

# GENDER PEDAGOGY AND FEMINIST POLITICS

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Feminist scholarship has developed the sex/gender distinction in complex directions since the initial formulation that separated 'biology' from 'culture'. Feminist historians of science such as Anne Fausto-Sterling have shown how the binary sex model developed in Europe with Enlightenment and the coming of 'modernity', with the biomedical sciences actively intervening to fix gender as binary and pathologizing and disciplining bodies that were not clearly Male or Female. American philosopher Judith Butler has developed the idea of gender as 'performance', this performativity not being counterposed to 'reality', but indicating rather, that 'sex' has to be forcibly materialized over time through performance and citationality.

The intervention of biomedical sciences and the pharmaceutical industry on biological bodies ranges from sex reassignment on intersex babies through surgery and hormone therapy, to treating as a disease, men

with 'fatty tissue around the nipples', a common, non-dangerous body type, but treated as a disease, called gynaecomastia. The fact that both testosterone and estrogen are found in all bodies, and that the hormone levels change in even one body over time and with different kinds of activity (aggression raises testosterone, nurturing raises estrogen) should teach us that maleness and femaleness are fluctuating characteristics. Gender thus, should be understood as fluid and as constituting a continuum.

But we often see 'gender' being conflated with 'women', in government discourses in India but also sometimes in Women's Studies. For government, the use of gender for women refers to women as they are formed in patriarchy through the sexual division of labour. Thus, there might be policies that assume women to be better at thrift and saving, for example.

In academia, what began as Women's Studies in the US

academy, fought for by feminists, in India was introduced in many universities through the University Grants Commission, but not all such programmes necessarily had a feminist orientation. In fact, feminism tends to be seen as a sort of optional add-on to Women's Studies, which was conceptualized as part of the Indian state's developmental agenda in the era preceding the neoliberal economic transformations of the 1990s onwards. However, the presence of feminist scholars in such programmes radicalized many of them. So whether Women's Studies programmes become governmentalized modes of doing studies on women, or whether they have a feminist transformative agenda, depends on who is in charge of the syllabus and curriculum.

The term 'women's empowerment' has been preferred by the Indian government to feminism, which is seen as dangerous and destabilizing as compared to the former which sees women as agents of the state's development agenda. That agenda has been very rapidly undone over the last four years by the regime that came to power in 2014 under a government close to corporate capital, but that is another story.

What we need to do is think about gender equity without conflating gender and women. A report by a Mumbai based queer group titled *No Outlaws in the Gender Galaxy* spoke to a number of people about how they felt about their gender assigned at birth, and got conflicted, complex responses.

Increasingly, with a multi billion dollar pharmaceutical industry interested in getting hold of the trans people's market, gender is being spoken of as being 'hardwired' in the brain and sex as something malleable that can be changed. This rebiologizing of gender and rebinarizing of sex has to be met with appropriate queer feminist responses.

So is the Utopia to be aimed for, 'gender-free' universities, as Prof Morley suggested?

Or should universities be spaces in which a hundred genders bloom, both as persons and in curricula?

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