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ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Presentation of Socially Gendered Stereotypes in the Movie- *Raincoat*

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Abstract:

The paper proposes to apply gender studies on the movie- *Raincoat*. For this purpose, Rituparno Ghosh's film *Raincoat* was analyzed on the basis of gender studies by various literary critics like Judith Butler, Shulamith Firestone, Ann Oakley, Simone de Beauvoir and others. The main aim of this study was to present gender troubles which is deep rooted in our society. The construction of male and female bodies and the development of thought process that constructs their behaviors in our society are made through cultural practices. The movie *Raincoat* is a fine example of inequalities and differences between women and men which is sown on the birth of a child.

Keywords: gender studies, society, inequalities, differences, women, men

Introduction

In order to delve deep into gender studies, the Hindi Bollywood film- *Raincoat*-2004, directed by Rituparno Ghosh has been taken. The film is an adaptation of the short story *The Gift of the Magi* (1906) by O Henry. *Raincoat* is a simple tale of two beautiful gestures in one afternoon which is told poetically and uncompromisingly by author and director Rituparno Ghosh. Inspired from O Henry's classic short story *The Gift of Magi* (1906) and Radha-Krishna's unrequited romance, *Raincoat* relies heavily on the seething chemistry of Manoj (a part played by Indian film actor Ajay Devgan) and Neeru (actor Aishwarya Rai). The movie-*Raincoat* is a fine blend of emotions and gender issues portrayed on the canvas of socially gendered society.

(I)

Within feminism and gender studies, the body has occupied a key position in a wide range of debates, including: men's control of women's bodies as a key means of subordination; critiques of dichotomous thinking; and in debates about essentialism and the theorizing of difference and diversity. Feminists have long recognized that bodies matter in social relations, but over time, there have been shifts in conceptions of what the body is, especially in relation to nature and to culture. The range of conceptions of the body present within gender studies can be grouped into three broadly defined categories: the body as nature, the body as socially constructed, and embodiment. In 'body as nature' perspectives, the body is conceptualized as a natural, biological entity that determines inequalities or differences between women and men. In Firestone's (1979) analysis, for example, inequality between women and men is based on biological differences in the body's reproductive functions. The capacity of women to conceive, carry, give birth to and breastfeed a child

meant that, until fairly recently, women were at the continual mercy of their biological bodies. Hence, women became dependent upon men for their survival. For Firestone, the natural difference in bodily reproductive capacity evolved over time into other, culturally based, differences. In order to eliminate inequalities between women and men, Firestone contends that it is necessary to eliminate the bodily differences in reproductive functions. She advocates the use of advanced scientific methods, so that all aspects of the debilitating processes of natural reproduction would take place outside of a woman's body, for example, the fertilization of eggs by sperm and the growing of foetuses in artificial wombs. Firestone regards women's natural bodies negatively; arguing that they have to become more like men's if equality is to be achieved. Other writers, who similarly rely on a conception of the body as natural and determining, take a more positive view of women's bodies, arguing that their more extensive sexual and reproductive capacities make women superior to men. Writing in the 1970s, Alice Rossi identified biological differences in the responsiveness of women and men to children. For Rossi, these biological differences, rooted in the body, made women better able to care for children than men. As a consequence, equality between the sexes should not be achieved through women devolving childcare responsibilities to others. Rather, equality should be achieved through securing proper societal recognition for women's distinctive, biologically rooted childcare abilities (discussed in Sayers 1982: 148–9). In the work of French feminist writers such as Cixous and Irigaray, sexual bodily differences between women and men are stressed, with women's bodies praised and valorized as an especial source of women's empowerment (see Tong 1998; Whitford 1991).

In contrast to 'body as nature' perspectives, those who regard the body as 'socially constructed' emphasize social and cultural practices. In 'mild' versions of social constructionist perspectives, such as socialization theories, the natural physical body is recognized but primarily as an object of interpretation and the attribution of meaning. In sex-role theory, for example, it is argued that the appropriate behavioral roles for each sex are learnt, especially during childhood. Boys and girls learn the social roles appropriate to their sex, as this is marked by their body, through social interaction with successfully socialized adults and immersion in sex-typed culture, and reinforcement through a system of rewards and punishments. It is suggested within sex-role theory that gender inequalities can be reduced through altering socialization into sex-roles, via, for example, non-sexist childrearing practices (Weinreich 1978; Maccoby and Jacklin 1975). Thus, in sex-role theories, the social and cultural practices arising from meanings given to female and male bodies are emphasized as primarily important, rather than the natural body itself. Nevertheless, the conception of the body present with socialization perspectives has residues of biological determinism. This tendency is clear in the account of Maccoby and Jacklin (1975), who explicitly refer to biology as the 'framework' which constrains socialization practices, making it possible for culture only to minimize, rather than eliminate, the effects of natural biological differences between women and men. As Connell (1987: 50) explains, in socialization theories 'the underlying image is of an invariant biological base'. The concept of the body 'hidden' within mild social constructionist approaches is that of a real, physical entity, unchanging across time and space, and which is, in and of itself, unaffected by culture. In contrast, 'strong' versions of social constructionist approaches to the body place so much emphasis on culture

and representations, especially in terms of language and discourse that the body as a real, physical entity all but disappears. Judith Butler, for example, proposes that,

the body is not a “being” but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality (*Gender Trouble*, 177).

In her theory of gender performativity, Butler argues that ‘the anticipation of a gendered essence’ in social and cultural life ‘produces that which it posits as outside itself’ (*Gender Trouble*, 15). In other words, in acting as if sex and gender ‘really’ exist, we bring sex and gender into being. For Butler, the ‘repetition’ and ‘ritual’ of ‘gender performances’ have an ongoing outcome. They contribute to the ‘naturalizing’ of bodies, making the ‘cultural fiction’ of gender appear credible and real, rather than being, as Butler contends, a corporeal (or bodily) ‘style’ or ‘enactment’, a constitution of meaning (*Gender Trouble*, 177-8). Butler cites the example of drag (in which a person ‘performs’ a gender that does not ‘match’ their ‘sex’) in illustration of her argument that bodies are not ‘beings’ but are the effects of discourses. The ‘strong’ social constructionist approach epitomized by Butler has been criticized for dissolving the body as a real, material entity. For example, Klein writes, ‘The bodies I have been reading about in postmodern feminist writing do not breathe, do not laugh and have no heart’ (qtd. in Brook 1999). Sayers (1982) uses the example of menstruation to argue that biology does have real physical effects on women’s bodies and their experiences, effects not limited to the discourses circulating within a society (see also Oakley 1998). Within ‘embodiment’ perspectives, the body is conceptualized simultaneously both as a natural, physical entity and as produced through cultural, discursive practices. Connell (1987) examines the interrelations of nature and culture on the body. He identifies a set of cultural practices which, in combination, act to ‘negate’ (or minimize) the similarities between the bodies of women and men, through over-exaggerating their differences. Clothing and accessories are an important means of achieving the negation of the body: skirts, high-heeled shoes and handbags (all with ‘feminine’ styling) for ‘female’ bodies, and trousers (with pockets), ties, and flat shoes (all with ‘masculine’ styling) for ‘male’ bodies. Connell also identifies cultural practices which ‘transcend’ (or transform) the body physically, making and remaking bodies so that they are more, or less, feminine or masculine. For example, the differing physicality of men’s and women’s bodies is brought about, in part, through cultural practices in which boys and men are encouraged, more than girls and women, to be physically strong and confident. Connell argues therefore that, rather than natural biology determining men’s and women’s bodies as different, masculine and feminine bodies are largely made as such through cultural practices. ‘The body, without ceasing to be the body, is taken in hand and transformed in social practice’ (1987: 83). Elizabeth Grosz argues for a similar conception of the body in her development of ‘corporeal feminism’. She challenges dichotomous thinking that posits a split between, on the one hand, the ‘real’, material body, and on the other, its various cultural and historical representations (*Volatile Bodies*, 21). Grosz further notes,

It is not simply that the body is represented in a variety of ways according to historical, social and cultural exigencies, while it remains basically the same; these factors actively produce the body as a body of a determinate type (*Volatile Bodies*, 10).

For Grosz, the body should be at the centre of the analysis of women's and men's subjectivity, but not in a biologicistic or essentialist sense. The concept of 'embodied subjectivity' means recognizing that who we are ('female, male, black, brown, white, large or small' (*Volatile Bodies*, 19) arises from the 'corporeal' (the body), as this is itself inscribed by the cultural, within changing time and shifting space (23). Importantly, embodiment perspectives point to the status of the body as an unfinished entity. In being continually subject to on-going cultural work, the material body can only ever be apprehended through culture. Embodiment represents the current moment in conceptualizing the body but the tension between the body as 'real' and the body as discursive remains a key axis of debate within gender studies.

Lees's (1989) research revealed a double standard of sexual reputation within the sexual cultures of young people. 'A girl's standing can be destroyed by insinuations about her sexual morality, a boy's reputation in contrast is usually enhanced by his sexual exploits' (*Growing Up Good*, 19). Terms like 'slag' and 'tart' were especially important ways through which girls' sexuality was socially controlled and regulated. Lees found that this language of sexual reputation was applied exclusively to girls and there was no equivalent label set applied to boys. In their efforts to avoid being labeled as a slag or a tart, girls had permanently to monitor and check their sexuality, including their style of dress, their friendliness with boys and their number and frequency of sexual encounters. Research by Holland and her colleagues (1996) also revealed that similar sexual behavior by young women and young men tends to result in different sexual reputations. In the words of one of the young women interviewed,

'If you sleep around you're a slag, if a bloke sleeps around he's lucky' (*Sexual Cultures*, 242). On the basis of their findings, Holland and her colleagues argued that both young women and young men constructed their sexuality in response to the rules of masculine-dominated heterosexuality. Young women had to safeguard their sexual reputation and avoid being labeled as sexually promiscuous, while young men had to demonstrate their sexual reputation in order to enhance their standing with their masculine peer group. The concept of the double standard has also been used in the analysis of the ageing process. Sontag (1979) has argued that, as they grow older, men and women are evaluated by different standards, and this is advantageous for older men. The qualities and attributes that women are valued for, especially their youthful physical attractiveness, are threatened by growing older. Men's value depends less on how they look and more on what they do, particularly economically. Sontag also points to the ways in which signs of ageing in men are less heavily penalized than they are in women. In men, wrinkles and grey hair may be valued as a sign of experience and be described as 'distinguished'. In contrast, women are more strongly encouraged to conceal signs of ageing on their faces and their bodies, due to the importance of youthful attractiveness to women's sexual candidacy. As a concept, the double standard is most often used to describe a disparity between the experiences of women and men, which is to the benefit of men. Judith Butler's model of gender as performative seems to wipe away the last vestiges of essentialism in her argument that we produce gendered identity by the process of naming/citation – the pronouncement that 'it's a girl' on the birth of a child.

Ann Oakley's path finding text, *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972) lays the ground for further exploration of the construction of gender. She notes how Western cultures seem most

prone to exaggeration of gender differences and argues that ‘the “social efficiency” of our present gender roles centers round women’s role as housewife and mother. There is also the more vaguely conceived belief that any tampering with these roles would diminish happiness, but this type of argument has a blatantly disreputable history and should have been discarded long ago’ (Oakley 1972: 192). This was not the first time that such distinctions had been made – indeed they were very much the stuff of anthropology, psychoanalysis and medical research; significantly for feminism, Simone de Beauvoir had explored this distinction in *The Second Sex* two decades previously with her statement that ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ (de Beauvoir 1972: 295). De Beauvoir’s discussion makes clear the ways in which gender differences are set in hierarchical opposition, where the masculine principle is always the favored ‘norm’ and the feminine one becomes positioned as ‘Other’. For de Beauvoir femininity can only be defined as lack – ‘between male and eunuch’ (de Beauvoir 1972: 295), so that civilization was masculine to its very depths, and women the continual outsiders. The majority of feminists in the 1970s seemed to embrace the notion of gender as ‘construct’ and popular youth culture seemed to endorse this in the 1970s’ passion for ‘unisex’ clothing. However, Shulamith Firestone is one exception who suggested in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) that patriarchy exploits women’s biological capacity to reproduce as their essential weakness. The only way for women to break away from the oppression, she argues, is to use technological advances to free themselves from the burden of childbirth. Moreover, she advocates breaking down the biological bond between mothers and children and establishing communes where monogamy and the nuclear family are things of the past.

Butler’s conception of gender is perhaps the most radical of all, taking as she does a Foucauldian model, and asserting that all identity categories ‘are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin’ (Butler 1990: 9). She argues further that ‘the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies’ (Butler 1990: 6). In simple terms, something is ‘gendered’ when its character is either masculine or feminine, or when it exhibits patterns of difference by gender. Pink and blue, for example, are gendered colors, the former regarded as ‘feminine’ and the latter as ‘masculine’. Paid work is a gendered institution, in that women and men undertake different forms of paid work (women tend to work part-time, men tend to work fulltime), in different types of paid work (say, women in nursing, men in construction), and have different average earnings from paid work; see Crompton 1997).

Research within the field of gender studies has examined the presence of gender stereotyping in key agencies of socialization, such as families, the education system and the media. For example, it is through the application of ‘sex role’ stereotypes by adults, especially parents, that infants and children learn what is deemed appropriate or inappropriate behavior for their sex (for example, Parsons and Bales 1956). In a study of secondary schools, Riddell (1992) found that teachers stereotyped girls as mature, neat and conscientious, while boys were seen as aggressive and lacking in discipline. As a consequence, teachers devoted more attention to boys as a strategy of maintaining order in the classroom. Riddell also found that many of the teachers she studied subscribed to a

gendered ideology in which femininity was equated with actual or potential motherhood. This dominant stereotype also served to marginalize girls and women as actual or potential workers, and so may have compromised the schools' policy of equal opportunities. Studies of reading materials and textbooks used in schools have been shown to contain gender stereotypes. Research on gender stereotyping in the media also suggests that femininity is routinely associated with domesticity and sexuality. In a classic study, Tuchman (1981) examined media depictions of American women from the 1950s onwards. Her findings were that women were stereotyped either as sexual objects, or as housewives, or in jobs which were reflections of their domestic/caring role. Tuchman described such narrow and constricting representations as amounting to the 'symbolic annihilation of women', in that they failed to accurately reflect the range of women's lives in reality.

(II)

Analysis of the Movie- *Raincoat*

1. Gender Stereotyping in Characters

In the first part of the movie, Manoj is seen crying in the bathroom because of his depressed state of affairs due to loss of job, this clearly shows that even a Man has a tender sight of emotions which he tries to hide in lieu of his so called gender stereotyping. As Butler points out that 'the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that "women" will interpret only female bodies' (Butler 1990: 6).

Further when Alok's wife, Sheila (a part played by actor Mauli Ganguly) says to Manoj, '*Next time when you cry in the bathroom, do put on the shower, there are few things which could be learnt from girls too*'.

It stresses upon the fact that gender is a culturally constructed framework whose nucleus in reality is mere hypocrisy.

The movie also shows the two women Neeru and Sheila confined to their four walls of the house and their husbands open to the outside world. Women are stereotyped either as sexual objects, or as housewives, or in jobs which are reflections of their domestic/caring role. Thus media plays a pivotal role in showcasing the Masculine characters to dominate while the few female characters to be stereotyped in domestic settings. Ann Oakley's path finding text, *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972) notes how Western cultures seem most prone to exaggeration of gender differences and argues that 'the "social efficiency" of our present gender roles centers round women's role as housewife and mother.

2. Socially Constructed Roles

The character of Neeru portrays woman in general who is culturally so brought up that she is dependent upon a man for economic and social security in her life. She looks in her prospective husband all sorts of materialistic gains. When Neeru tells Manoj that her fiancé works in good company and can give her variety of comforts, it displays her societal constructed mindset where the man is considered the bread winner, 'the norm' and woman

just an object of beauty who is foolish and regarded as ‘the other’ as suggested by Simone de Beauvoir. Also, the inability of Manoj to change the circumstances in his favour and Neeru blaming him for not being successful in life reflects that boys and girls learn the social roles and responsibilities appropriate to their sex and are further weighed down by their contributions in the society.

To further add to the agony of Manoj, when the landlord (actor Annu Kapoor) says to him, ‘if you did not have a bold heart, then why did u fell in love with her (Neeru) or you had some rich woman in your life because of whom you had this- I do not care attitude for Neeru’?

This statement of landlord clearly acts as a slap on the face of much humiliated Manoj or rather on the society which categorizes men as the strong or bold counterparts in comparison to women who are known to be weak.

In the next scene when Manoj pays the three month rent of Neeru’s house, the landlord comments, ‘Is it your expiation or vengeance’?, shows the conflicting side of man which on one hand displays his extreme guilt ridden soul and on the other hand drives out immense pleasure in satisfying his male centered ego which lies in subjugation of woman.

Furthermore, the portrayal of women outside the realms of household is confined to the role of a secretary whose sole purpose is to take care of her superior’s needs who in turn is a male. Thus, highlighting that paid work too is a gendered institution, in which women and men undertake different types of work.

Manoj’s remark to Sheila in the last part of the film that she is very practical, to which Sheila replies, ‘Women have to be practical in life’, displays that women in our society are taught to undergo subjugation of men in their lives with a smile put up on their face that says they are ‘happily married’ which rather means ‘happily being subjugated’.

3) The Title –*Raincoat*

The title of the movie literally means a coat that protects oneself from rain but in the movie the two characters Manoj and Neeru though try their best to hide their agony caused by separation but they eventually fail to do so. This is the result of the gap which is constructed in our society due to gender specific roles wherein the ordinary emotions are buried under the ordeal of gender trouble.

Conclusion

Thus, the complete film is an explicit account of gender troubles that are prevalent in our society and are intricately intertwined with the meeting of the two players who indulge in a game of ‘Everybody says I am fine.’ The movie *Raincoat* instead of covering the gendered shortcomings of our society, uncovers it and brings forth the gendered stereotyping of human beings.

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