Gender in Indian Philosophy, Civilization, and Culture

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Abstract: This paper explores the foundations of *gender* in Indian philosophy, culture, and civilizations. What exactly gender is? Is this limited to humans' male or female bodies or may be extended to other living, and nonliving beings? Such issues expedited under the premises of ancient Indian texts in Sanskrit including *Vedas, Upanishads, Grihyasutra, Smriti Granthas, Puranas,* and the orthodox and unorthodox branches of Indian Philosophy. Therefore, the paper is based upon inferences drawn thereon, with the author being the key informant. The concept of *gender* is very different from the western perspectives as in Indian civilization, gender is not limited to mere sex, bodies, and living objects. It is extended to nonliving objects and included emotions, feelings, and sentiments. Every matter is bound to change, therefore *gender* changes and is the subject matter of appropriation and realization. The same matter could exhibit different gender depending upon different situations.

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Introduction

Gender could not be confined to mere physical and material attainments or fulfilling social needs. It must have a holistic approach toward life and nature. Thus, the scope of *gender* goes beyond the sociological and biological boundaries. Limiting *gender* within the premises of sex and body would not be appropriate.

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed including norms, behaviors, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, *gender* varies from society to society and can change over time (WHO, 2020).

Gender is the range of characteristics of femininity and masculinity and differentiating between them (Wikipedia, 2020). Depending on the context, this may include sex-based social structures (i.e., gender roles) and *gender* identity (Haig, 2004). Most cultures use a *gender* binary, in which *gender* is divided into two categories, and people are considered part of one or the other (boys/men and girls/women) (Sigelman & Rider, 2017) those who are outside these groups may fall under the umbrella term *non-binary*. Some societies have specific *genders* besides "man" and "woman", such as the hijras of South Asia; these are often referred to as *third genders* (and *fourth genders*, etc.). Most scholars agree that *gender* is a central characteristic of social organization (Heinemann, 2012).

Review of the literature

Ghriyasutra is a compilation of the social and religious lives of Vedic people as surveyed in *Rigveda, Srautasutra,* and early *Avesta*n literature. A guide for a *grihastha* or a householder to conduct different *sanskaras,* religious ceremonies, education, agriculture, animal husbandry, business, the status of a woman, health, and hygiene (Apte, 1939). *Grigyasutra*s were the rules of the domestic ceremonies of the Vedic people (Oldenberg, 1892). The six orthodox Indian philosophies provided an account of creation, cognition of knowledge, truth, and gender. The book on

Indian philosophy by *Dr. S. Radhakrishnan* in two volumes provided an account of Indian philosophy (Radhakrishnan, 1932). The book by *C. D Sharma* provides a clear, comprehensive, and critical account of the various systems of Indian philosophy by surveying various kinds of literature related to the *Vedas, Upanishads,* and *Bhagavad-Gita.* It included the study of Materialism, *Jainism* and *Early Buddhism, Sunyavada, Vijnanavada, Svatantra Vijnanavada,* and the six systems of Indian Philosophy (Sharma, 1960). There were almost 18 *Smriti granthas* by different sages and as many numbers of different *Puranas* were reviewed.

Limiting gender issues with sex, bodies, or mere womanhood several scholars considered those ancient texts adverse to women. Indian society has never accepted womanhood as being equal since the age of *Dharmaśāstras, Mánusmṛiti,* and even today's women's stories are reflected repeatedly as interesting episodes from the ancient period of Indian civilization (Pal, 2019). The forbiddance of women is linked to the belief and practice of patriarchy which subjugates women at various levels – political, economic, social, and cultural (Rawat, 2014). The *gender* aspect is responsible for endogamy being one of the features of the caste system. The restriction was also imposed on a woman to marry out of their caste to maintain their family income (Eswaran, 2014). A female child is taught to be sensitive, loving, and caring, and therefore assigned to manage household work, child nurturing, and motherhood-related responsibilities (Sharma, 2017). In the words of *Manusmiriti,* 'woman is a perpetual minor and has to lead her entire life under the guardianship of the father, the husband or the son (Narayanan, 2016). What is possibly the central factor for the subordination of the upper caste woman: the need for effective sexual control over such women to maintain not only patrilineal succession but also caste purity the institution unique to Hindu society (EPW, 1993). Powerful instruments of religious and legal sanctions back the authority of men to dominate them. Therefore, for effective comprehension of the true nature and character of the evolutionary process of formulation of

various social structures and institutions, it becomes imperative to identify such forces at work at various points in time (Gautam, 2014). *Kuniyath* and *Sankaranarayanan* abstracted that the ideal woman of India is appreciated based on her *kulinisam* and characteristics like fidelity, chastity, servitude towards her husband and his family, obeisance, non-fickle mind behavior, honesty, purity, and many more. By fascinating and conditioning women based on these characteristics given by society, Indian masculine egotism made women dump driven cattle from womb to tamp. For that, they used and made many ideals with the help of Folkways, Epics, *Puranas,* and *smritis*. Myths and mythology are having a big role in women's degradation in India and this paper focuses its attention on the position of Indian women-related mythology and the role of such myths in women's position degradation (Kuniyath & Dr. K. C. Sankaranarayanan, 2017).

No gender discrimination existed in ancient India. The girls had equal privileges, in all spheres of life viz., Education, marriage, employment, etc. However, in the medieval period, women were pushed downhill from the highest freedom and status due to the impact of Muslims, corrupting vices like the *purdah* system, child marriage, etc. (Khandelwal, 2016).

In Indian civilization, the fight is not for a woman's status, but for human worth. The claim is not to end the inequality of women, but to restore universal justice. The bid is not for loaves and fishes for the forsaken gender, but for cosmic harmony, which never comes until a woman comes (Singh, 2013). The status of a woman was superior as a mother compared to being a wife or a daughter (Ray, 1999). In Vedic society, women participated in religious ceremonies and tribal assemblies. In Buddhist and Jain cultures women were accorded respect and their rightful place in society (Mahapatra, 2018).

The issue of women is not just something metaphysical, it is a practical thing and everybody has their own experience of life. Not necessarily as an individual, but as a member of society (Malik-Goure, 2019). *Kelkar* attempted to evolve the possible perspective for making a

particular type of classification and in the light of this perspective tries to elaborate the three models of the man-woman relationship and suggest their implications for feminist theory (Kelkar, 1999). *Chaudhury* explores how the language of tradition and modernity has been the dominant idiom that has sought to capture the "essence" of both the Indian nation and the Indian woman (Chaudhury, 2012). Not only in India but also all over the world, there has been a close link between feminism and the women's movement, each inspiring and enriching the other (Pande, 2018).

Carol S. Anderson et.al provided the research resource to Indian philosophical gender issues, exploring a variety of texts and traditions from Indian philosophy where the treatment of gender is dynamic and diverse (Anderson, Ashton, Balkaran, Maderey, & Gupta, 2019). Many religious institutions are always helpful for women in economic and social distress (Inglehart, 2004). There are problems central to Western philosophy (e.g., Whether knowledge arises from experience or reason) that philosophers in India did not pursue, and important distinctions (such as that between analytic and synthetic judgments) they did not make (Coseru, 2014). Indian philosophy involves using theories of negation developed by the *Nyaya* philosopher *Raghunatha Siromani* to examine the erasure of gender (Wells, 2019). The medieval devotional traditions (600 CE–1700 CE) provide an especially fruitful milieu for female voices (Pokazanyeya, 2015). The Vedic community was liberal, and yet the essence of the Vedas is preserved: love for God and all other living entities (Agrawal, 2013).

Gender constructions transform religious experiences and rethinking gender and sexuality, forces us to re-conceptualize settled ontological frameworks (Howard, 2020). The story of philosophy in India is described through a series of exceptional individual acts of philosophical virtuosity (Ganeri, 2017). The distinction between sex and gender are used in both confused and confusing ways (Kumari, Tandon, & Batra, 2017). It was never proper to blame men as they were also victims of stereotypical gender roles (Sirimanne, 2016). Sexuality in India has undergone paradigm shifts from the Bronze Age civilization to present-day India. The manner of experience and expression has also undergone significant changes over time in individual desires, attitudes to sex, beliefs, values, behaviors, gender roles, and relationships (Rao, 2019). *Sexuality* is constructed upon the individuals' sexual orientation which is their emotional and sexual attraction to particular genders. Sexuality broadly encompasses the biological, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects (Chakraborty K, 2013). The time has come to rediscover ourselves in terms of sexuality to attain individual freedom and to reinvest our energy in social issues related to sexuality (Chakravarty & Thakurta, 2013).

The *Gender Inequality Index* (GII) sheds new light on the position of women in 162 countries; it yields insights into gender gaps in major areas of human development. The component indicators, highlight areas in need of critical policy intervention and it stimulates proactive thinking and public policy to overcome systematic disadvantages of women (UNDP, 2020). A *gender stereotype* is harmful when it limits women's and men's capacity to develop their abilities, pursue their professional careers, and make choices about their lives (OHCHR, 2020). A *gender-equal society* is a "society in which both men and women, as equal members, have the opportunity to participate in all kinds of social activities at will, equally enjoy, economic and cultural benefits, and share responsibilities (GEBC, 2020). Feminist anthropology could play this role in psychological and educational theorizing about gendered science and mathematics (Mukhopadhyay, 2004). *Gender equality* is no longer a women's issue but an issue of looking beyond the gender lens and seeing employees' best qualities regardless of their gender in the Indian context (Rai, 2018).

Problem discussion

There was a lack of literature on the manner *gender* could be understood within the premises of ancient Indian philosophical and *Vedic* texts, which mainly described *gender* in terms of creation and universal justice. Either most development practitioners and social scientists were deliberately confusing the *gender* issues, knowingly or unknowingly, whereas it required *gender* issues be addressed universally without unnecessary conflicts and corrosions.

While surveying and reviewing relevant pieces of literature I came across several primary and secondary literature which criticized several ancient Indian texts, norms, and social systems without any basis. They failed to recognize that obeisance, non-fickle mind behavior, honesty, purity, fidelity, chastity, and servitude were applied to males also.

The previously mentioned literature review gave the impression that various social systems, traditions, and literature are criticized without any adequate logic and basis. Associating patriarchy, caste system, endogamy, *sati*, polygamy, widow marriage, *gotra* system, etc. solely with upper castes appeared grave nonsense. Most of them could not even read those ancient texts in Sanskrit, therefore it was very difficult for them to come up with any logical inferences.

Certain pieces of literature are criticized because of politics and vested interests. If a particular social group had particular social norms and practices in the past, not applicable today because of constitutional laws. Therefore, merely criticizing those ancient texts and getting them associated with upper castes and *brahmans* is not logical.

It is a problem for me to see how *gender is* being tactically and selectively used by development practitioners to illogically create conflicts in the so-called developing world. If patriarchy, patrilocality, and patrilineality are practiced in any society so just on this basis it could not be assumed that matriarchy, matrilocality, and mother linearity were sanctioned.

It could be established that most pieces of literature considered *gender* in terms of sex and physical bodies and talked about discrimination based on sex and body. In most cases, they ignored the *gender* aspects of men and settled in favor of the feminine without any basis. That could be a highly materialistic approach toward *gender.* There is no need to be unnecessarily feminist. If anyone wants to associate *gender* with patriarchy and get it limited to upper castes or white Aryans, then how it could be justified? It may be an attempt to target the social norms, systems, customs, and traditions of those social groups. It is not decided who will fix the *gender* and how?

Many people mistakably equate themselves with so-called *Shudras, malechs,* and *chandals* described in the ancient texts. They should avoid equating themselves in this manner. Every social group has its literature, philosophy, and way of life and there is no place for any unrequired criticism leading to conflict in society, especially because India is now a democratic, secular, and socialist nation. The constitution provides rights to every individual and social group to follow and practice their own beliefs, customs, traditions, and philosophy. They are also free to work for the sustenance of their culture and solidarity. The main criticism that *Brahmans* considered at the top of the social hierarchy in ancient pieces of literature, could not make other social groups inferior either. After all, superiority and inferiority would be always determined by performance, character, conduct, and the valued social produce produced by the respective individuals, and social groups.

It was also wrong to construct the nature of *Prakriti* and *Purusha* to reflect the roles of women and men in early societies. The dualism of P*rakriti* and *Purusha* as found in the "Samkhyakarika", and the impact of the same on the constructions of female subjectivity (Natrajan, 2001). However, the *Purusha* and *Prakriti* of *Sankhya* are not male and female sex or bodies.

Women's libber tried to fix *gender* issues around women neglecting males and transgender. Considering women's entities as weaker and considering that they need a favor or justice is an inferior view towards a woman. On several occasions, such issues have jeopardized the *gender balance* in a particular society. *Gender justice* is required to adjust universally. Such attitude adversely affected the productivity and efficiency of different societies the world over. If you are not philosophically correct, your behavior and conduct are not accordingly to philosophy and the respective social objectives and problems, there would be problems in delivering *gender* justice and building a *gender*-fair society. *Gender* justice is not different from universal justice. Therefore, a fair and just society is required to

pursue a process of universal justice for all its members.

Gender couldn't alone decide the social division of labor in a society because it would be always wise and logical to assign a particular job to someone who can do that particular job quite efficiently. Not every person can do all the jobs with equal efficiency. The jobs within and outside the household can be decided with mutual understanding. If every man and woman would start thinking differently, then there would be massive *social deviance* and that would lead to large-scale *social disorganization* further leading to the falling of orders in society. The *gender* issues and the social division of labor must be suited to the respective social objectives.

International developmental practitioners are more concerned about unequal salaries, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, barriers to career growth, and disclosing their net worth. Gender within and outside households have two different perspectives. If we fix a price or reward equally for men and women then the issue of *gender* would be dealt with around the quality of the product and that may again put certain people in advantageous or disadvantageous positions. There is always better scope for *gender equality* while working for self, working for own family, and working for the respective community. The moment any person starts working not for self, family, or the community, the problems of balancing *gender* would become significant. Such problems would be eluding a fair and just *gender* ecosystem.

Feminists keep targeting the caste system and patriarchy for gender discrimination. However, it would establish that in Indian society matriarchy was more responsible for the plight of daughters. There were several questions that how patrilineality and patriarchy could be held responsible for gender discrimination. If daughters used to move to their in-laws after marriage, then how this system could be considered anti-feminism? So what? In some areas, especially in the *Mithila* region of Bihar bride brings the groom, to their home, and the sons used to move away after marriage. How we could associate these practices with *gender* without any basis? Patrilocality or another locality is mostly situational and largely depended upon social norms involving marriage and the division of roles among family members.

Methods

This article attempted its ways with literature surveys and reviews, dissertation analysis, and conceptual analysis. As this study includes a particular historic overview of the development of the relationship between Indian Philosophy and the gender aspects of creation, hence, a synchronic, as well as a diachronic perspective, is presented hereby. An undeviating understanding of Indian Philosophy as well as various concepts of *gender,* including social, developmental, cultural, and biological were explored. Several hypotheses were developed, and the method validation of those hypotheses was done.

Although, it made no sense in mentioning in this article all those numerous occasional and casual hypotheses.

Results

G*ender* is a spirit or a state of consciousness of a matter. Masculine, feminine, or neutral gender has nothing to do with sex and body. Therefore, all these three *gender* qualities can reside simultaneously in the human body and the rise and fall of a particular property can lead to the exhibition of a particular *gender.* Therefore, *gender* could be solely settled accordingly to the laws of universal and natural justice without any special preference.

The theory of creation described in different *Vedas* and *Upanishads* indicated that matter has both the qualities of masculinity and femininity, and it can also exhibit neutral qualities. The *gender* classification was not based on sex and body but on attributes and qualities. So much so that *gender* could change over time during the process of cause, causation, and caused. The *Purusha* and *Prakriti* described in the *Sankhya* did not represent male and female, masculine, or feminine. The *Purusha* and *Prakriti* of the *Sankhya* literature represented the spirit or consciousness and the *Maya* or non-conscious materials by which this entire universe is made of. The union of the *Purusha* and the *Prakriti* or the mutual merger of consciousness with the non-conscious materials created this whole universe. Therefore, due to this union, every bit of this universe either living or nonliving behaved consciously. However, the state and levels of consciousness further depended upon several factors. We lose consciousness under the influence of love, emotions, hatred, and anger.

Therefore, in Indian civilization and culture every conscious, durable material be it living or nonliving was assigned the masculine gender and every powerful, unstable, or temporary material was assigned the feminine gender. Most powerful, short-lived entities are assigned feminine gender. Ex. Electricity, Government, Army, etc. Whereas, durable. Long-lasting and more conscious beings are assigned masculine gender. In addition, several nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives are also classified on such basis and assigned feminine and masculine gender. Notions, emotions, and feelings are also categorized on such basis.

The mass and energy duality works for gender demarcation also. Every mass has energy and energy can be converted to a mass. If a particular mass is assigned masculine gender, then the energy contained in that mass has been assigned feminine gender. The durability of mass depended upon the separation of energy from that mass. Mass converts into energy and vice versa. Therefore, both work as a source for each other. Based on this philosophy, in Indian civilization, the very concept of different gods and goddesses has been upon. If S*hiva* represented masculinity, then *Parvatee* or *Durga* represented femininity. They are just two forms of the same source. They cannot be separated until *Pralay* or rollback of

the creation. Thus, *Vishnu & Laxmi; Brahma & Saraswati* were also conceptualized and socialized in Indian civilization and culture as husbands and wives. Therefore, *gender* could not be considered in isolation of one particular gender from another gender, as the same material behaves differently and coherently over time.

Every living and nonliving material is influenced by the respective rise and fall of the qualities described in Indian Philosophy as *Sat, Raj,* and *Tam.* Under the influence of *Sat,* every material remained calm, composed, and blissful. The *rajas* rise to disturb the *sat* or the harmony or balance and then ultimately *tam* rises to again establish the state of balance, harmony or the *sat.* The attributes of *sat* are blissfulness, happiness, and peace. It symbolizes by white color. The attributes of *rajas* are action, velocity, and lack of peace. It symbolizes the red color. The attributes of *tamas* are darkness, foulness, and moment of inertia. It is represented by black color. All these three properties or *guna* are bound to every particle as a rope like *gunasutra* or DNA/RNA. All living and nonliving materials continuously remained under the influence of these three properties and they behaved accordingly.

Gender is different that sex. Many civilizations of the world have used distinctive grammar based on their respective sex. The grammar of most Indian languages recognizes sex and body instead of gender. In Hindi grammar, the sex of a particular person is reelected in terms of verbs, unlike in the English language. For example, in English, we say "Ram is going" and "Rama is also going", However, in Hind, it is said as "Ram ja raha hai" and "Rama bhi ja rahi hai". Perhaps, there was no need to assign special grammar for the so-called 3rd sex because their neutrality may transform into either the male or female sex.

The names of a woman or girl usually had a relatively heavier tone towards the end than a man or boy. Examples of some common girl names in India used to be Anita, Sunita, Sunidhi, Anukriti, Ankita, etc. Therefore, the sex of any person in India is usually also gets recognized by his or her name.

Conclusion

Gender has nothing to do with sex and bodies in Indian civilization and philosophy. It is a particular behavior by a matter at a particular point in time and could not remain constant either. Thus masculinity, femineity, and neutrality could reside in any one body be it male, female, or a s/he male. Finally, I want to say hello to feminists.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was declared by the author.

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