

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 5, May 2019

www.ijellh.com

Mathangi G

Assistant professor

Department of English

A. M. Jain College

Meenambakkam, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India

ganesh.mathangi@gmail.com

Redefining Gender Perspectives in Literature through Queer Questions: An Overview

Abstract

The term Queer was first used by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991 to describe constructs that did not adhere to binary gender and heterosexuality. Late twentieth century is considered to be a watershed from gender to gender queer. Gender became a deterministic term to denote codified and stabilized norms of human behaviour. Gender was no longer sufficient in itself to denote to fluidities in identities. It can be said that Queer is a product of the Feminist, Marxist ideologies and Structuralism of the early twentieth century. A need for an accommodative nomenclature to describe the ever divergent human orientation, there in grew gender queer. The roots of Queer theory traced to Gay and Lesbian studies too. Queer offers solutions to the problems related to identity and label. To reexamine homosexual texts .contexts and ideas in the new context is the primary role of Queer theory. This paper studies this paradigm shift from Gender to Gender Queer in the light of literary analysis and critiquing. This write up focuses on the need for such a shift propelled by socio- ethical models. Culture, from this perspective is reduced to a social constraint and queer is broader and a defining term that is all inclusive. The term defines the inappropriateness in terms likes sex and gender and manifested human desires. The main idea of this shift is to discover a

deviant discourse away from regular taxonomy and mono-scripting. The paper attempts to bring out this transition in theory and approach to societal issues and its consequent reflection in literature.

Keywords Queer; Gender; Homosexuality; Lesbian; Feminism; Equality; LGBTQ.

Introduction

The Genealogy of The Queer Theory: Introduction

“It takes strength to be proud of yourself and to accept yourself when you know that you have something out of the ordinary about you.”-Abigail Tarttelin.

The Queer is the byproduct of the gay and lesbian movements of the 1970s and 1980s in the USA and worldwide. This realization in society and literature ended with the inclusion of the Queer question in LGBT, resulting in LGBTQ. “The dynamic nature of both sexuality and the political organizing that has developed around it’ (Beemyn and Eliason;1996) - while talking about the spree of discussions and sociology about Queer for the past five years. The word Queer cannot be used to deal with gay and lesbian orientation alone as it includes a variety of terms like cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender corrective measures. The objectives of queer theory was to reinterpret gender studies in terms new emerging dimensions of human behaviour, as is represented in contemporary literature.

The basic idea of Queer theory in literature is to devise new vantage points to interpret texts to bring out divergent dimensions which question the idea of fixed sexual and gender identities. This approach rests on the individual’s questioning of constant sexual identity. It emphasizes that identity is fluid and is ever in formation. It exposes the contemporary meaninglessness of sexist terms like masculine, feminine gay, lesbian (Eliason & Schope; 2007). The difficulty to mark rigidly these terms and attribute unique characteristics is

brought out in Queer theory. Interpretation based on shared experiences is discussed in the queer dimension. Hence, queer is an umbrella term for all orientations away from heteronormativity, it is against stereotyping and classification of gender identities in literary discourses.

How Queer Is Feminism?

Feminism and Queer approaches to literature question the existing definitions of gender and sex. Both are subversive approaches to understand literature, but feminism relies on sexist approach, whereas queer questions it (Weed; 1997). To answer queer questions, twenty first century feminists brought in Queer Feminism to question the authority of patriarchal and dogmatized structures that challenge diversified sexual orientations of LGBT (Knauer, N. J.; 2009). Patriarchy is seen as the deformed social system hitherto designed and dominated by men, now steeped in vices like genocide, human rights violation, racism and disregard for human values. Stereotyping and liberal politics are seen as tools of victimization of the queer consciousness. The issues on non-binary genders other than masculine and feminine are dealt with in Queer Feminism. In her book, *No Future: Feminism, Queer theory and Ethics of Sex*, Carol Anne Tyler says,

“Whereas feminist theory sees sexual difference at the heart of sex, queer theory sees sexuality, testifying to an antagonistic structure of sex that cannot be overcome...by a happily coupling of the two fields.”

The shared future of Queer theory and Feminism becomes a question though sexuality is the pivot around which these theories turn; the former treats the structure of sexuality that suffers to answer queer orientations, while the latter talks of sexual consciousness of being a woman. Queerness thus becomes a larger issue beyond gender politics and the known gender concepts (Tyler;1994). Besides understanding the depravity of the feminist theories, to know the unknown and identify the other in literature, we need narratives that would not buy the

established gender assimilations. It is to be noted that even in same sex marriages, adoption is embraced upon to legitimize the social purpose of progeny in marriages and thus only uphold the institution of marriage that they challenged. The inclusion of Transgender in the homosexuals and heterosexuals results in an inclusive theory where Feminism finds no place. The addition of the questioning category to LGBT to make it LGBTQ is an attempt to make the list extend to even new categories of self identifications. LGBTQ refers to *the other*, suggests that sexual identities are gender typing is not congenital but can be realized over a period of time and can thereby be alternating in nature. The Third Wave Feminism of the 1980s and '90s took up activism in many forms. By 1980s groups of radicals began to articulate queer politics, reacting to abusive jargons hurled against gay and lesbian orientations. Lisa Duggan coined the term *Homonormativity* in 2002, to help assimilation of gay, lesbians and intersexual to be observed in to mainstream politics and social discussions, so far they have been castigated as *the other*. The Third Wave Feminism also took up new methods to politicize feminist issues. The concept of street theatres to depict the plight of HIV –AIDS affected deaths, named ACT UP. The concept of *Queer Nation* was formed in 1990s by the ACT UP activists to challenge violence against queer groups. As a result *Sex Positive Feminism* erected itself upon the principles of relieving not only both the sexes against violence but also the all the deviants from the same. Queer Feministic culture aims at creating congenial sex spaces for liberation and accommodation of deviants. Development of *Queer Media* conveyed new messages to all subgroups out of binary sexual orientation.

Queer Media And Gender Discourses

The third Wave Feminism aimed at creating *Queer Media*, the purpose of which is to create mass queer cultural productions to reach out the tech- savvy generation, that is why, Third Wave Feminism is always called not feminism but post-feminism, as it created a queer alternative to understand issues relating to feminism of the earlier two waves.

“For example, the Riot Grrrl movement, based in the Pacific Northwest of the US in the early 1990s, consisted of do-it-yourself bands predominantly composed of women, the creation of independent record labels and art. Their lyrics often addressed gendered sexual violence, sexual liberationism, heteronormativity, gender normativity, police brutality, and war.”

This broadened Feminist networks outside the US to discuss violence against the Third World, which led to *Trans National Feminism*. Western Feminism was attacked in Queer Media as being racist, dealing with problems concerning the whites, and these offer no solution to the complexities of globalization and Diasporas all around the world (Hubbard; 2013). The Third Wave Feminism created this Queer Media to convey that Queer must be used to relieve social structures from dogmatization of any sorts. The queer media supported coalition culture and politics as opposed to gender specific identity politics. It is a platform for the coloured, the whites, the feminists, trans people and the disabled to articulate the vices of established structures and promote coalition culture through media. It aims at creating intersexual politics to challenge global hierarchical structures to form politics of social justice (O’Riordan & Phillips; 2007). Queer media criticized minority model of identity politics. The gay and lesbian groups challenged their misrepresentations of visual culture and needed to label themselves as queer to gain entry in to civil politics (Rubin; 2011). The emerging argument was how social and cultural politics can be made inclusive to describe the other. When dealing with LGBTQ media, it is not monolithic but diverse and multifaceted (Signorile; 2003).

Queer media discusses relationships of the queer with mainstream media and their responses to it. Key concepts in media literacy can be used to depict queer consciousness. These are as follows:

- The meaning is attributed by the audiences.

- The underlying purpose of media is to redefine human experiences.
- Media does have an ideology and value.
- Commercial implications of media are a support for propaganda.
- Media has a unique aesthetic appeal
- All media is a representation of people, cultures and events.
- Media presents realities triggering the commercial sense of the audiences.
- Queer media helps to show the ideology of the queers in connection with queer demography and queer culture.

Queer Questions In Queer Media

- What is the purpose of creating the media and the text?
- Whose interests are being represented?
- Whose voices are absent?
- What do the narratives used talk about Queer people?
- Are they ridiculed or condemned?
- Is the Media conscious of not portraying the queer as mean and perverts?
- Does the media treat the queer as rounded individuals capable of proclaiming a self-thought identity?

Answers to the above questions reinvent new wave assimilation in gender construct.

Gender  Gender Queer

This paradigm shift is due to self styled identifications of people from binary gender classification to diversified leanings. The Human Rights campaign and the gender spectrum used the term *gender expansive* to add the *Q* to LGBT. A person who is *gender fluid* prefers to be identified with multi gender than with a particular. The terms *gender queer* came into vogue by the mid '90s in US and around the world.

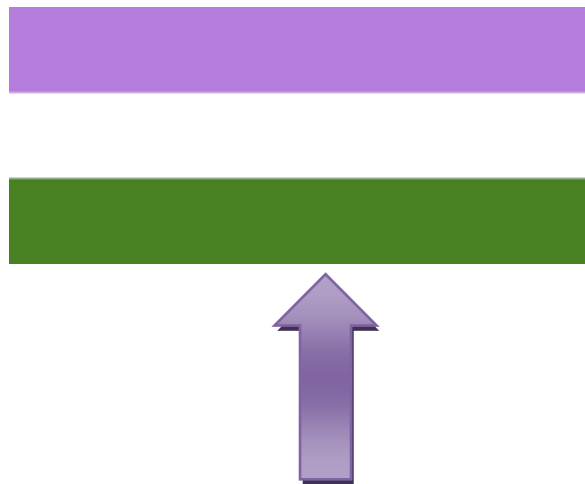


Figure 1: The gender queer flag above indicates the new proclaimed shift from gender to queer.

Furthering Queer Equality In Gender Construct: Conclusion

A need for gender non-binary approach in work places and educational institutions are mandated in view of the rising population of queer in millennial population, The use of gender neutral pronoun *they* is essential to denote the gender non-conformity of the queer. The options involve HR initiatives to remove single identity signage from bathrooms, a blank for gender columns in documents right from passports to all certificates. Non –binary legal recognition is a question to be answered affirmatively yet. We are moving towards *postgenderism* who argue that presence of gender roles would lead to inequality in queer structures. Words like *Trans humanism*, *post humanism* would supplement the word *gender* itself (Manalansan; 2006). Feminist movements thereby have eliminated not only binary stereotyping and gender stamping but have done away with gender itself. As Freud opined, human beings have entered the terrain of *polymorphous perversity*. Postgenderism transcends gender by changes in social and political arenas aided by technology and psychology. Technological progress is blurring such margins of workforce created by patriarchy. The future of gender studies is the understanding of the limitlessness of human experiences aided

by science and rationale. Gender has become as assumed term more than inherent biological codifications of *XX* or *XY*. Queer consciousness in gender puts an end to static biological and sexual identification and goes in for assumed sexual assimilation, thereby, deepening the gradient of sexless societies of individuals.

Declaration

The author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

References

- Beemyn, G. (1996). *Queer studies: A lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender anthology*. NYU Press.
- Butler, J. (2011). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. routledge.
- Eliason, M. J., & Schope, R. (2007). Shifting sands or solid foundation? Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identity formation. In *The health of sexual minorities* (pp. 3-26). Springer, Boston, MA.
- Hubbard, P. (2013). *Cities and sexualities*. Routledge.
- Knauer, N. J. (2009). LGBT elder law: Toward equity in aging. *Harv. JL& Gender*, 32, 1.
- Manalansan, M. F. (2006). Queer intersections: Sexuality and gender in migration studies. *International Migration Review*, 40(1), 224-249.
- O'Riordan, D. K., & Phillips, D. J. (2007). *Queer online: Media technology and sexuality*. Peter Lang.
- Rubin, G. (2011). *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*. Duke University Press.
- Signorile, M. (2003). *Queer in America: Sex, the media, and the closets of power*. Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Tyler, C. A. (1994). Passing: narcissism, identity and difference. *Differences: a journal of feminist cultural studies*, 6(2-3), 212-249.
- Weed, E. (Ed.). (1997). *Feminism meets queer theory (Vol. 2)*. Indiana University Press.