

**SOLID AND LIQUID GENDERS: FREQUENCY OF GENDER
OVERLAPPING IN SOME OF THE CHARACTERS IN ANAND
NEELAKANDAN'S *DURYODHANAN KAURAVAVAMSATHINDE*
ITHIHASAM AND MT VASUDEVAN NAIR'S *RANDAMOOZHAM***

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ABSTRACT

Gender was not discussed in the past, as the concept of woman was not independently discussed. Religions restrained woman as an extension of man for his personal needs when man craved for company. Woman was created for breaking his loneliness and caused his breaking up from God, his Creator. Thus, woman was dehumanized, and her existence was totally neglected. Most of the literary works and epics portray woman as a parasite on man preparing and facilitating his epic and his 'tory'. Even if gender theories mark him to be domineering, men sometimes become a toy in the hands of women forgetting his religion -assigned role. Women, even though marked as the oppressed, sometimes prove herself to be the oppressor and the cause of major tragedies in men's lives. In Homer's *Odyssey* Odysseus who returns after Trojan war completing his ten years of voyage tests the chastity of Penelope, his wife, incognito even if he himself fathered Teledorus from a sea nymph. Anand Neelakandan a famous Malayalam writer brings about deconstructive perspectives on the different characters of our epics in his novels, *Ajaya*, the *Epic of Kaurava Clan* and *Kali*. In MT Vasudevan nair's *Randamoozham* also we see this gender overlapping in many of the characters. In many instances in the good/bad binary and male/female

binaries, the readers have found overlapping and definitely might have frowned at the binary overlapping. This is because some characters want to protect themselves from the inner struggles they undergo. M T's and Anand's work brood on the overlapping in gender and thus in this good/bad binary opposites. This paper tries to identify the solid and liquid genders and find out where this overlapping happens for some of the characters in different genders in these novels.

Key Words: Voyage, Chastity, Penelope

INTRODUCTION

Gender studies indicate the study of masculine, feminine or queer behaviour in a given community, society or a field of study. The term sex refers to the biologically observable differences where as the term gender refers to the social expectations and roles. Even then biological sex can be socially constructed and masculine and feminine behaviours can be rooted in physiology as well. Gender concepts and roles are the result of a broad network of influences of society operating independently through the much interference of the people related. Anand Neelakandan's *Ajaya* The *Epic of Kaurava Clan* or *Duryodhana Kaurava Vamsathinde Ithihasam* and MT's *Randamoozham* narrate analytically the various characters of our great epic Mahabharata. The

readers of these novels are drawn towards the characters' mind and thereby understanding their real motive behind their actions. Far away from their Epic dimensions, the readers get a "them" through these novels and they disclose themselves in front of our eyes as someone very different from the name assigned to them by the writer. The dimension in which oral popularity affixed on the characters are brought to reflective analysis and that brings about a revelation where many idols break down, in their place new ones are constructed. Sometimes we can find a shift in their gender roles also. Sometimes this happens because there a shift in the gender roles occurs within the family through the process of identification as Freud emphasized as Socio -cognitive theory of gender development. This theory can be applied here as it applies to a life course time. Children's identification with the same sex parent takes a difference when they come across different experiences in their family life. From the Novels, Bhishma Vidura, Karna Suyodhana, Bhima, Yudhishtira and Ekalavya from the male side and Kunthi, Gandhari and Panchali from the female side are brought to analysis.

OBJECTIVES

- To find out how often the shifting into different gender occurs in the selected characters.
- To emphasis whether this shifting of gender happens with the demand of the time if it is to the stronger side or as part of their helplessness if this shifting is to the weaker side
- To show how certain strengths and weaknesses are ascribed to their caste in spite of the kinetic ability and mental strength of some characters.

GENDER OVERLAPPING IN THE CHARACTERS

Gender is something different from sex, as the second is a primordial one, in which one is fixed from birth. Gender is our acquired status, but gradually fixed upon us, the role that is given to us through our circumstances. Our urge to perform certain roles decide our gender and that is inadvertently stamped upon us by the society. It is our secondary identity. All of us have a lot of identities working upon us in our lives. Identities that we prefer at times are mostly contextual. The Socio-cognitive theory of gender development works upon this identity shifting or overlapping. Sometimes these identities will be layered in some people when the roles that we are expected to perform are many. . The novels Suyodhana, Kaurava Vamsathinde Ithihasam and Randamoozham, which is based on the Epic Mahabharata, is a storehouse of many such characters who shifts their gender occasionally to suit their circumstances. They recognize the importance of acting in a different gender other than what is fixed on through the ages. Sometimes it is reflexive in some persons, but is voluntary for some other characters.

Starting with Bhishma, the backbone of Kuru vamsha, his birth itself is a mystery as he is the son of river Ganga through Shanthanu his first name is Ganga Dutt Devavrathan but he is renamed as Bhishma when he facilitates his father's marriage with a fisher woman Satyawati and takes an oath to follow celibacy throughout his life. Strong as he is as a man he forgets and neglects his biological function as a male. But he initiates the marriage of the blind Dhritarashtra. Defeating Gandhara king he brings the princess of the country to Hastinapur to facilitate the marriage. He changes his mind to

kill Gandhari's brother Shakuni, when Gandhari pleads with him not to kill the boy in her face. He forgets his kshatriya masculinity there which reminds him not to leave an opponent who may later avenge him. Here, he rejects his reason and becomes the victim of emotion that causes the ruin of Kuru vamsha. A shift from masculinity to feminine soft emotions rises here when he takes the boy on his shoulder to take him along with the princess.

Vidura, the Commander in chief of Hastinapur is always in conflicting role, as there exists an approach -avoidant conflict in whatever he does due to his low birth. He is the son of Krishna dwaipayana through a servant so he is not self confident whenever he does something. He suffers ill treatment from different quarters due to his low birth. The respect with which Bhishma always regard him, shows the democratic sentiment of Bhishma, who later seems to insist on Vidhura's presence to relieve himself. He is Bhishma's second self, as Bhishma experiences the restrictions imposed on him by his ideal paternity, and Vidura's self doubt, when he looks after the affairs of the state, as he has culture imposed restrictions upon him, put both of them in moments of inner conflicts. In Anand's novel Pandavas hesitate to touch vidura, but Suyodhana hugs him. Suyodhana seems to have inherited this democratic spirit from Bhishma. In moments of self doubt and self conflicts, they cross their gender roles. Suyodhana always shows an egalitarian sentiment throughout. In Randamoozham, which is seen through Bhima's perspective, Suyodhana's indiscrete nature is highlighted and even then his egalitarian sentiment is applauded through Bhima's memories too. When Karna is laughed at and when Ashwathama is ill treated he comes to the rescue. Like a mother protects her children he protects

them. Here Vidhura and Suyodhana show a shift in their gender role.

A deconstructive reading of these novels show a topsy turvydom in the whole values ascribed to the Pandavas. Hypocritical or showing off of values are generally praised in the epic than real virtues depicted by Bhima, Karna and Suyodhana. The predicament of Karna and Vidhura has some similarities as both of them are ill-treated by the appraised group and they occasionally lose their masculinity and drift to feminine subordination. Karna's Kavacha and Kundala are his masculine symbols that are taken away through treachery due to his feminine virtue of giving away. Vidhura suppresses his emotions when Shakuni and Bhima insult him. Suppressing his masculinity, he threatens them he will inform Bhishma pitamaha of this insult. He is afraid of asserting himself and thus he is drifting away from his assigned gender role of a male. A peacemaker as he is, Vidhura doesn't possess a fixed gender and most of the time it drifts towards female or inter- gender.

Really the three sons of Krishnadwaipayana suffer this identity crisis. Drithrashtra, the blind son of Vedhvyasa is totally helpless, as he cannot bestow his masculine powers due to his physical disability. He cannot stay on his solid gender role assigned to him by the society due to this. When he hugs Bhima after the battle, his Kshatriya fury and his masculine strength unites, but even here he is cheated due to his disability. He had to leave his Rule to his brother Pandu even though he was the rightful heir to the throne as the eldest son. For a time he remains even genderless without any proper role to perform. It is Bhishma who brings him a bride obliterating even the race of the bride except Shakuni. Vidhura is genderless sometimes due to his low birth. Pandu, the next one assumes

the rule, but he is debilitated by a curse. Sage Kindama cursed Pandu that were he to approach his wives with the intent of making love, he would die. So he had only an outsider perspective about his own life. He was compelled to remain impotent due to this curse. The five sons that he call as his are not his, but of some gods'. He remained inter-gender throughout his life. When he comes back to his original gender, he dies. Sometimes revelations will be self-destructive.

Gender overlapping happens in many other characters in these novels and more significantly in the major female characters like Kunthi, Gandhari and Panchali. Kunthi is a mixed gender shifting from one gender to another within seconds. Sage Durvasa gives her the special boon as she attends to him with a special care. Then the reflexive irrationality of a masculine gender implores her to test it on Sun God and she begets Karna whom she disowns and discards into the river. There is no amount of emotion bestowed in this action. She legitimately uses this boon again with the permission of Pandu three times. She shows her intolerance when Pandu marries Madri, but later she endows her boon to Madri also who begets Nakula and Sahadeva. . When Pandu and Madri die, she audaciously enters Hastinapura to regain her power. Role changing from docile to fierce happens simultaneously to her.

Gandhari is really a complex character in the novel as she is uprooted from her country one day to be rooted in the life of a blind man and she blindfolds herself to wave herself with her newly gained husband disregarding her loss of her parents and her bridegroom's blindness. Using socio-cognitive theory of gender development, this act can be explained as the assertion of her masculinity to the many injustices done to her without any reason.

She is not interested in the newly gained positions, yet she uses it for self-assertion. Her resistance might have ended up as a backdoor secret. When it comes about her children she is perfect in her original gender.

Droupati or Panchali suffers for the ignorance of Kunthi as she answers Arjuna to share the prize with brothers when the latter refers Droupati as his prize. Automatically she becomes spouse to five brothers. Her brother Shikhandi is neuter and Arjuna defeats Bhishma placing Shikhandi at the warfront. Panchali is the real 'man' among Pandavas as she stand strongly for her womanliness. She is contemptuous of Kauravas and makes fun of them when they enter Indraprastha. When Sushasana insults her she calls Krishna for help as she doesn't believe in the masculinity of her husbands who caused her predicament. She knows that she is being treated as a commodity to put at stake, by her husbands. She is contemptuous of her husbands at their helplessness and irrational decisions. She rises up occasionally with her masculine mental strength.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of these novels shows a shift in the gender roles of many male and female characters. When they mature themselves in years and mind their gender overlapping is more frequent than their immature days when they were a bit more solid about their gender. Vidhura's is mostly liquid as he stands always for the righteousness on both sides. He is neutral in his disposition. We can see that the good/bad binary and male/female binary fluctuates with different circumstances. It is not concrete as people believe in their moral concepts. Reflective reading of the novels is required to understand this shift in the binary opposites. Male and female

characters of these novels are not fixed in their gender roles. When they recognize their position and condition into which they are forced into, they occasionally drift into the opposites. Socio-cognitive theory of Sigmund Freud recognises a choice in human condition to select a gender in accordance with their social conditions and circumstances even when they should work within the God-assigned sex. Gender is the preferred societal role and it has a long range of manifestations. It can adhere to its sex assigned societal role or cross it to assert the preferences of its intuition and transgress the sex-assigned gender.

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