

The Social Construction of Gender: An exploration of Judith Butler's Ideas

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Abstract - Judith Butler is one of the most important and influential writers of this feminism stream. She has forechecked in every dimension of this movement. She has revolutionized this movement from a new perspective. She is the first one to relate gender with power and social discourses. She perceives gender from as a construction, but its relationship with sex and sexuality is also in question. She has given different thoughts about sex, gender and sexuality in her works. This research paper explores the ideas of Judith Butler, her philosophical landscape, her gender theory, the Impact of Performativity theory on Social Constructs and her approach to deconstruct gender norms. This paper also includes the criticism made by various writer on butler's theories and area for future research on this perspective.

Key Words: feminism, revolutionized, social discourses, performativity, social constructs

1. Exploring Judith Butler's Philosophical Landscape

Judith Butler is a famous influential feminist pioneer. On Feb 1956, this post-structuralist philosopher was born in Cleveland, Ohio, USA. Her full name is Judith Pamela Butler. She was influenced by many thinkers such as: Karl Marx, Foucault, Austin, Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, Freud, Wilhelm Hegel, Beauvoir and Pointy. She has deep impact on phenomenology and existentialism movement her concepts of the materialisation of body have been deeply influenced by phenomenological movement. She has written numerous books which has been proved as milestones in feminist movement. Her first book, *Subjects of Desires and Hegelian reflections* was based on the phenomenology of Hegel. It was basically a critique of Hegel objective idealism which gives no place for subjective perspective. The book that made her the most influential figure in third wave feminism was *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, which was published in 1990. Another important book of her come in 1993 titled as *Bodies That Matter: on the discursive limits of sex*. Other important books of her are *the psychic life of power: theories of subjection* 1997, *Excitable Speech: a politics of the performative* 1997, *Antigone is claim kindship between life and death* 2000. She took forward her performativity theory in her book *Undoing Gender* that was published in 2004. Here she draws attention to the umbrella term such as transgender and whereas Incapsula's the other terms. She gives her famous queer theory in this book. After that she wrote *Precarious life: the power of mourning and violence* 2004, *Giving an account oneself* 2005, *Frames of war: when is life Grievable?* 2009, *parting ways Jewishness*

and the critique of Zionism dispossession: the performative in the political 2013, *Sense of the subject* 2015. She is the forefront member of the gay and lesbian movement. Judith Butler has given different thoughts about sex, gender and sexuality in her works. *Gender trouble* this book was published in 1990, that raised contradictions to the prevalent social structure. Gender identity was ignored in these social discourses. She posed radical perspective about gender and sex that, in same way, revolutionised the feminist movement. She makes her points even more clear and distinct in a book "*Bodies that matter*" as comparison to *Gender Trouble*. She explained gender performativity theory in detail and how it has been related to the basic notions of patriarchal structure. In "*Undoing gender*" book, Judith Butler elaborates the concepts that she has introduced in gender trouble such as gender and queer theory.

1.1 Key Concepts in Butler's Gender Theory

Butler redefined gender concept in her philosophy. She deconstructs Beauvoir's famous aphorism that female becomes woman. It shows that woman is a becoming or a process. This process is everlasting without any point to realize its nature because it has no nature. It is a construction that is meant to reconstruct and re-constitute time to time. Gender is neither natural nor sex, but neither is sex both are made up with structures. She rejects any ontological identity behind body. Butler defines gender as an act. An act of doing something. Gender is a process of performing certain repeatedly acts, these acts are determined by social regimes. Social norms expect some acts from certain categories those categories are binary. These binary categories have given certain attributes. These attributes command those acts that are being judged with context and categories "one has to do some acts to remain in the heterosexual matrix." Butler contends gender as unnatural, but she raises the question on other "given and pre-supposed notion too. She denies metaphysical or authentic identities.

Gender is a performance of inevitable acts that cannot exclude any specific individual choice which is only apparent in gender. Gender is a copy of authentic discourse. This imitation is not the imitation of something real but of something ideal which exists nowhere. Butler calls this process as 'parody'. Gender is a parody, but parody must be related with something real. Gender's parody has no real arche rather it is copy of copies. She uses 'drag' word to elucidate it more clearly. Drag exposes the instability of gender binary categories. Drag is both at the same time and changes. Gender traits within his or her will. Gender is act, but choice is determined.

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proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed.

Gender is a verb in a sense that it keeps changing and it is re-defined overtime. Noun is a deed object which shows stagnancy, but verb is an activity. Gender is an activity of doing something perpetually. This 'doing' has no 'doer' behind. Butler rejects the existence of any subject behind act because subject shows choice and individual has no agency of choice. Language is one of the factors that determines the choice. Language is power in which gender is fabricated. Language is binary in nature and constitute categories. Language binds everything within specific matrix. Language has made a heterosexual matrix. Sex and gender are placed within this specific matrix. Sex has categories such as male and female. Gender has categories such as man and woman. Every individual is placed within these frame works. Butler calls this as identity roles. These identity roles are 'compulsory compelled' on an individual. Gender functions in this way to categorize everyone in single umbrella.

1.2 The Impact of Performativity on Social Constructs

Butler describes gender performativity theory in her book 'Gender Trouble'. Gender is described as performativity in one's own gender theory. Performativity is the sum total of acts which are emerged from pre-determined notions, but the performer is defined by those performance. The performer is not even aware that he is performing something. Butler espouses the linguistic theory to establish her theory. Further she demonstrates the relation between gender and sex as closely associated with performative acts. She deconstructs those discourses in which gender gets formed and constituted. Gender is performed, in many ways and those ways are analysed in deeply in her book. Since the primitive age, body is being defined on the basis of gender. She doesn't accept any existence beyond sociological structure. Nothing such as a body pre-exists in this cultural discourse. Everything is imposed even before the body comes to existence. She denies every natural foetus concerning body. As Butler explains "gender is not something one is it is something one does."

Butler expresses that no one can isolate from the sociological discourse where the performances are being performed. The determination is inevitable when the rituals and norms are different that are imposed on human beings. Society, context and economy are differently implied in the construction of gender. Butler denies authority beyond language. She rejects Descartes; dualism. Descartes made a distinction between body and soul. Butler refutes this distinction by asserting that body is disciplined under various discourse. These discourses are imposed not just by external forces rather the sociological practices compel one to perform these practices. When everybody is repeatedly endeavoring towards same norms then one cannot feel those performative acts. Butler stresses that when one is defined as girl or boy then it is not mere constative statement rather an act of doing. That doctor or nurse professes something which has real effect. Sex is imposed on that foetus and gender is constructed from that every single act of this is done witting heterosexual matrix. Discourses form and constitutes even

when the body didn't come to existence. Butler rejects any independent subject behind this structure masculinity and femininity are constructed as distributes in same way. Butler makes a point that claiming a foetus in womb as girl, is to define it within the category of 'Girling'. The 'Girling' is not something related to body. It is an abstract power that will control the foetus after coming into existence. It is process that will determine the way of living. That child has to live within this point of view and adapt his or her ways as this process suggests this process is far away from anything natural. It is construction which is being installed.

1.3 Deconstructing Gender Norms: Butler's Revolutionary Approach

Butler redefined gender concept in her philosophy. She deconstructs Beauvoir's famous aphorism that female becomes woman. It shows that woman is a becoming or a process. This process is everlasting without any point to realize its nature because it has no nature. It is a construction that is meant to reconstruct and re-constitute time to time. Gender is neither natural nor sex, but neither is sex both are made up with structures. She rejects any ontological identity behind body. Butler defines gender as an act. An act of doing something. Gender is a process of performing certain repeatedly acts, these acts are determined by social regimes. Social norms expect some acts from certain categories those categories are binary. These binary categories have given certain attributes. These attributes command those acts that are being judged with context and categories "one has to do some acts to remain in the heterosexual matrix." Butler contends gender as unnatural, but she raises the question on other "given and pre-supposed notion too. She denies metaphysical or authentic identities. Butler summaries it as "gender is not what we are rather what we do" in her words "gender is not a noun (but it) proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed

Butler draws influence from Derrida's theory of 'citationality'. She articulates that gender categories are forcefully 'cited' on body. In Gender Trouble she discussed those strategy of parody which troubles gender here. She touches the 'Citational theory' which is forced upon body and reduces it to normalcy. She demonstrates 'drag' theory to explain the failure of all gender categories and how Queer trouble happens to? To understand this the discussion on queer theory is mandatory. Queer theory refutes normative categories, based on the pre-existing assumptions. Queer is an umbrella term which incapsulates many minor terms underneath. Queer theory stresses that it is pointless to establish any category beneath body structures. In that theory rejects notions which are considered as the 'natural' and 'given'. Queer theory transcends the binary distinction and every other identity such as gay, lesbian, woman or man. Queer focuses upon the individual which is beyond any objectification of level or stereotypes

2. Butler's Influence on Feminist Thought

Judith Butler is a prominent feminist writer. Her famous book Gender Trouble was published in 1990. This book deals with the most core concepts of feminism and redefined them in a new dimension. She analysed the concepts of Simone de

Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Lucy Irarary, Derrida and Foucault. She points out the objectification in the Freud's interpretation of dreams and his psychoanalytical method. Freud and other predecessor feminist writers have made the mistake when they make two categories, i.e., man and woman. They have put all woman under one umbrella of woman concept. Hence, every attribute identifies to whole woman category, but this is not the case in reality. She asserts that feminism has been restricted under these mini-objectives, but it has to pursue many other subtle aims. They have denied the existence of isolated body and body is determined through human efforts. Parallely, they avow that gender is constructed by patriarchal structure which itself is grounded upon the body identity theories. Gender is not just social construct rather a performativity. She rejects any kind of essentialism and stresses that the activities we do in mundane life are defining what we are. Hence, gender is not what we are rather what we do. Sex, gender and sexuality have the same source of emergence. That emergence point is heterosexual matrix. When the repeated acts are done habitually within this matrix then they decide what we do and what we will do. Precisely, gender is sum total of repeated acts. Butler questions the category of woman as a whole. If gender is an inscription over body, then where is the question of man and woman? She deconstructs the genealogy of woman where it is demonstrated that woman is a process of resignifications and recontextualizations. She became other between man and transgender. She is trivial category in feminism which is defined within enclosed patterns. Transgenders are marginalized, but woman are defined within this rigid framework. Even transgenders are willing to pay for their conversion into man. Male superiority is evident to illustrate that from whom they are superior and who has to remain oppressed? Butler wrote regarding women masculinity that:

“The woman who wishes for masculinity is homosexual only in terms of sustaining a masculine identification, but not in terms of a sexual orientation or desire.”

Gender is discussed through feminist perspective but now the gender will be traced through feminism types. Judith Lorber distinguishes between three broad kinds of feminist discourses: gender reform feminisms, gender resistant feminisms, and gender revolution feminisms. Gender resistant feminisms focus on specific behaviours and group dynamics through which women are kept in a subordination position, even in subcultures which claim to support gender equality. Gender revolution feminisms seek to disrupt the social order through deconstructing its concepts and categories and analysing the cultural reproduction of inequalities.

3. Critical Responses to Judith Butler's Theories

This part represents the critical encounters of Judith Butler's theories by other scholars. In 'Butler's Phenomenological/Existentialism Diana Coole places Butler's work in relation to an ostensible break between the phenomenological/existentialist and post-structuralist/constructivist schools of thought. Coole suggests that Butler's own thinking, particularly in the field of gender, is mistaken particularly in *Trouble* (1990), (2nd edn. 1999), in a very strict antihumanism context. In addition, Coole is trying to demonstrate that much of Butler's more recent

history. It is clear that the work owes its existence to those approaches. This matters, Coole argues, because Butler's later thought, and indeed her political interventions, thus risk eclecticism and incoherence in relation to the experiential issues of corporeality, materiality, agency, intersubjectivity, politics, and society. Coole's critical tour de force resituates Butler's *Gender Trouble* by connecting her most recent works of philosophy with the earliest, and these are much more politically explicit.

Linda M.G. Zerilli distances Butler in 'Feminists Know Not What They Do', from the epistemological tradition in Western philosophy. Linda Zerilli depicts this tradition as having a 'craving for generality'; it assumes that knowledge must be universal if it is to survive an encounter with philosophical scepticism. Zerilli refers to this as the trouble that Butler had in women's feminism when he invoked his supposedly sceptical questions about categories of Women, or at least conceded them. Zerilli's advocating for a free and democratic feminism that challenges feminists to leave the false security behind. of epistemology, and venture out into the world of action – where the very There is a much more effective way of dealing with insecurity of contingency.

Butler had, of course, an impact on feminist philosophy and philosophizing that was substantive but also controversial in many ways. Lisa Jane Disch takes a look at one relatively overlooked aspect of the debate in "French Theory" goes to France." Disch shows that the French theory proves to be true, in an even stranger history, it was a rather strange construction: term applied by the North American academy to a select-yet-disparate group of French feminists, and now, with the recent translation of *Gender Trouble* into French, it becomes a term that French thinkers themselves use (in English) Specifying a phenomenon that they consider peculiar to the United States. Disch begins by asking whether Butler's work really adds anything significant to the French materialist Wittig's work, and concludes with an affirmative answer, showing precisely how Butler critiques the naturalised conceptions of agency, the very conceptions that are currently the basis of democratic politics.

Karen Zivi continues the theme of explicating and analysing Butler's philosophically reasoned interventions in today's political debate in "Rights and Politics of Performativity." Butler's theory of performativity has been strongly criticized by the public; it has been accused of undermining political action, in particular action aimed at liberating political change. Arguing to the contrary, Zivi explains how Butler's *Work on human rights* is an important step in democratizing policies. In addition, Zivilik shows that the practice of rights claiming is not proven beyond a reasonable doubt. impossible under Butler's conceptualization, actually illustrates Butler's theory of performativity in a way that is empowering. While Butler argues that to claim rights (particularly in relation to hate-speech) is Complicated in licensing government regulation, and while her 'politics of the performative' has come to be related with drag, parody, and similarly non-standard political tactics, Zivi argues that Butler's politics presumes a performative subject with real agency – just what Butler's critics have denied.

4. Future Directions in Gender Studies Inspired by Butler

Judith Butler's work has made a meaningful contribution to the development of gender studies, inspiring scholars to explore new theories, concepts and possibilities for further research. Here, inspired by Butler's theories, are a few possible next steps for the study of women:

Intersectionality and multiplicity: The complexities of intersecting social categories like race, class, sexuality or disability can be further explored in gender studies based on Butler's focus on the interconnected nature of identity. Scholars may explore how people's experiences of gendered oppression and privilege are shaped by the various axes of identity, with a view to determining their impact on societal structures as well as power dynamics.

Embodiment and Materiality: The relationship between language, speech and the body that shapes gender identity and experience can be further explored in future studies. Scholars can explore how gender is represented and practiced in everyday activities, gestures or bodily acts using Butler's theories of performativity. Such research could also look at the substantive dimension of gender, including how bodies are governed and shaped by societal meanings.

Transgender and Non-Binary Studies: Future scholars may continue to explore transgender and non-binary experiences, identities, and politics because of Butler's work on contingency of gender. The ways in which transgender and nonbinary people negotiate, challenge normative categories of gender as well as the social, policy or legal challenges they face to assert their identities and rights could be examined through this research.

Ethics and politics of recognition: questions of recognition, agency, and social transformation in the context of gender justice and emancipatory politics can be explored in future research, inspired by Butler's engagement with ethics and politics. In this research, the ethical implications of different approaches to gender identity, expression, and inclusion could be explored, as well as how gender equality struggles are linked to broader movements for social justice and human rights.

Digital and Technological Dimensions: The ways in which digital media, online platforms and emerging technologies shape gender identity, representation and action can be examined in future directions of women's studies with the growing influence of digital technology on everyday life. As well as the potential for digital technologies to enable new forms of expression and community building, scholars can explore the challenges and opportunities posed by digital spaces for challenging or reproducing gender inequalities and norms.

5. CONCLUSIONS:

In this research paper the gender is discussed from Judith Butler perspective. She rejects the related traditional gender related views. Butler defies the line between sex and gender. Judith Butler gives different point of view about sex and gender. She said that sex is as also constructed as a gender. Gender is an activity or doing. Gender is a choice, but there is no subject beneath to make choices is fabrication within sociological structures. Butler defines gender as a performance of repeated acts. There is no identity which is ontological every category is inscribed upon body through discourses. Hence, gender is parody of parody which is

revealed by drag theory language works as power to constructed binary categories. Butler transcends from categories in queer theory. Butler's work has been considered as milestone in feminism, but her work is also criticized by many writers and scholars. Her theories inspired other scholars to do future research. Scholars may do further research with the inspiration of her theories on various perspectives of feminism and gender.

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