
Rethinking of Sexual Difference Beyond Binary: A Debate between Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray

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Abstract: Can we go beyond binary? By emphasizing this argument, it shall explore the notion of sexual difference which has not been recognized explicitly in the contemporary world. It articulates the different sexuality of women and other sex for the reconstruction of their subjectivity from the psychoanalytic framework. It argues that sexual difference is not based on gender differences. Gender difference does not construct the sexuality of the individual as one may have more than one sexuality. Globally, lesbians, gays, and queers are socially and culturally considered the problem of gender identity. These different sexualities are subjected to be recognized as an Other in the patriarchal discourse. Their social identities and sexuality are always being blurred, unrecognized, and questioned in society. It asserts that some people may have multiple sexualities but cannot entrench their identity due to the conventional norms and the inherent sexualities that create limitations among the individual. In this sense, it argues that different sexualities should be validated as the intelligible identity in a given society. Hence, by emphasizing this issue, I shall explore the rest with the debate of two contemporary feminist thinkers Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray, and how they have rearticulated sexual difference and established the recognition of sexual difference beyond the binary.

Keywords: sexual difference women, body and sexuality, subjectivity, Other gender, and sex.

1. Introduction

There is a contingent debate about the notion of sexual difference when we talk about body and sexuality. Both body and sexuality are pivotal terms that compel us to rethink differently in terms of women's sexuality. The social and cultural construction of sexual difference is divided into two, i.e. male/ female binary. But here, I shall explore the notion of sexual difference which is beyond binary. As the paper is explicitly concerned with the debate between Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler, it delves into the inscription of women's body and sexuality, Other gender, and how the sexual difference materializes through the performative acts. Further, it highlights other French feminists' views on sexual differences. Feminist understanding of sexual difference is explicitly different from the general understanding of it. The general understanding of sexual difference is based on the biological difference, that is male and female. But feminists such as

Helen Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler have given further views on that. For them, sexual difference is nothing but a social and cultural construction. The synthesis of Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray on the sexual difference would be explored below.

2. Analysis

Luce Irigaray and the other two French feminists constructed the notion of sexual difference based on female eroticism. Female eroticism is primarily associated with the entire body's desire. Women's desire, pleasure is so transgressive and open which have not been discovered yet. Their sexuality is more superior to men. They fulfill their *jouissance* without men. In this sense, Cixous argues that women have an infinite, cosmic libido, an eroticism that is always in flux and so minute and subtle and goes far beyond male/masculine sexuality. Irigaray argues that woman has sex organs just about everywhere. It depicts that women experience pleasure everywhere. As such women's bodies have multiple sexualities with one threshold of passion. French feminists have talked about the fantasies, wildness of women's eroticism in their own space against the binary logic. If we think of sexual difference within the binary logic that is masculine and feminine then, these two logocentrism reduce the subjectivity with the limitation. The binary possesses the possibility of yes or no which is a limiting way of constituting subjectivity.

As Cixous states that desire is something that never dies. The notion of desire is dealt with the female *jouissance*. Now the question is how the woman does experience their female *jouissance*. The response is that the female *jouissance* always operates outside of culture, language. It always remains in the body. As such, the feminists recommend that it should be operated within the language, expression, and culture for reconstructing the women's subjectivity outside the patriarchal discourses. Similarly, Irigaray describes women's sexuality in the pluralistic way that women have all over eroticism. Their body is a total sensuality where the whole of skin is alive to touch. The whole of my body is *sexuate*. My sexuality is not restricted to my sex and the sexual act.¹ Irigaray's morphological way of defining sexuality is considered as empowering women and a challenging to the traditional definition of feminine morphology where the bodies of women are seen as receptacles for masculine completeness.² Irigaray in her essay, the sex which is not one argues that a woman has no one sex, rather she has many.

Here Irigaray uses the two vulval lips or the libidinal voice as the gendered voice or voice for all women. The sex lips are self-pleasure, autoerotic and always touching and do not need any master phallus for their pleasure. Their sexuality is infinity. Woman as a whole touch by herself. They never ready to close. In this sense, openness is always emphasized. The woman is not fixed at any time, rather a woman is already in terms of becoming. Irigaray's views on autoerotism subvert the phallic hierarchy and replace it with the process of reciprocity and circularity. Because the labia do not have boundaries and barriers between them. As such they are both open and closed. The metaphysics of sex lips encourages the woman for *speaking woman and speaking as a woman*. Thus, the multiple sexualities and the plurality of sexuality stand against the binary, homosexuality, lesbian, bisexuality, etc. Irigaray uses the notion of erotic feeling as a political weapon for the construction of women's subjectivity in front of patriarchal discourse. The ethical norms of eroticism explicate the sexualities with no boundaries. Thereby, the women's body is represented as the subject instead of treating as the object for the male. But the problem is that the erotic feeling is always practiced by the women as unrecognized and unexpressed. It always lies in fiction and the fantasy world. As such, Helen Cixous recommends that women should write their history and jouissance so that it can be heard by everyone. Women should write their pleasure, and pain with the feminine language which is outside the masculine discourses. Because women's sexuality has always been defined in terms of male fantasies. But women's jouissance is beyond that the definition given by males. It is so open and wild that has not yet been discovered by men. Luce Irigaray talked about the two kinds of erotic jouissance. One is the phallic of orgasm which is concerned with men. And the other jouissance is concerned with the female libidinal economy in harmony.

The notion of *difference* has always been colonized by hierarchical and exclusionary ways of things. It may always be understood in terms of domination and exclusion. It is always functioning by binary politics which creates the split categories of otherness as Rozi Braidotti states. The term difference defines the other sex. In the patriarchal discourse, the otherness is always associated with the female otherness, which is considered as edge, boundary, border in the society. Feminists' understanding tries to preclude the fixed identity of female (being otherness) given by the masculinists discourse. The difference between I and you always turns out to be coextensive with the notion of sexual difference. It creates the issue of self and other. Thereby, sexual difference is the mirror of only binary difference and hides the other gender and sex.

As we have seen that lesbian, gay, queer is socially and culturally considered as the problem of identity and gender. These different sexualities are recognized as the outsider or blurred identity in the patriarchal discourse. Their social identities and sexuality are being blurred, re-defined, and questioned. In response to these blurred identities, many sexualities must be accepted by societal norms. It is a fact that some people have multiple sexualities which are being blurred in our society. The inherent sexualities create the limitation among the individual.

There is also a debate in lesbian and queer theory about the penis and phallus. Does the lesbian mimic heterosexual intercourse and perform the patriarchal norms? Does the lesbian consider as absolute outsider? Such terms construct the categorial identification which excludes the other. On the contrary, Judith Butler is against the categorial identification as it excludes the other. But Irigaray and other French feminists have argued that besides the absolute other, there is an erotic otherness of outside space for the women which is completely undiscovered by masculinist discourse. This otherness is a very personal, transgressive, radical form of female sexuality which goes beyond male sexuality. It is not a mimetic form of male sexuality, rather goes beyond male narcissism. Monique Wittig claims that a lesbian is a categorized societal other or outsider. For Wittig, lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject(lesbian) is not a woman either economically, or politically or ideologically. (1980, 53). It asserts that lesbian has no way to express their subjectivity in the language of heterosexuality. As such they must find out their voice in society. But Judith Butler as critics argues that Wittig assumes the social unity which either exists or has never existed. Wittig's view of lesbian sexuality affirms the notion of both heterosexual and homosexual norms rather than reinventing or re-writing the notion of gender and sexuality. In a nutshell, Wittig claims about the categorial identification or compulsory norms of heterosexuality rather than the construction of multiples sexualities. In Luce Irigaray's view, women are considered as commodities or objects that are exchanged between men in the psychoanalytic context. Irigaray asserts that there is the metaphysical supposition that as a woman she is silenced and negated and as a lesbian, she disappears from the masculinist system of exchange. As such the notion of lesbian subverts the economy of exchange that is based on the phallus. It is noted that Irigaray is somehow influenced by Wittig as she argues about the nonexistence of women in front of men.

Further, Irigaray's construction of sexual difference is explicitly emphasized essentialism which is often encountered by other feminists. Irigaray attempts to establish the new paradigm of sexual difference in the respect of the natural difference between the sexes. She swiftly moves from essentialism to culture as she does not replace the penis with the vagina. Because the vagina is a part of the masculine discourse of subverting women. By establishing the notion of sexual difference Irigaray charges the notion of pre-existing, pre-given, and determinant attributes of the feminine. But later, Irigaray assumes that both men and women have different natural characteristics, expressions that signify the different discourses for the different range of activities. Irigaray's earlier notion of sexual difference thus, appeals for the understanding of the fixity of the natural world, material world and which is the ground of the social world. On the contrary, her later version of sexual difference is manifested not only in the fixity norms but also in the process of open-ended growth and unfolding. As we are a human being that surrounded by the material phenomena, natural phenomena that materialize in the process of growing with the norms of nature. In this sense, it attempts to dispute that Irigaray

is influenced by the phenomenological perspective. Through the experiences of the natural phenomena, the attributes of both men and women naturally materialized in the process of becoming. Hence, it is believed that human beings have specific sexual attributes to be gradually and culturally developed. In other words, the norms of nature are defined as involving. The term 'nature' has been understood in the two senses. First, the nature of something that denotes her/his defining character or essence which possesses different natures. Secondly, nature signifies the material world or environment that exists with the structure of developments but independently of human transformative activities.³ It is the pivotal key that makes Irigaray rethink the sexual difference and argues that sexed individuals are not the same involving with the norms of nature rather they differ in a certain respect of rhythm.⁴ Hence, Irigaray's version of essentialism denotes the essential characteristics of both men and women that consist of the rhythms that ensure their bodies and experiences grow and unfold in distinctive ways. In other words, any form/ essential/ character of a thing consists in its tendencies to unveil the certain patterns of unfolding. In this sense, Irigaray, by accommodating the nature of sexual difference constructs the symbolic status of sexual difference. Symbolic status of sexual difference always leads to the coherent identity of gender that is masculinity and femininity. The notion of duality seems to remain in the articulation of sexual difference. Irigaray thus, can not overcome the binary or symbolic status for which has been encountered by Judith Butler.

For Butler, gender is understood as opposite discourses in the norms of a sexual difference since gender is a culturally constructed norm for the deconstruction of sexual difference. As it's been mentioned above that Butler chooses culture over nature, argues that gender, sex division and heterosexuality are culturally produced and be subverted. There is a difference among the women, but it is constructed by gender norms that regularly changing and do not fix any identity on women and experience. For Butler sexual difference is culturally constructed which materialize over time. It has no fixed or coherent difference rather it shifts because of gender norms. Sexual difference embodies in gender norms. Gender norms are the ground of constituting the sexual difference, but Butler argues that gender should not be considered as the surface or matter for identifying the effect that he/she possesses. She made a distinction between gender and sex. She asserts with this distinction that given sexual body create different genders as the product of social construction. But Butler states that how a sexed body generates a certain gender identity smoothly with the performance of gender which regulates (reflects) the biological sex and influenced (restricted) by it. However, gender is a discursive mechanism that produces sex as a natural essence that precedes any discourse. Hence, the body itself is a social construction as such, the discourse regarding the body, sexuality, gender, biology, and nature determines what is considered as the body, its boundaries and meaning. Gender for Butler is always performative. The performance of gender is manifested in performativity and produces the social identity. In other words, their performative acts constitute the subject that brings them into

being. Being is doing. The different possibilities of the subject can be done differently. It has no fixed ontology. It will be a limitation if gender is counted as a separate model based on sex. Gender is not sex-based, unlike Irigarayan. Both sex and gender can be seen as an interacted relationship. Sex can be understood as a gendered body as it is created by the culture. The materiality of the sex is materialized in the process of performativity within the regulatory norms. We are always constrained by the cultural conditioning and power relationship of the culture that we are part of. Our desires which may be a form of performative enactment also engaged in unconsciously or knowingly, unknowingly due to our cultural conditioning. Similarly, gender is something that we enact. It is an aspect of identity which are created through a *stylized repetition of performative acts*. As Butler states, there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis.⁵ Hence, both sex and gender are beyond nature. Moreover, Butler rearticulates Merleau Ponty's reflection on the *Phenomenology of Perception* of the body in its sexual being and argues that the human body is a historical idea rather than a natural species. Here, Butler is inspired by Simone de's view on the woman that gender is a historical situation rather than a natural fact. It asserts that every performative act distinctively constitutes the individual. It argues that the body does have natural characteristics, but the performativity of each discourse constitutes the subject. In a precise word, it is called 'one of many'. Alike in the book of *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference*, it's been mentioned that each body is composed of multiple forces that enable the subject to act in particular kinds of activity. Alison, the author has given the notion of preconscious impulses that makes the subject come into being. For the author, the body is one of multiplicity. Hence, it argues that the essence/natural attributes of the subject cannot be ignored away but such attributes construct the nature of performativity of the body. To start with something newly constructed also, there is a need for the pre-existence of the thing. For instance, 'dot' is required to make the line also. The pre-existence of the 'dot' is precisely constructing the subsequent existence of the entity which is merely understood as the constituted subject in/object. The notion of pre-given is somehow contributed for an alternative way to the subsequent construction. On the contrary, the multiplicity of the body is a conflict with the synthesis of Luce Irigaray on sexual duality in several ways. For Irigaray, sex is not one which only engenders heterosexual but also the many, more and multiplicity which emerges from the Other gender. Now the question is how can we synthesize the multiplicity of the body with the Irigarayan version of sexual duality? In response to this question, it argues that whether it is a natural duality of sexuality and the multiplicity of the body is not independent of self-construction and self-differentiation. It is a naturally self-differentiated process that is also constrained by our cultural conditioning. Cultural conditioning renders the individual into the sexual difference and the pre-condition for

the construction of multiplicity. Hence, it asserts that the Irigarayan version of sexual difference is merely natural but a process of self-differentiation and self-construction which is culturally expressed in a self-limiting form.

In contrast to Irigaray, Butler's notion of sexual difference is not only about the recognition of heterosexuality rather the construction of the Other gender by seeking the queer theory. She wants to abolish the categorical identification as it excludes the other. As such, Butler tends to erase the distinction between the notion of gender and sexual difference. Queer theory has been played as the internalization of the division between constructionism and essentialism of gender. Though for Butler gender has been introduced to detach masculinity and femininity from essentialism or biology, the notion of sexual difference makes her theorize the differences between the subjects in certain ways. The sexual difference has been introduced for the repudiation of marginalization and for constituting the value of liberalism focused on the universalized individual subject. Butler attempts to disrupt the binary construction of gender to disavow heterosexuality. The sexual difference most often holds the femininity and masculinity as two different modes of relating to language and considered as the limits of symbolic identity which is supposed to be articulated as the difference cannot be easily considered as an effect of gender that is culturally constructed and different meaning. In Butler's account of queer theory, we can see that there is an attempt of theorizing the forms of subjectivity by embracing the difference within and between the subjects. But Butler makes the differences within the difference based on the repudiation of sexual difference. As such, Butler's accounts for queer theory also remain in the logic of universality which is only confined to the external alterity 'other' by displacing the psychic split subject called the internal alterity domain. Butler's such politics of exclusion and inclusion signifies the limitation. Identification for the subject is a response or prescription for its sexual difference and symbolic limit. If it integrates inclusion, the experienced symbolic limit and inconsistency of the subject render the subject to internalize the limit as threaten to the externalization of Other. Such accountability would a way better potential for endorsing the Other and the external form of difference. Thus, Butler also explicitly constitutes the subject whose identity relies on the process of exclusion and the repudiation of differences.

Though Butler initially in her book *Bodies that Matter* exposes the result of the logic of universal to theorize bisexuality, but her process of the formation of subject fails to render bisexuality for which it is understood as inconceivable. Butler's argument on a 'domain of unthinkable, abject unliveable bodies' that signifies the status of the symbolic order and precisely engenders the heterosexuality compulsory.⁶ The irony is Butler seems to exclude bisexuality from the domain of intelligibility. In this sense, some subjects are considered as the intelligible subject with the significance of gender and sexuality to Other. The question is why some subjects are not identified as intelligible subjects? In this regard, we can see the hegemony of identity politics between the differences. Though Butler's formation of the subject depends on the disavowal of differences and perception of the sexual and

racial other threatening, ultimately such denial of differences reduces the effect (agency) of the contingent discursive meaning which constitute Other as other within the matter of structural necessity. Indeed, Butler's account of disavowal of differences is represented as the necessary condition for establishing the subjectivity to the symbolic differences. As such, the crux of repudiation of differences makes the bisexual subject inconceivable. Butler's account of subject formation is inherent in all the social constructionists to idealize the heterosexual norms of the subject and embraces the discursive construction of the subject to the symbolic order. Indeed, the universal approach of the formation of the subject makes Butler unable to recognize the possibility of different subjective responses to the difference. In other words, Butler represents the psychoanalytic vision in which only masculine subjects respond to the limits of the symbolic norm. Hence, by accommodating the logic of universal, Butler attempts to internalize the limit of symbolic from the perspective of the internal, psychic domain to a living 'other' who embodies and represents the limits.⁷ Ultimately, her accounts of the formation of the subject depending on the mode of exclusion and repudiation of difference. Within the difference, the possibility of different subjects has been ignored and externalize in Other instead of internalizing the limits. Hence, in Butler's account of constructing the subject, the socially constructed meaning is not maintaining the structure of inclusion/exclusion rather prejudice maintains it. Therefore, Butler could not constitute the subject outside of an inclusion/exclusion binary which has reflected in her account of the formation of the subject. As Butler states:

The forming of a subject requires identification with the normative phantom of sex and this identification takes place through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject can not emerge. The subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation.⁸

In this formulation, it has also been noted that Butler from the psychoanalytic perspective defines the split subject as unsymbolized, internal alterity (self-difference). It is a sort of constructing heterosexual subject, the male subject through the force of exclusion of homosexuality, bisexuality, and femininity. As such, it is synthesized that such domains of abjection hurt the very integrity of the subject. In this sense, Butler fails to theorize the subjectivity outside of an inclusion/exclusion binary and reduces the subject to the ego. Freud may have designated identification as the primary mechanism in the formation of the ego, but as Lacan made clear to confuse the ego with the subject is akin to confusing the child with its image in the mirror.⁹ Identification merely functions to conceal the fragmentation of the subject: the ego that emerges from it but an imaginary formation that provides the subject with an illusory sense of coherence.¹⁰ As a result, Butler's account for the formation of the subject with identification fails to accommodate the equal subject position within the symbolic norm. Butler's emphasis on the identification with the symbolic norm is a condition of becoming subject and

she fails to constitute the embodiment relation between internal alterity and external alterity. As such, external alterity that is concrete other has been accepted within the sexual difference but not all.

3. Conclusion

Besides the apparent difference between males and females, there are many other sexual differences in the world. Such apparent sexual difference is constructed based on essentialism. In other words, the biological body creates the sexual difference between male and female. Biological constructed difference limits the identity of the subject with fixed and stable meaning. If we follow the biological-based sexual difference, we have pre-existing, pre-given, determination signification of the women. Such biological notion enforces us to think of the sexual difference in a natural way. Whereas sexual difference is not essentially constructed but culturally, linguistically, politically, constructed. Gender is an opposite discourse in the norms of sexual difference. It is obvious that gender, sex, and heterosexuality are culturally produced but at the same time, can be subverted also. In the language of Butler, thus, if we think sex is a different module then we will make a blunder mistake. Sexual differences are not based on gender differences. Butler investigates this problem of sexual difference by abolishing the difference between gender and sex. Because we are always constrained by the power relation of the culture of which we part of. Hence, our desire under the norms of performative enactment knowingly or unknowingly, consciously, or unconsciously engages in the cultural condition. Thereby, the argument is that if we follow the sexual difference naturally, then we have an only apparent sexual difference that is male/female. As it has been mentioned above that besides heterosexuality, many other sexual differences have not been counted as the subject in this structural world but can't ignore them either as they are already a part of the language of identity. The norms of the linguistic and political move and cultural discourse can make their life thinkable. Hence, it argues that there are many sexual differences and heterosexuality is one of them. Precisely, heterosexuality is one of many. From the natural perspective, perhaps, it asks about the different features of sexed bodies. The sexed bodies are constructed in the norms of naturalness in society. There are indeed different features of the material body. Some features of the bodies are considered as sexed, and some are not. But if we follow the Butlerian argument that why some features are considered as the sexed body? Because such consideration has gone through the social arrangement in the respect of productivity. Hence, Butler argues that there is a multiplicity of bodily forces but not inherently sexed bodies. Unlike, for Irigaray, the multiplicity is the common character of all bodies. Irigaray chooses two from many whereas Butler argues for the one of many. For Butler, no one is born an individual. In the sense that the becoming of individuation, sexed subject, gendered subject, gendered body materialized in the process of both performativity and recognition. They are made meaning socially, culturally, politically, psychologically etc. In this paper, I,

besides the different sexual difference have tried to find out the sexual difference within the women itself excluding the men's sexuality that goes beyond binary. Further, in posthumanism we can see the revolution of sexual difference where the individual of the society does not need to reduce their sexualities to binary. Moreover, individual need not to reduce the identity to the gender roles or assigned roles. It neither belongs to the apparent binary nor any other fabricated gender role. In fact, it is a matter of choice for performing their gender roles. Gender always renders the constrain on human potential. Advanced technology such as neurotechnology, biotechnology, and reproductive technologies takes the place of eliminating the notion of reflexive biological and psychological gendering in the human subject. Such technologies make the biological traits unnecessary for reproduction and accommodate the norms of experiencing both masculinity and femininity role. As such, sexual difference need not to be assigned to only binary rather beyond that.

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Notes

- ¹ Ives Kelly, 'Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva: The Jouissance of French Feminism', Crescent Moon Publication, 2018 p.55,
- ² *Ibid.*, p.55.
- ³ Alison Stone, 'Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference' Cambridge Press, 2009, p.3
- ⁴ Irigaray defines rhythm in the respect of the structures of sexual difference, i.e., the primary structure of the process, flow and becoming in which the form and content are united in a regulated harmony. It is a causal factor that regulates the circulation of bodily fluid, but it is not a genetic material. Rhythm always deals with the time, space that accommodates the bodily forms with the emergence of sexually specific bodily capacities and forms of experience and perception.
- ⁵ Judith, Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York, 1990, pp.191-192
- ⁶ Judith, Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Routledge, New York, 1993, p.3.
- ⁷ Susan, Feldman, 'Reclaiming Sexual Difference: What Queer Theory Can't Tell Us about Sexuality', *Journal of Bisexuality*, Routledge, 2009, pp.259-278.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3.
- ⁹ Susan, Feldman, 'Reclaiming Sexual Difference: What Queer Theory Can't Tell Us about Sexuality', *Journal of Bisexuality*, Routledge, 2009, pp.259-278.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.259-278.