

# Chapter 6

## Gender and Space in Flux in Anukruti Upadhyay's Bhaunri

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In Butler's theory, gender is constructed through a constant act of performance and repetition which explains it as an act of becoming. In light of this theoretical perspective, the present chapter aims to explore the Indian bilingual novelist Anukruti Upadhyay's Bhaunri (2019) to analyze the trajectory of the process of becoming a gendered identity. The chapter examines the various ways in which gender roles and identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through the processes of signification, appropriation, and subversion. The findings reveal that in their struggles for their social and spatial rights, the female protagonist and her mother reassert their power by challenging patriarchal discourses. This chapter contributes to feminist discussions that argue for the fluid nature of gender and spatial relations.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. (Butler, 1990, p. 140)*

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*..... the body is in a state of transition... perennially... so is... identity. Therefore, it is not desirable to identify with a single category. It is, in fact, impossible. Everything is in a state of making... eternally... nothing is ever complete... the same is true of the body and, therefore, identity. It's a continuous process. (Bakshi, 2013, p. 12)*

The above two quotes talk about gender identity as fluid, mobile, unstable and in a state of flux. Identity is a dominant discourse in culture studies and is complicated with the term self. Gender transformation is everywhere; it is taking place as well as limited by social, political and symbolical order. Exploring the transformation of territories, space, identities is intriguing as well as rewarding. From the style of *The Beatles* to *BTS* there has been a transformation in the representation of men too. Derrida's (1988) concept of deconstruction is interesting to note regarding gender studies that what is constructed can also be deconstructed.

Indian English literature provides a fecund terrain of gender studies. The paper deals with the work of Anukrti Upadhyay, who hails from Rajasthan. She writes in Hindi and English. She has earned her post-graduate degrees in management and literature. She is a budding writer who has three novels to her credit. With her sweeping narrative, rich cultural tapestry and in-depth research, she keeps the readers hooked to the novels. She has given new types of women characters in her novel. They are traditional as well as bold and brash.

*Bhaunri* (2019) is written in simple yet elegant prose patterns. The story is of a blacksmith girl, Bhaunri. "It is a story of a nomadic tribe of Rajasthan. It seems to be a well-researched work depicting the rites, traditions and the surroundings of this tribe" (Anand, 2021, p. 457). The characters in the novella intrude and violate conventional gender roles and gender becomes fluid and relative concepts. Before embarking on the analysis of the text, it is pertinent to discuss some of the key concepts that lead to the construction of gender, space and identity.

## **BACKGROUND**

Gender is a loaded term. We enjoy, suffer gender. It is a part of our everyday lived experience. We unconsciously adopt a gender-based notion of manhood and womanhood. We negotiate gender with our language, body, food, rituals, dress and other significance, so to speak through our embodiment. Every literary work is produced in a particular culture. "...gender cannot be understood as a *role* which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,' whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act,' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority" (Felluga, 2015, 279). Gender is a certain course that we consume which we internalize.

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