



Exploring Gender Multiplicity through the Lens of Post- Lacanian Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

Sexual difference must be recognized in thought and human interactions to enable people to find their real source of *jouissance*. The Lacanian finding of 'masculine phallic desire' and 'feminine libidinal desire' in all human beings, irrespective of their biological sex-gender, paved the way for rethinking gender identities. It calls for reforming inter-human relations from the presently predominant utilitarian mode to the one based on love and recognition of the other. Gender is an arbitrary construct to serve the interests of males in finding phallic sexual pleasure, power and recognition in their social life. Assertion of sexual difference and gender multiplicity will enable human beings to find the other human being as their actual desired object, beyond the pleasures offered by wealth, comforts and commodities.

Keywords: Gender; Sexual Difference; Desire; Love; Psychoanalysis

Introduction

Poststructuralist feminism sprouted from Lacanian psychoanalysis holds that unless sexual difference is recognised in thought and inter-human relations, a renewal of the mode of life human beings have been following for centuries will not be possible. Modern culture, the product of traditional metaphysical philosophy, does not recognise sexual difference. Philosophy has been an endeavor to find absolute truths based on which the world and human lives are structured. Traditional philosophy, neglecting the difference between one entity from another, has produced a generalised account of human nature. Deviating from this trend, poststructuralism produces a thought of multiplicity by reflecting 'difference' in various ways¹.

This difference-thinking triggered the Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition to rethink the essentialism of gender identities prevailing in our civilisation. Human emancipation demands a thought on difference. Luce Irigaray, from a post-Lacanian point of view, thus, claimed that "sexual difference is probably that issue in our own age which could be our salvation on an intellectual level"². Against the traditional thinking that reduces all human beings into a single category of humanity, the difference between man and woman, one woman and another woman, and one man from another man must be explored and affirmed. Instead of perceiving gender as two, as Judith Butler has insisted, each human being has to be seen as a specific gender. This paper explores the structure of such a thought developed by the difference feminists of the post-Lacanian tradition like Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva,

1 Ontological difference (Heidegger), ethical difference (Levinas) and difference in terms of meaning (Derrida) are some of them.

2 Luce Irigaray, "Sexual Difference", in Irigaray Reader, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 165.

and Judith Butler. Lacanian account of 'sexual difference' enabled them to reexamine the idea of gender identity and to explain what it means to be a man and a woman.

Post-Lacanian tradition questioned the patriarchal structure of traditional culture that conceives women to be the other³ of men. It also puts the notion of the universal rational self into question and casts identity as a discursive construct intended for the management of society based on the interests of men. It finds love to be the fundamental attribute of feminine libidinal desire. Lacanian psychoanalysis distinguishes 'feminine libidinal desire' from 'masculine phallic desire'. Because love is an experience different from men's enjoyment of power, Lacan depicts it as "Other jouissance"⁴. Later, with the arrival of Judith Butler's critique of gender⁵, difference feminism seeks to reconstitute the existing structure of inter-subjectivity prevailed on utilitarianism and sexist interests into a relationship based on love. The abstract reasoning of masculine philosophy is insufficient to explain the mechanism of love that has its source in unconscious libidinal desire. Entry into the subtle layers of the unconscious requires a different method. This is what psychoanalytic theory has provided in contemporary thinking.

While traditional philosophies analyse love as an abstract concept, psychoanalysis and feminist philosophers evaluate love as a concretely lived experience. Therefore, its source must be sought in physical existence, which women can think about and explore. Psychoanalytically, love is a bodily desire whose source is in the affectedness of the body by another body. Libido is considered as the essence of the body. It was a departure from traditional philosophy that finds the source of love in the transcendental consciousness of the soul. However, the question of how one can love an invisible, intangible object such as the soul of a person, is left unanswered by traditional thought. There must be a concrete, recognisable object that alone can trigger love, and that object cannot be the reason or the soul as claimed by traditional accounts⁶. Psychoanalytic research into the functioning of the unconscious discloses that, rather than reason, the desire is the motivating force behind all inter-

human relations.

Contemporary society insists that love and sexual interaction must be between a man and woman who are psychically positioned on opposite poles. The nuclear family is the model for sex and love in modern civilisation, which assumes that only opposites can have mutual sexual attraction. In its perspective, only opposites can be synthesised into a unity. But difference feminism criticises the enterprise of limiting love entirely to the heterosexual matrix of the nuclear family. The nuclear family always wants to confine all intimate relations of human beings within its boundaries. However, this activity takes care of only the reproductive instinct of human beings. It does not accord any intrinsic value to love. It perceives love and sexual relation merely as a means for reproduction.

As a result, interpersonal relations outside the nuclear family in modern times diminish mainly into mere utilitarian interactions for the exchange of commodities between humans, who are situated within the bounds of their egoistic self-identities. Nevertheless, the power of love to produce dissipation of self-identities has already been informed by thinkers belonging to the poststructuralist tradition. However, finding that it may subvert the cohesion of their self-identities, individuals desist it and mostly strives to protect their stable subject positions. As a result, people keep the other persons always away at a distance.

Love that could rupture the self-identity of the partners is not encouraged. Intimate relations between man and man, and between woman and woman, are characterised as gay and lesbian, respectively, and are stigmatised by society as unnatural sexual behaviour. In interactions, individuals are not allowed to cross the limit set by the society⁷. Inability to create deeper love relations makes it impossible for a person to come out of the prison of his self-identity to which he is confined. In modern times people enter into friendly relations primarily for mutual utilitarian benefits, and such relations are employed to promote trade, commerce and procreation. In such relationships, the meaning and value of the other person is determined by the self, based on the self's interests and perspectives⁸. Love being an unconscious libidinal desire, is thus repressed in contemporary societies.

With the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, the activation of the love relationship beyond gender

3 Simone de Beauvoir explains how women are relegated to the position of the "other" by men in human history in *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M Parshley, (London: Pan Books, 1988), 16–21.

4 Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, W.W Norton & Company, 1999), 74–76. Lacan employs the psychoanalytic notions of phallic jouissance and Other jouissance to explain the difference between men's sexual enjoyment and women's joyfulness.

5 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, London: Routledge, 1999.

6 Plato's Socrates puts higher love as a desire felt for the soul of the person and the abstract forms. See Plato, *Symposium*, trans. and ed. M.C. Howatson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 48–49.

7 Freud says that in the modern societies individuals are neurotized; as a result they modify their behavior according to the social norms. It leads to the inhibition of libidinal desires.

8 This is what Levinas explains as the ontological attitude of modern civilization, where the relationship between the self and the other is devoid of ethics. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42-46.

difference became a new political project. For Butler, the gendered existence of people as men and women is not conducive to a genuine expression of love. Therefore, gender identities⁹ have to be ruptured by revealing their groundlessness. Lacan's psychoanalytic explanation of the nature of sexual identities¹⁰ is the theoretical source of Butler's critique. Lacan's case studies of people reveal that the bio-medically determined sex of human beings in terms of genitalia and chromosomes contradicts socially defined notions of masculinity and femininity. Psychoanalysts confront the problem of the inadequacy of defining sexual difference in biological terms. "From a clinical vantage point, a great many anatomically defined females turn out to have masculine structure and a great many biological males prove to have feminine structure"¹¹. Biological differentiation is inadequate to explain sexual difference. Too many people seem to cross over this difference at the psychological level. "There are males with feminine structure and females with masculine structure"¹². From the psychoanalytic point of view, men are those who are determined by phallic function¹³ regardless of their biological structure. Instead of endorsing the cultural belief that sexual identities are fixed, Lacan perceives masculinity and femininity as two different kinds of relations that human beings maintain with respect to the socio-symbolic order.

Patriarchy that restricts all human intimacies within the heterosexual matrix of the nuclear family blocks the expression of love. It projects love as a chaotic force that threatens regular social order. Love has the potential to rupture the stability of the rational self. With the rupture of the self, the gendered identities of human beings as male and female can also disappear [14]. Finding it is an alarming proposal, patriarchy, through the containment of love, constitutes human relations within the heterosexual matrix. It serves two functions. One is that heterosexual relations ensure the reproduction of children so that the patrilineage can be carried on into the next generation. Furthermore, it makes the woman's body available for the phallic enjoyment

of the man in the sexual act. Thus women's bodies have been carved, stylised, moulded, and constituted according to men's fantasies¹⁴.

The union of human subjects in love beyond gender norms can creatively reformulate the existing social structure. Sexual relations here do not necessarily mean indulging in the carnal phallic sexual act as lesbian, gay, or straight. For Lacan, mystic union of two human beings in "Other love"¹⁵ is the primary form of sexual relation. The libidinal desires of the body trigger the love relations that unite two individuals. However, the body's desire cannot be seen as a desire for sexual penetration as misunderstood by the orthodox strata of the society. Such a perception may be accurate of the phallic sexuality of males. On the other hand, feminine desire is explained as a longing for a unity of the self with the other in a relationship of 'otherness'. For existential self-realisation of life, all human beings must be united with their proper objects of desire. Emmanuel Levinas, who explained the necessity of ego loss for opening up the self to the other¹⁶, is the model for both Butler and Irigaray.

While Irigaray restricts affectionate love to the sphere of the man-woman relationship, Butler casts sexual relations in a broader spectrum. Anchoring on Freud's bisexuality theory¹⁷, which reveals the presence of both masculine phallic desire and feminine libidinal desire in all, Butler demonstrates that no human being is entirely man or woman. Though these two sexual desires are visible in all from the time of their childhood, soon after the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex, society assigns gender identities to each human being based on his/her biological bodily structure revealed through genital organs. As modern Society is male-dominated, men interpret the significations of human anatomical structure from their masculine perspective. They interpret the penis as the symbol of power. Man, as the possessor of it, is placed in a more powerful position over the woman. The woman, as the castrated version of the man, is seen as the one who has lost all power. Men use this symbol to gain upper hand in the socio-symbolic order, relegating women to the "immanence" of the home. As a result, both adopt two different relations to the symbolic order. Men claim the right to control society, and women, cast as an incomplete version of man, have been

9 Gender is not considered a natural identity by psychoanalytic feminism. It is a socio-cultural construct added onto the biological categories of male and female. Gender is formed in the combination of biology and culture. Gender and sex are two different categories.

10 Unlike gender, sexuality is psychic in origin. Psychoanalysis portrays human beings as bisexual. All human beings have masculine phallic sexuality and a feminine libidinal sexuality. Sexuality is thus two types of experiential states. The sexual difference between man and woman is different from gender difference.

11 Bruce Fink, *Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 108.

12 Ibid., 123.

13 penetrative sex, social structure building, rational analysis, creation of law and order etc. are few of the phallic functions

14 Lacan has already shown that human self-identity appears always as gendered identity. For him, self and gender cannot be dissociated. Ego formation, every time, is gender formation as well.

15 "Other love" is a concept Lacan uses for "courtly love," which, in the European tradition is understood as a romantic longing for the union of two souls devoid of any self-interest.

16 Levinas. *Totality and Infinity*, (trans.) Alphonso Lingis, Pennsylvania: Dequesne University Press, 2002.

17 Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay, (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1995), 243-244.

kept from society.

Lacan assesses the structure of love differently. Rather than perceiving love heterosexually as an attraction between the sexualities of male and female, he perceives feminine libidinal desire as the source of 'Other love'. Irrespective of biological structure, the play of feminine libidinal desire causes the production of love in a person, which Lacan terms 'Other jouissance'. On the other hand, the dominance of masculine sexual desire, irrespective of his/her biological structure, motivates a person to seek out a different set of objects and desires. Lacan says that gaining "object a"¹⁸ is the aim of masculine desire. As a result, man's pleasure is limited and determined by the phallic function. It is limited to those spheres which are determined by the play of linguistic signifiers¹⁹. The spheres of politics, morality, institutions, trade, commerce are few territories that enable men to fulfill their phallic pleasures²⁰. Men for Lacan, are those who are determined by phallic desire, irrespective of their biological appearance as male or female. Therefore, many human beings who appear as women (biologically) are to be seen men in this sense. In Lacan's opinion, such women are to be considered as homosexuals due to their preference for masculine phallic pleasures such as power, possessions, and high status in the socio-symbolic order. They prefer to be united with members of their gender rather than with other women. Their desire for men, however, is not heterosexuality. The predominance of masculine phallic desire makes them desire men; thus, for Lacan, it manifests their homosexual desire²¹. Lacan would like to categorise organ-based sexual pleasure also as homosexuality, regardless of the gender of the parties involved. For him, phallic desire is the origin of all carnal sexual acts²². When a man (psychoanalytically) enters into a sexual relationship with another in a phallic manner, the other person is downgraded and is turned into "object a." The object here is only peripherally related to the subject who desires.

Different from phallic desire, feminine libidinal desire produces a unity of the self with the other. Its operation can also be seen in the processes of art, music, and mystical experience. Lacan classifies them also under the category

of Other jouissance. Under its spell, even ordinary objects are elevated to the status of "thing." God, art, and poetry are all examples of the Freudian "thing." The Other jouissance makes the human subject turn towards the other to provide gratification to the other rather than using him/her as an object for the subject's gratification. Lacan depicts it as the jouissance the other person gets out of a subject and also the subject's enjoyment of the other²³.

Following Lacan, Butler also holds that libidinal love cannot be limited to the heterosexual matrix. To her, it can be ignited in all interhuman relations, regardless of the gender of the parties. For her, gender is an unreal construct, based on the genitalia of the person, meant for the sustenance of the patriarchal social structure. Butler calls for reorganising existing gender identities that prevent human beings from forming a union with their actual objects of desire. She thus asks us to reexamine our moral prejudice about queer sexuality, which, in modern civilisation, is prohibited due to the perception of it as a deviant behaviour.

Butler criticises modern civilisation for preventing affectionate love relations between woman and woman, and man and man. Man-woman love, though permitted in modern civilisation, is possible only within family boundaries, as husband and wife. It is set as a means for sexual intercourse and reproduction. Here, the choice of a person's sexual partner is dependent on the reproductive instinct rather than love. Therefore, the desire expressed in this relation deteriorates into a desire for carnal sexual enjoyment.

Humans alone are restrained from reaching out to their actual objects of desire. Other species, being situated outside the realm of "man"-made rules and morality, live happily in union with their objects of desire²⁴. Though there is no restriction on human beings in fondling and caressing their pet animals, such physical contact is disallowed in their relations with other humans. Why only humans are restrained from fondling one another is an important question in the present milieu²⁵. Linguistic communication is modern civilisation's only legitimate means of interacting with others. It reveals the abstract, impersonal, and shallow nature of inter-subjectivity that prevailed in our present

18 Lacan depicts, "object a" as a thing that satisfy masculine desire. It can be anything from material goods to the female body by which human beings satisfy their need for pleasure. Here, the object is looked at as a means to obtain selfish pleasure.

19 Bruce Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, 106.

20 Here the meaning of the term "men" has to be understood in the psychoanalytic sense rather than in the biological sense.

21 Bruce Fink, "Knowledge and Jouissance," in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge and Feminine Sexuality*, eds. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 37

22 Bruce Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, 106

23 Lacan, *Encore*, 23–24

24 For Nietzsche, animal is the model to be followed for the rejuvenation of the life of human beings, who have lost touch with the earth. See Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Antichrist*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 134. Nietzsche associates woman with animal in a positive sense. Animal and woman are those beings who have not yet lost the fragrance of life.

25 "Touch" is an important philosophical issue today for phenomenology and feminism. See Irigaray, "The Fecundity of Caress: A Reading of Levinas, Totality and Infinity, and Phenomenology of Eros" in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 154–79.

milieu. In linguistic contact, one keeps a physical distance from the other. In relationships with others, body contact is entirely avoided. Interactions are limited within the linguistic realm. Speech, as an impersonal act coming from the “symbolic register,”²⁶ marks the alienated condition of the subject²⁷. This alienation is not a mere estrangement from others but a disjunction of the subject from itself. Modern civilisation encourages such alienation to facilitate the utilitarian manipulation of the earth that promotes trade and commerce. It reveals the predominance of masculine phallic jouissance in modern times.

Earlier historical periods, however, show a different picture of inter-human relations. We see that love between human beings prevailed in earlier times regardless of their gender. Foucault’s studies on the history of sexuality reveal that divergent sexual behaviours were accepted as legitimate by the ancient Greeks²⁸. Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s Symposium is another account that throws light on divergent sexual behaviours that existed among human beings²⁹.

Expression of love for another cannot always be seen as a means for phallic organ-based pleasure. It would be phallic only if the dominant desire of the involved persons is masculine jouissance. In that case, both parties in the relationship would be psychically males. On the other hand, if their predominant drive is feminine libidinal desire, their enjoyment will be Other love, irrespective of their gender identities. Lacan writes that “when one loves, it has nothing to do with sex³⁰”. Such would be the love of two biological women whose enjoyment is motivated by feminine libidinal desire.

Nevertheless, the relationship between two women (biologically) need not be ‘Other love’ every time. If the dominant desire operating in them is phallic, their love would be carnal passion and such people, though biologically appear women, psychically would be men. As no person is fully man or woman, the gender of an individual cannot be determined through biology or by medical means. One’s sexuality has multiple layers, and thus, in place of the two, there can be as many gender behaviours as there are human

beings. Each human being can be conceived of as a particular gender.

We have to examine why our civilisation, through the exclusion of affectionate love, places a higher value on masculine sexuality. The writings of the ‘difference feminists’, which anchor on Lacanian psychoanalysis, throw light on this issue. According to these writings, “libido” is the force that creates longing in human beings to unite with others. It is also the triggering force behind all actions and projects in life. This stance deviates from the traditional conception of the human being as the embodiment of rationality. According to psychoanalysis, fulfillment in human life lies in the satisfaction of libidinal desires, even though the desired objects elude human grasp. Though obtaining complete satisfaction is impossible, human life turns into a perpetual search for finding the appropriate objects of their desire. Freud, the first to develop the libido theory, explains libido as the essence of the human body. Freud conceives the human body/ego “as a storehouse of libido, a kind of psychic repository or a dam³¹.” Libido exists throughout the human body like water is stored in a reservoir. Libido can flow from the bodily reservoir towards other bodies of its liking to form libidinal cathexes.

Such cathexes constitute love relations. Human life is considered to be a perpetual struggle to find other humans to form libidinal cathexes. Rather than forcefully appropriating the object for oneself, in libidinal love, the subject presents itself to the desired object to form a symbiotic unity. Libidinal love finds joy in gratifying the other rather than extracting pleasure from the other through domination. That makes feminine libidinal desire fundamentally different from the phallic sexuality of males. In phallic love, the other is forcibly appropriated for the subject’s selfish pleasure. Sexual intercourse and acquiring wealth through capitalist production are two instances for it.

If both male and female sexualities exist in all human beings as the bisexuality theory suggests, individuals cannot become exclusively men or women without the intervention of culture. Judith Butler unravels the history of the process of the production of “man” and “woman” by culture out of bodies as two separate gender identities. To her, all identities are discursively constructed, and there is a definite strategy and purpose behind their production. For her, gender is a performance rather than a reality. Men and women are nothing but social roles assigned to individuals. Gender is made a reality by body’s continuous performance of these roles. Foucault, who claimed that “various individual

26 Lacan speaks of three registers. They are the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, of which the symbolic is the domain of social existence where interpersonal contact is entirely dependent on language.

27 Social relations are structured by language and according to Lacan, this is the nature of the symbolic order. After the resolution of the castration complex, human beings are forced to live in the symbolic order. In it, they are alienated from others.

28 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Vol. 2 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

29 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. and ed. M.C. Howatson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22–27.

30 Lacan, *Encore*, 25

31 Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques, Lacan A Feminist Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 29

subjectivities in society are identities discursively produced through techniques of dressage and disciplines³²," was the methodological inspiration for Judith Butler.

For Butler, gender does not follow from biology but is an entirely arbitrary construction superimposed upon the body of human beings³³. Gendered subjectivities are produced through cultural inscriptions made on bodies, which, in the beginning, were devoid of any identity or essential characteristics. Each culture uses different mechanisms to produce "subjects" out of bodies. Culture, thus creates a male out of a biological body by augmenting its masculine disposition and suppressing feminine libidinal desire. Likewise, culture creates a female out of a body by suppressing its masculine desire and auguring its feminine disposition. Once consciousness of one's gender has been created in a person, there will be a tendency in that person to actualise it. He/she will then strive to perform that gender role perfectly. There is a psychic tendency within human beings to augment the identities assigned to them by society. From then on, a person modifies her body language, attitudes, and preferences accordingly. That makes Butler claim that gender is nothing but a performance.

For Butler, like gender, sexuality is also a social construct. The belief that male sexuality is active and vigorous and female sexuality is passive and without content is groundless. Women pose (masquerade) as passive to become the object of man's pleasure³⁴. Likewise, the man thinks that unless he displays valour, he will be looked down upon as feminine and castrated. So he pretends to be virile in all domains, including the sexual act³⁵.

Judith Butler holds that gender dispositions can be diverse instead of just the two. Furthermore, gender behaviour can vary from society to society and culture to culture. It calls for considering queerness as a different style of living, in which one lives beyond the identity of either man or woman. One can perform as both a man and a woman, or in fact, any number of sexual roles simultaneously.

However, once a person's identity as a man or woman has been fixed by society, it becomes difficult for him/her to alter that. That makes it oppressive. One who is forced to live as a man due to his genitalia may not be a man in terms of libidinal disposition. Likewise, a person who is made to

live as a woman may not be a woman on libidinal grounds. From the perspective of poststructuralism, the identities stamped on the body are functional only at the cultural level of existence, which is the peripheral layer of life.

Nevertheless, the libidinal object a person desires is determined by his/her unconscious psychic disposition. Therefore, a biological man may not necessarily desire a woman as his love object, as society expects. Also, a biological (in appearance) woman may not psychically be a woman in terms of libidinal disposition. As all bodies have masculine and feminine libidinal dispositions, the dominant disposition among them will determine a person's sexuality and her libidinal objects of choice.

Butler holds that the love relationship between a child and its parents plays a crucial role in forming its libidinal disposition. Psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan speak of the pre-Oedipal phase of the child as an imaginary stage in which children of both sexes have libidinal love relations with their immediate care-takers, which, in most circumstances, would be their biological mother. However, the incest taboo of society leads the child's father to prohibit this love³⁶. As a result, libidinal desire is suppressed within the unconscious, which is instrumental in the child's development into a socially responsible self. Reinterpreting the Freudian theory presented in *Mourning and Melancholia*, Butler observes that in place of the mother, in some cases, the father can also be a libidinal object of desire for the child³⁷. Due to cultural prohibition, boys and girls who have libidinal love for their mother are forced to give up their love. As compensation for this unbearable loss, they internalise the image and character of the mother.

A feminine libidinal disposition dominates in such children. In the remaining years of their lives, too, their sexual attraction will be towards other women. Love and sexuality in such people will be lesbian. Those children, whose libidinal love is for the father, internalise his image and characteristics; in them, a masculine disposition predominates. Their sexual object of desire will be other men. That is how homosexuality develops in human beings. The women belonging to this category also desire the company of men. Butler, instead of perceiving it as heterosexuality, takes it as the expression of their homosexuality³⁸. A masculine disposition predominates in such women, and their sexuality leads them to seek satisfaction through acquiring symbolic value and power in the social domain. It motivates them to seek friendship with

32 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Scheridan, (New York: VintageBooks, 1979).

33 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York:Routledge, 1999)

34 *Ibid.*, 58–61

35 *Ibid.*

36 This stage marks the onset of the Oedipus complex. However, unlike Freud, Lacan perceives the father as a sign that stands for the cultural law of the society and not as the biological father of the child.

37 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 73–80.

38 *Ibid.*, 67.

men. However, such a desire for men may not be for genital sexual enjoyment. As Irigaray observes, the homosexuality of men only means the pleasure they derive in trade, commerce, and politics, which is produced in the company of men³⁹.

However, the narcissistically formed modern civilisation does not allow human beings to reach out to their true love object to form libidinal unity with it. Therefore, the present social structure is not conducive to finding fulfilment in life. Fulfilment in life rests on gaining the actual object of one's desire. Here, desire and need have to be distinguished. Modernity mistakes need for desire. Desire, in modernity, is understood as arising from the lack of an object that satisfies pleasure. The question we have to pose is what ought to be the objects of human desire. Modern civilisation, driven by the death drive, suppresses and conceals the actual object that provides fulfilment in life and projects a different set of objects as desirable ones. Consumer goods are projected as objects that satisfy human 'need'. It asks people to acquire properties, vehicles, power, riches, and social status to get contentment in life. In capitalist logic, the worth of a person's life is measured by the symbolic value he gains in society through possessing such objects. Acquiring riches and fame is the way to attain social recognition, which helps a person boost his image in the eyes of others. Those who are not capable of gaining such objects are seen as worthless. There is also the danger that those who do perceive the value of life differently may get lured into the web of capitalism under the influence of public opinion. A biopolitical compulsion also forces people to compromise with the existing social structure for their survival. As a result, people's lives in modern societies mostly turn out to be a race to acquire properties.

However, accumulating material goods only helps people boost their ego. Capitalism also turns intersubjective relations into a means to increase the symbolic value of a person. In everyday life, people mainly treat others as a means to fulfil their needs. Consequently, others appear primarily as traders, technicians, newspaper vendors, labourers, and they are judged based on their efficiency at work. The ethical dimension of intersubjectivity is lost. Capitalist modernity thus thrives on the prohibition of love and affection in interactions. It only encourages impersonal relations because affections hinder success and economic growth in capitalist logic.

Possession and control of various objects inflates the male ego and is experienced as pleasurable, which constitutes the structure of male sexuality. Men exchange

material goods and ideas among themselves, constituting a political nexus of men. It is manifested through competition and power play. In it, men derive satisfaction mostly from mutual cooperation and collaboration. Therefore, Irigaray perceives their pleasure to be homosexual enjoyment⁴⁰. The patriarchal order is envisioned as a structure suitable for men to find their jouissance. Stratifying human beings into two genders, as man and woman, is a prerequisite for the survival of patriarchy. In order to attain phallic jouissance, patriarchy creates a private sphere of women, which takes care of food, physical comforts, reproduction, child rearing etc. It enables men to indulge in politics, trade, commerce, and administration and thereby, find their masculine sexual satisfaction. In addition, women's bodies are to be made available to men for phallic sexual intercourse. The woman's body has to be constituted in a specific fashion to perform these tasks. Her body, therefore, should be different from the man's body. Based on men's fantasy, she is made to dress up in culturally stereotypical clothes. Women's attire, such as frock and lingerie, have to be seen in this regard, as men's fetishes added onto the woman's body to awaken their sexual instinct. That is how the heterosexual matrix becomes the foundation of modern societies. 'Other love' is thrown out of the male-dominated social order. Women, as the guardians of Other jouissance, a feminist uprising is required to reinstate the value of love lost due to the overriding surge of phallic-capitalist desire. Due to their forcible insertion into the heterosexual matrix, many people are prevented from seeking their actual love object. Fearing social exclusion, they accept the gender position imposed upon them by society and choose to remain heterosexual. Sexual identities based on anatomy lead to the suppression of true libidinal desires. Though both men and woman are affected by it, the woman, who represents the feminine libidinal economy, is the most affected. In a patriarchal culture, there are enough opportunities to satisfy masculine sexual desires. The public sphere provides the space for it. The phallic sexual act is also possible both within marriage and outside it. However, the feminine libidinal desire is repressed in modern civilisation. 'Other love' in it is suppressed, and all human relations are turned into phallic relations.

All intensely experienced moments of love, whether produced in relations between men or between women or between man and women, are occasions of 'Other love'. They arise from feminine libidinal desire. As the interaction of the feminine desires of two human beings, 'Other love' is a lesbian experience. When Other love is in operation, the gender difference is blurred as unreal. Gender is only a patriarchal construct to create sexual attraction between two human beings for reproduction. It is meaningful only when sexuality is considered a pleasure based on genital organs. As lesbian

39 Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market," in *This Sex Which is not One*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 170–91

40 Irigaray, "Women on the Market," 170–91

love is not an organ-based sexual act⁴¹, the subjects in it will no longer be men or women. Monique Wittig's statement that "a Lesbian person cannot be called a woman"⁴² assumes significance in this context. Gender identity is meaningful only within the heterosexual matrix.

Julia Kristeva, another Lacanian feminist, provides an excellent account of the nature of the lesbian experience in her articulation of the feminine psychic structure⁴³. For her, the feminine psychic disposition is not dependent on biology or a trait belonging to women alone. All human beings have the feminine disposition lying suppressed within their bodies, beneath their rational social consciousness. For her, the feminine libidinal experience is manifested most explicitly in an individual's early childhood when the child remains in symbiotic love with the mother. But with the child's entry into the socio-symbolic order necessitated by castration, love is forced to withdraw into the unconscious. Kristeva uses the two principles of symbolic and semiotic to represent human beings' social existence and pre-social imaginary existence, respectively. In Kristeva's opinion, the semiotic, which is initially manifested in the child's relationship with the (m) other, is a lesbian experience. Her stance rejects the Freudian claim that child's love is the moment of heterosexual love. Different from Freud, libido for Kristeva is fundamentally a feminine force.

Freud's interpretation of libido as a masculine drive can be seen as the outcome of the cultural prejudice that existed during his time. To Freud, both carnal sex and love have their source in masculine desire, which alone is active. Femininity, in his opinion, is a passive phenomenon. Therefore, for him, love and sexual desire can originate only from the masculine libido, which alone is the active force of life. This belief led Freud to state that "little girl is a little man" to explain a girl child's active love relationship with her mother during the pre-Oedipal phase. Therefore, Freud interprets a child's symbiotic relationship with its mother as heterosexual love. Rejecting Freud's stance, Kristeva gives a feminist twist to psychoanalytic theory and asserts that the libido is basically a feminine drive. In her opinion, the masculine drive emerges only with the child's entry into social existence, which is brought about by the suppression of the child's love with the mother. Thus, the mother-child love shall be seen as a moment of union of the feminine libido of the child with the

mother's libido. It is thus a lesbian love experience. So, what is prohibited by the father as incest is lesbian relations rather than heterosexual love. Thus, according to Kristeva, intimate love between human beings, in every case, irrespective of their gender identity, is fundamentally a lesbian experience. Lacan, in his seminar *Encore* endorses this and says that "homosexual love is the supreme love of the woman, a love that keeps alive an essence of the feminine"⁴⁴. For him, romantic love is courtly love, and it is not a merging of the opposite poles of man and woman as understood by patriarchy. The magic of love does not lie in creating a union of the two individuals who are asymmetrically structured as man and woman but in the coming together of the feminine libidinal sexuality of two human beings. So it helps Kristeva to separate sexual drives into two, the feminine libidinal drive that produces affectionate love and the masculine sexual drive that creates social structures, symbolisation, law and order, and the phallicentric coercive sexual act. She observes that the feminine semiotic remains suppressed under the masculine symbolic in our civilisation. Kristeva's feminist political project therefore lies in liberating the feminine libidinal desire from the subjugation of the masculine-phallic desire, in human beings' social existence. For her, all semiotic expressions, such as courtly love, poetic articulation, and maternal emotion, are the moments of return of the lesbian experience from the body's interiority.

The exclusion of feminine desire from a person's existence is a precondition for attaining rational self-unity. Men mostly attempt to preserve their rational self-identity to draw energy to express their masculine vigour and power. Men consider the chaotic nature of love experience as a threat to the cohesiveness of their male ego. Therefore, experience of love is seen as an alarming phenomenon by them. The mental state of love indeed contains elements of psychosis, as pointed out by Kristeva.

Nevertheless, semiotic expressions of it in art and inter-human relations preserve people from experiencing it as madness. Notwithstanding this fact, men stay away from love due to its potential to destroy their projects and endeavours in the public sphere that provide them with phallic sexual enjoyment. That causes for the exclusion of feminine libidinal experiences such as motherliness, courtly love, and poetic expressions from our male-dominated civilisation.

Though feminine libidinal desire is suppressed and turned into the interiority of the body, it returns in the ecstasies produced in artworks, motherliness, aesthetic

41 Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, 25. Lacan writes that "when one loves, it has nothing to do with sex."

42 Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 21

43 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

44 Lacan, Quoted in Ellie Ragland, "Psychoanalysis and Courtly Love", *Arthuriana*, Vol. 5, No.1 Spring (1995) 2.

processes, and in the tones of music. It is also at work in the supple movements of the body in dance and music. Thus, works of art, which recuperate the lost moment of early imaginary relation, can be considered the celebration of lesbian homosexuality. Lesbian experience in our times is manifested more in dance, music, and aesthetic processes than in actual life situations. Though the direct materialisation of it in the form of the union of two human beings is suppressed, it returns in aesthetic processes. As love is a process that is ejected by patriarchy as anti-social and psychotic, aesthetic processes are the only remaining domain of its legitimate existence. Art provides a space for the expression of feminine libidinal sexuality for those human beings who are forced to live heterosexual life. It is not due to the imaginative depiction of love in literature that it becomes a domain of libidinal expression. Instead, both the aesthetic state and love are the same kind of experience, whose source is in the libidinal drives of the body. However, our phallogocentric civilisation ensures that the feminine libidinal play does not grow beyond semiotic processes into a concrete expression of lesbian love between human beings. Our civilisation, perceiving love as an irrational passion or psychosis, relegates it to the margins of social life, because both courtly love and the poetic have the potential to destabilise the symbolically constituted patriarchal structures of life and society.

However, it can be observed that Kristeva does not suggest any means by which love can be made into actual commerce between two human beings. For her, poetic production is the only means to attain feminine liberation. Judith Butler criticises Kristeva for her inability to take the lesbian experience beyond the confines of art and literature. Thus, Kristeva's feminist politics seems ineffective in producing any meaningful changes in existing gender relations. It does not lead to human liberation by making feminine desire a lived reality of the sexes.

Butler thinks that unless human beings are empowered to express love in their actual life, beyond gender identities, meaningful relationships between people will not happen. Love must be turned into a lived reality rather than a poetic experience. Butler, who believes lesbian love should be turned into a legitimate human relationship, goes beyond Kristeva. She believes that a man should be able to become woman, a woman, man and all human beings should be

able to live beyond gender identities if they so desire. Butler's project is meant to provide emancipation to all who cannot reach their actual object of desire. It offers liberation to those restrained from living their feminine libidinal desire due to their inclusion within a particular gender based on their anatomical bodily structure. The dress code and other

ornamentations assigned to men in our society are meant to erase or cover up the woman lying within them. Butler, in this regard, believes that gender is not two, but many. As each individual can be made into a different gender, she says, all people should be empowered to live multiple identities and follow different styles of living. This is the true meaning of queer, explained by Jasper Laybutt as a process transcending gender identities: "To me, queer transcends any gender, any sexual persuasion and philosophy. Queerness is a state of being. It is also a lifestyle. It is eternally the alternative to both the lesbian and gay mainstreams⁴⁵". Only that person who discards his/her identity and lives a life devoid of any subject position can be called queer properly.

Butler's investigations throw more light on the need to have multiple gender positions, and it reminds us of the poverty of the present-day human life lived based on binary gender roles. The repressive marks drawn on the body to regulate its libidinal expressions have to be erased in order to be able to live multiple lives. Also, one has to reinscribe oneself with new, body-friendly marks. "Drag" performances that subvert the existing dress codes of society must be seen, in this regard, as a revolutionary gesture in the sexual politics of today. Such a gesture lets a person express his desire to live beyond fixed identities. It is how one is able to live the desire to become woman. To become woman does not mean to live the life of the conventional female gender. The conventional female gender is a constructed identity and a signifier of man's sexual fantasy within the heterosexual matrix. The masculine gender is another signifier that expresses a body's desire to have phallogocentric sexual intercourse with women. Patriarchal society has constructed the man's body to perform that task. However, in rupturing gender, one discards his majoritarian masculine identity in order to participate in the loving playfulness of feminine desire. Such a perspective of sexual transformation gets a powerful theoretical endorsement in Gilles Deleuze's idea of "becoming woman"⁴⁶.

Sexual politics of Lacanian feminism, thus, proposes the rupture of the capitalist social structure that keeps human beings away from reaching out to their actual objects of desire. The political project of multiplication of gender undertaken by the Lacanian tradition shows the way to that end.

45 Jasper Laybutt, Quoted in Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion, Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 207.

46 Deleuze and Guattari, "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming Imperceptible," in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 232-309.

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