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Gender And Sexuality: Constructions And Issues

Suja Karappath

¹ Assistant Professor, SN College for Women, Kollam, Kerala, India

* Corresponding Author:

Suja Karappath

karappath.suja@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Sex and sexuality are often used interchangeably, yet they represent distinct concepts, with sexuality encompassing a broader range of identities, behaviours, and social meanings. Sexuality is not a fixed biological reality but a construct shaped by historical developments, cultural norms, and power structures. The shift from the one-sex to the two-sex model reinforced binary distinctions and heteronormative ideologies, privileging reproductive heterosexuality while marginalising other expressions. In many societies, particularly in India, non-reproductive sexual practices are stigmatised and silenced. The construction of sexuality is deeply linked with colonial domination, capitalist discipline, and moral regulation, where institutions such as family, law, and religion control bodies and maintain social hierarchies, including caste and patriarchy. Economic systems further regulate sexuality to sustain labour and production. From a post-structuralist perspective, sexuality is fluid and subject to change. Recognising sexuality as socially constructed opens possibilities for challenging dominant norms and asserting it as an essential dimension of human rights and individual agency.

INTRODUCTION

The word sex and sexuality used interchangeably and people have a vague idea about the term sexuality. The reason is that the word sexuality and the act is repressed or silenced throughout the history. The paper tries to examine the reasons of repression of sexuality and issues of constructing it. Furthermore, the paper discusses the issues involved in the construction of sexuality.

Sex and Sexuality

Sex refers to whether or not a person is male or female, whether a person has a penis or vagina. Sex is also commonly used as an abbreviation to refer to sexual intercourse. Sexuality refers to the total expression of who you are as a human being, your femaleness or your maleness. A person's sexuality includes his or her attitudes, values, knowledge and behaviours or sexual identities, behaviours, preferences, habits, etc. To sum up sexuality is a much broader term, has many components, and includes much more than sexual intercourse.

Sexuality is Constructed

In the eighteenth century, the concept of sex was invented. During this period, western culture was moving from one sex model to two sex model. From Antiquity through Middle Ages, women's anatomy was not considered fundamentally different from men's anatomy, rather, it was viewed as a variation or inversion of the same structure (Schiebinger, 1989). Under the one sex model, anatomy and biology were ideologically insignificant compared to theology (Oudushorn, 1994). This perception changed drastically with the emergence of the two-sex model, which emphasises sexual difference as a biological and social (Lacquer, 1990, Schiebinger, 1989). In 1913 a British physician named Walter Heape produced a particular expression of two sex view of sexual difference.

In the late nineteenth century, biological determinists drew binary forms of a sex often referred to as the two sex model. Biological determinists assert that biology determines everything and it is pervasive. (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). The characteristics of the reproductive cells or protein making process or bio differences saturate the adult human organism is called pervasive and obviously constructing an inherently heterosexual understanding of sex. Based upon these factors, social policies have been formulated and justified (Jordan-young, 2019). In the 1960's and 70's psychiatrists and other medical personnel working with intersexed and trans sexed patients and these dilemmas have been summed up as the 'sense of being trapped in the wrong body'.

Consequently, such cases should be treated through surgery and hormone aimed at aligning bodies with binary model of sex. All these scientific and medical practises ultimately reinforced heteronormative ideology and rejects homosexuality (Butler, 1990).

In terms of how sexual desire is experienced or expressed, peno-vaginal penetrative sexual intercourse continues to be regarded as the 'normal' and socially respectable form of sexuality. Its privileged status stems from its association with human reproduction, which has historically been treated as the primary purpose of sexual relations (Foucault, 1978). The reason for its privileged status is that this is the sexual act that is associated with human reproduction. Although the strict Victorian notion that sex exists solely for reproduction is no longer widely accepted, the underlying reproductive logic persists. The logic continues to grant peno-vaginal intercourse a high degree of cultural legitimacy and moral approval than other forms of sexual expression (Rubin, 1984; Butler, 1990).

In many contexts, the term 'sex' is often used interchangeably with 'peno-vaginal sexual intercourse'. For example, in the Indian context, sexual acts performed purely for pleasure are frequently stigmatized (Chakravathi, 2003; Vanitha, 2005). Consequently, Other sexual practises that fall outside of the reproductive logic even if premised fundamentally on consent, are either relegated to a zone of silence or held abhorrent. (Rubin, 1984; Butler, 1990). The notion of normal heterosexuality is reinforced and regulated through the institution of marriage and domestic laws administered by the state (Mishra, 1998). These laws and public policies use marriage as the primary requirement for social and economic benefits in terms of benefits such as tax of health, housing etc rather than allocating resources on other bases such as citizenship or individual need (Chakravathi, 2003; Mishra 1998).

Issues of Constructing Sexuality

1. Sexuality and the 'Other'

The concept of 'other' in the context of sexuality was vastly used by colonial powers to subjugate colonies. The sexualised stereotypes were strategically reinforced difference-asserting European rationality, purity and moral superiority against the perceived irrationality and promiscuity of native cultures (Levine, 2006). Similarly LGBTQ community also attacked by colonial masters. Colonial authorities often sought to appropriate their wealth and social influences held by LGBTQ community who historically commanded property and authority through ritualistic practises (Reddy, 2005, Nanda, 1990). This was part of a broader effort to reinforce Christianity and undermine native belief system. Leslie Feinberg states that in the ancient societies many goddesses and gods are in cross dressers. These are negated by colonial powers.

2. Sexuality and Economy

Foucault in his book *History of sexuality* states that until the 17th century it not repressed. The rule of silence imposed upon sexuality and censorship reigned since the period of 17th century. It is considered for reproduction and confined into home also. The Victorian society is best example of it. He describes repression linked to the rise of capitalism. Sexuality is repressed because it was incompatible with the work ethic demanded by the capitalist order. They aim to transform all the energies for production purposes. In this sense it is considered as specific form of power. The kind of repression operates according to simple and endlessly reproduced mechanisms of law, taboo and censorship. Why and how the regulations of rule or power accepted? Foucault here use the term speakers benefits. Speakers' benefits mean intellectual speak for humanity and he appeal to future will be better and ultimately these kinds of speaks will lead to pleasure. So, the laws are made and accepted thorough this mechanism. For example, In India the movement of prostitutes restricts in the name of public hygiene. So the prostitution considered as unhealthy act. Here techniques of discipline developed and was perfected like in workshop. Goal is to produce human being who could be treated as docile body. All the operations of laws or workshop are prisons hospitals, schools, universities etc.

Marxist scholars would argue that the heterosexual family is a key site of support for capitalist relations of production in as much as it facilitates the seamless reproduction of a labour force that is socialised into an unquestionable acceptance of social and economic inequalities. Economic and social pressures have historically compelled women into regulating their sexuality often through medical interventions such as hysterectomy or other reproductive controls reflecting societal efforts to discipline female bodies in accordance with labour, class and social norms (Armstrong, 1993; Rapp, 1993).

3. Sexuality and Morality

Lerner, in his work *The Creation of Patriarchy* states that the entry of agriculture brought with it greater intertribal warfare, and also with men having more leisure time than women to manage surpluses and enhance their power. Women, in her view, are captured from other tribes while their men are killed, so that such captured women were not only the first slaves but also the first forms of private property. private property preceded the greater control over women's sexuality, by effectively. Arguing the opposite – women as slaves may well have constituted the first forms of private property apart from animal husbandry. Uma Chakravathy said that Retaining ownership over the land and maintaining caste purity thus required regulating women's sexuality and reproduction, who are then the pivots in this interlocking structure in India. It can be associated with Brahmanical patriarchy. The same arguments mentioned about Kerala society by J Devika in her book *Kulasthreegalum Chandapennum* states that sexuality on women controlled by male in the upper caste to maintain caste purity.

CONCLUSION

Since the 1960's a decade closely associated with the sexual rights and civil rights movements in the US and Europe, sexuality has increasingly been articulating as a universal human rights. Whenever a pride march in Delhi or Mumbai, or a legal judgement in a judiciary, invokes sexuality as a right, it implicitly connects to the over two century old idea of liberal citizenship, integrating sexual



orientation into the broader, evolving concept of citizenship. Post structuralist thought posits that all cultural phenomena are socially are socially constructed. From these perspectives like gender is a construct, challenging the notion of fixed identities and stable essences. The implication is that if sexuality is culturally constructed rather than biologically determined, it can be transformed through political and social action. Moreover, natural processes themselves are neither calm nor stable, they are often violent and transformative, undermining claims of inherent determinism. In sum, the repression of sexuality serves a binary understanding of gender, operating to benefit the capitalist system, protect private property, and preserve caste hierarchies. The resulting sexual division of labour and the hegemony of patriarchy are therefore direct by product of these social and economic mechanisms.

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