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**PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY
IN ANY TWO MODERN COMIC PLAYS**

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Gender and sexuality are two intertwined concepts that work dependent on each other. This is why some researchers, like those in Niranter who have explored the relationship between gender and sexuality argue that they cannot be thought as distinct and separate categories, but as intimately related. The societies we live in construct the right and wrong way to behave as men and women, and these are mapped out onto 'right' and 'wrong' sexual practices, beliefs and behaviors. People could easily substitute gender for one's sex, but this is a misconception of what really, both concepts stand to define. Sex on one hand refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women, but 'gender' unlike sex refers to the widely shared set of expectations and norms linked to how women and men, boys and girls should behave. In other words, gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and women in any given society. These expectations are not fixed, but are continually being constructed and reinforced through social relationships, and economic and political power dynamics.

Sexuality on the other hand is influenced by gender norms. It is related to the way people do, think, and feel, that are related to their sexual desires. There is a distinct way women are viewed to behave, as the supposed ideal of women's sexuality and this restriction is built upon the women gendered world, on which they are bound to, though I do not know whether by an ephabic oath, or by the mosaic law, to live out. Sexuality therefore can be seen as a person's habits and preferences in terms of sexual behavior and desire. This is expressed and experienced in a variety of ways, through thoughts, fantasies, behaviors, roles and relationship.

We shall look at the exploration of these two important issues in the following plays; 'Volpone' by Ben Jonson, and in 'Mandragola' by Nicolo Machiavelli. Earlier on, it has already been stated that the conceptions of both concepts is society-based. In essence, the construction of gender and sexuality varies from society to society.

At the time in which the play 'Volpone' is set, men were wholly responsible for finance and they were expected to have power over women in relationships, roles that most of the male characters in the play firmly occupy, etc. We see how obvious and clear gender stereotype is in the play, whereby the roles of men and women, are already divided amongst them, and separated from each other by the society. This gives the view that women are the 'weaker sex'. In this case, men are seen as the blue blood (having superior gene), while women are viewed as feeble and flexible. The issue of gender with its ups and downs is highly pronounced in the character of Celie, Corvino's wife, who is subjected to terrible matrimonial fidelity by being locked inside a room, and at an extreme point, is forbade from venturing too close to the window.

In fact, the marriage between Corvino and Celia (an Italian marriage) would be used as a yardstick to measure this gender and sexuality issues in the play. Though Corvino's rule as regards the extent to which his wife is expected to appear in the society is extreme, it was still stereotypical for Italian to be jealous and controlling of their wives. Men are viewed as merchants who are compelled by the law of profit-making to jealously safeguard their sales (now in the form of women), without the society seeing any wrong therein. This is seen as the ideal enterprise men ought to embark on, thus marriage is treated more like a political contract where the motto becomes, 'do or die affair'. It is either women swallow the societal expectations of their gender, hook, line and sinker, or they get doomed by the penalty of an otherwise step. Celie represents the stereotypical Renaissance ideal of a woman; she is silent, chaste, and

obedient. She is compelled to adhere to any rule, whether such rule discomforts her, or not. Unlike men who are free to live their lives however it occurs to them to do. We see these in men like Voltore, Corbaccio, and even in Corvino. They parted with what they had freely, without any moral or rational prosecution as regards their over being ambitious. They did unto themselves, including their property, that which is most pleasing and sound to them. Unlike Celie who had no control, even over her own self, let alone having control over how she disposes herself to coming out to the world's view. She is a woman who was not given the freedom to enjoy a room, where she is being locked, but is even restricted from drawing close to the window. Anybody including a lunatic could see this ladder of gender inequality amongst men and women.

Celie's virtuous though seem to be of her utmost advantage even turns out to be her 'Achilles' heel'. Her sterling reputation initially gives her credibility in court, but her testimony is quickly undermined, since as a woman, she is considered to be an unreliable witness (even to a crime of which she is a victim). The power of Celie's reputation couldn't stand up to the stereotype that women are too hysterical and emotional to be trustworthy and rational, even though the men who argue against her are known to be deceitful. There is no single trust placed on Celie's testimony. Her words are considered vain and trivial, that even her own husband finds her to be the summit of deceit and lies. Instead, she is penalized for an alleged assault which supposedly, she ought to be the one seeking for redress in the law court. Women are meant to shoulder the onus of chastity, while the lustfulness of men is considered a natural phenomenon. Volpone, though gets the reward that his folly earns him seems as though he is punished not primarily because of his attempt to rape Celie, but due to his continuous deception of the other men, if it is critically analysed. He seems most guilty of the crime of excessive greed for money, at the expense of Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino.

From the line of event, we could infer that the cruelty of the impossible position in which Celia finds herself in court illustrates that seventeenth century (17th century) women couldn't win, no matter how virtuous. Women were considered to be untrustworthy, and inferior creatures.

Coming to the aspect of sexuality, we see how women are generally used as 'sex objects', or as avenues where a man's libido is quenched. Women have no scale as regards their sexuality, they are treated as mere robots. I do not need a concave lens to decipher what Celie's condition is like, a woman who has no say in her world, but is kept indoors for conjugal visits alone, with a jailer in the guise of a protective husband. It is this very notion that becomes Volpone's muse, Which he calls beauty. This is seen in the words of Celie when she laments; '... and punish that unhappy crime of nature, which you miscall my beauty'. Men get their sexual feelings, fantasies and drives filled by the women folk. This is also seen in lady Would-Be, though already has a husband- Sir Politick is still used as a sex enterprise. She conducts an extra marital affair with Volpone, and is more of a mistress to him.

It is this aspect of sexuality that spells out more of the gender imbalance we have in the play. Since Celie opts for death other than being raped, Volpone makes up a false story against her, and because of this gender stereotype, Celie's voice is heard thinly in the law court, and at a point, the judges close their ears to her testimony. For men, every woman has a place below their phallus, your person notwithstanding. Volpone even pretends being a physician, going to places advertising his products. He goes close to Celie's window and promises her of her own kids sooner than later in a way to win her love. Celie being on the receiving end, throws her handkerchief to Volpone. Here, Volpone uses Celie as his sexual manifesto to get at her. Nothing is done out of love or goodwill for the woman, rather all actions are propelled by some selfish drive. Corvino takes no cognizance of Celie's emotional drive but to avoid being a cuckold, or

letting another man gain any advantage over his wife, he locks her. Celie is bound to remain chaste at all odds, she falls a victim of rape or she escapes it, it doesn't matter, for the watch word is 'Chastity'. Possibilities of otherwise are given no room.

What about 'Mandragola' where gender stereotype makes women gullible, docile and highly vulnerable and which subdues women, their voices, their willpower, and compels them to be under the custody of men, who dictate and design their lives for them. Men are considered the last resort to life affairs and are seen more like monarchs, whose rule supersedes every other authority. We see the gullibility of Sostrata, Lucrezia's mother, when the issue of her daughter going to sleep with a strange man so that she would conceive. Every rational strong-willed mother would have objected to this, but the reverse is the case here. She quickly without hesitating consents to this telling the daughter that when two evils are given for one to choose, one has to go for the lighter one.

Women's opinions were not seen as worth reflecting on. In fact, their role seems as though they are just there in the societal ladder to exhibit an unquestionable obedience. They are given charge and men see to it that such is carried out. They have no choice on how their lives should go, whatever the clarion call says, they answer to. The most painful thing is that plans regarding their lives are made behind them, and once it is let open, they do not object.

Looking at Lucrezia, we see all the forces implored to make her oblige to the plan of sharing her own self with someone that has no legal or moral claim over her. In the first place, her husband-Nicia, goes on singlehandedly with this plan, together with the doctor (Callimacio), Ligurio, and the priest (Friar Timoteo). After the plan has been constructed and stamped, they let Lucrezia know of it, not primarily to seek for her opinion, but to ensure the success of their scheme.

Earlier on, we see how Nicia gets the specimen Callimacio demands of him, forcefully from his wife- Lucrezia. He just rushes home at the spur of the moment, and demands that his wife gives him her stool. A woman has no right over herself, men are the custodians of their choices. Lucrezia on her own doesn't buy the idea, but when the whole pressure falls on her, she falls for that.

Talking on the issue of sexuality, it is even Callimacio's sexual desire that derives him home to his native land, the war notwithstanding after he is thrilled at the praises Florenzo gives to Lucrezia. Her condition as being childless earns her an imposed sexual outburst by a lustful sex maniac in the guise of a flute boy. Lucrezia's sexuality is not taken into account. It did not matter what she feels as regards her sexual dispositions. In fact, Lucrezia becomes the object of desire of several male characters. Further to Ligurio's alignment of his desires with those of Callimacio, Friar by disguising himself as Callimaco also identifies with him. This process of identification is reiterated on a verbal level as Timoteo says to the audience at the end of (Act v), 'Callimaco and Lucrezia won't sleep, because I know that, if I were he, and you were she, we wouldn't sleep. In the event, Timoteo does pass a sleepless night, the reason being his desire to find out how Callimaco has fared. Timoteo goes on to soliloquize. He says he wasn't able to sleep a wink last night. He also says that his desire to hear how Callimaco and the others got on was so strong. The next morning, he even goes to eavesdrop when Callimaco narrates his experiences of last night to Ligurio. Logically, it does not take much imagination to see that he has spent his night in a fantasy of vicarious sexual gratification as Callimaco.

In both plays, one very thing is common, and that is 'women'. They usually stand as the reward for men. They are the greatest muse on which the plays' plot is built on. This is usually due to sexuality and the orientation attached to it, and this is in conformity with gender

stereotype, which sets women as mere objects that can be used for the greatest utility of men, including their libido outburst.

From the discourse, we can be contented with the little learning and knowledge we have of what gender and sexuality are.