancipated from the comparison with the already present singular subject, the male. Rather, it is another subject, breaking the horizontal social hierarchy. In the social history even with a more sympathetic approach people speak of the existence of the other without specifying the entity of that 'other'. Consequently this 'other' tends to be another self of that subject, not a true 'Other', always caught in the prison house of comparison with the 'I'. Irigaray's critical survey also includes a criticism of Freud for his theory of 'castration complex' or 'penis envy'. She severely critiques his androcentric theorisation where he looks upon woman in relation to man, in term of man. She further says that even when people speak of 'man' as the primary subject, they confront a false reality; because, this 'man' himself is only a copy of an abstract image of an ideal 'man' in the Platonic sense. The attempt, therefore, to emulate him, to occupy a position like him in the social hierarchy is a futile attempt.

Irigaray forms a new discourse which speaks to get rid of the prevalent model of 'one and many'. Rather, there should be a model of two, a paradigm of the two, completely different from each other, with no sense comparison. Having postulated her idea of the 'Other' (another subject position) Irigaray formulates the ways of becoming Another Subject. She says that at the very beginning one must recognise the duality of her genealogy, which she was born of man and a

woman, accepting the active existence of both the parents. At the same time, like the formation of another subject position Irigaray speaks of creating another world, a feminine one, absolutely distinct. In order to do that they must liberate themselves from the sexualised characteristics of language this is the primary way to establish one's distinct position. At every level of social understanding they require special right. The experience of life is different for man and woman. A man experiences homogeneity in the course of his life from boyhood to old age, but a woman has to undergo multifarious experiences – puberty, loss of virginity, maternity, menopause. Therefore, there must be a scope for respecting and valorising women in terms of choice.

The question of the 'other' with which Irigaray deals is essentially a new approach in feminist movement. This 'other' is not the marginalised other, an other with distinct identity, not less or more than the established one. Here she speaks in favour of abolishing the horizontal social hierarchy for giving recognition to all forms of others without any authoritarian approach. Irigaray wipes out all sorts of sexual differences that provides the male with singular position and holds all other forms as marginalised other. Irigaray's formulation of this new ontology in term of gender relation and gender politics resolves all apparently irresolvable disputes in sexual differences and makes the beginning of another feminist discourse.

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