Exploring Gender Performances and Fluidity within Indian Literary Tradition

Dissertation submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, in partial fulfillment for

the award of M.A degree in English Language and Literature.

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2023

Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled " Exploring Gender Performances and Fluidity within Indian Literary Tradition" is a bonafide record of sincere work done by, Devi Archana P D, Register Number :210011004028, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature under the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2020-2023.

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Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented dissertation "Exploring Gender Performances and Fluidity within Indian Literary Tradition" is based on the research that I did on under the supervision and guidance of Ms Meriya George , Guest Faculty, Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. This is a report of my hands based on the research done on the selected topic and it is my original work and interpretations drawn therein are based on material collected by myself. It has not been previously formed basis for the award of any degree, diploma or fellowship or other sim*lla* r title or recognition.

Date: 11/08/2023   Devi Archana P D

Place: Thrikkakara   Reg.No: 210011004028

Acknowledgement

I find myself fortunate to be surrounded by people who are forever willing to help and guide me. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Ms. Meriya George for guiding me in accomplishing my research work titled "Exploring Gender Performances and Fluidity within Indian Literary Tradition". Her supervision and support truly helped in the progress and timely accomplishment of this research work.

I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the scholars and artists with whom I consulted and whose works I referred for my work.

I express my sincere thanks to Dr.Johnson K.M, Principal, Dr.Thara Gangadharan, Head of the Department, and all other faculty members of my college for their support and concern.

I'm also grateful to my beloved Mother and Father, family members and friends for their loving encouragement. Above all, I thank God Almighty for constantly supporting me and for blessing me with such wonderful people in my life.

Devi Archana P D

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Chapter One

Introduction

Gender manifests as a complex, multifaceted idea with a variety of cultural, social, biological, and psychological components. It consists of certain duties and conduct that are associated with a person's apparent gender. While biological sex refers to physiological factors, an individual's gender identity is their own sense of gender in relation to the assigned roles. Gender is or never was a binary notion. It is a wide spectrum of identities transcending the gender binary. Culture has always impacted gender expressions all around the world. These gender expressions are often restricted by sociocultural stereotypes surrounding the binary concept of gender and sex.

The conception of gender varies across cultures and historical periods. It has evolved through time in regard to social norms. India has had a wide range of gender and sexual expressions throughout history, frequently impacted by conventional expectations, colonial influences, and contemporary changes. In the past, men and women were given distinct duties and obligations in Indian culture, which upheld traditional gender norms. These roles were frequently based on cultural and religious beliefs, with males generally playing roles in the public sphere and in the economy, while women typically took on household and caring responsibilities.

Gender performance and fluidity has not been a cutting-edge idea to the Indian society. India has a long history of recognizing a third gender category. The idea of *Tritiyaprakriti* has always been an indispensable part of Vedic literature, folklores, and so on. *Tritiya prakriti* translates to 'third nature' in a literal sense, representing an entity that does not fit entirely within the male or female categories, both in terms of physicality and mentality. The Indian tradition of *Tritiyaprakriti* offers an extensive array of wisdom and insight as

societies around the world struggle with shifting notions of gender. This tradition displays the persistent ability of cultural narratives to shape perceptions, challenge norms, and foster a more accepting and compassionate understanding of human diversity. Hindu mythology features numerous narratives involving this third gender, individuals in a constant state of identity transformation, underscoring the belief that gender is a dynamic and adaptable concept.

In Vedic texts, human gender is grouped into three categories based on nature: male, female, and the third gender. This classification considers the whole person, including physical body, psychological traits, and social role. Vedic science understood the idea of male and female elements coming together on a biological level long ago, aligning with the tritiya-prakriti concept. According to recent studies, biology, including genetic and hormonal variables, affects not only physical sex but also sexual orientation and gender identity. Homosexuality and transgender identity may represent common forms of intersexuality. This explains why Sanskrit terms for the third gender are often used interchangeably, encompassing homosexuals, transgenders, and intersex individuals. There has been a tendency to view gender fluidity and homosexuality as concepts imported from the Western culture. Sanskrit, being one of the oldest languages, has added gender non-binary identities within its meanings. Terms like *Kliba, Napumsaka, Shandha,* etc were actually used to describe individuals with a third gender identity, those who were homosexual, transgender, or intersex. "While the *Kama Sutra* uses the term *Tritiya-prakriti* to describe the intrinsic nature of homosexual and transgender behavior, other *Kama Shastra* texts provide more explicit descriptions of the third sex as inborn" (Wilhelm 180).

Numerous literary works spanning from the ancient to modern have masterfully depicted characters existing along the diverse spectrum of gender identities. *Bahuchara Devi*, an expansion of goddess Durga as mentioned in both the *Madman* and *Skank Annapurna*, is

venerated particularly by individuals seeking to undergo a change or transformation in their sexual identity. These include transgenders, transsexuals, the intersex, Hijra, eunuchs, and sim*Ila* r groups. She provides encouragement for individuals to undergo self-transformation through dreams, and in a nurturing maternal role, offers solace and protection during significant rituals such as castration ceremonies or modern-day transsexual operations. *Bahuchara Mata* is said to bestow special favours onto her followers, including the capacity to give both blessings and curses upon others, and she leads them through their difficulties.

The tale of *Ila* is present in medieval texts written in Sankrit called *Puranas* , each of which contains a distinct account of his life. The tale of *Ila* , who originally held the position of a male monarch and governed the territory of *Bahlika*, situated in present-day Balkh, Afghanistan. The character also appears in *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana* .*Vaivasvata Manu*, the creator of humanity, and his wife *Shraddh*a are said to have given birth to *Ila* , who was their eldest daughter, according to the *Linga Purana* and the *Mahabharata*. However, the parents wanted a boy, so they prayed to the gods Mitra and Varuna, who altered *Ila 's* gender, and they also through austerities to appease them. Sudyumma was the name of the boy. During one instance, *Ila* has an encounter with Lord Shiva and Parvati while they are on a visit to his realm. Deeply impressed by *Ila 's* gracious hospitality, Lord Shiva extends a boon to him. Expressing a wish for progeny to carry on his lineage, *Ila* inadvertently undergoes a transformation into a woman due to a misunderstanding or an unintended error.

In Indian literature, there are specific individuals who purposefully defy conventional gender roles and societal expectations. These characters disrupt established norms through their deeds, decisions, and conduct. *Shikhandi* is considered to be a perfect example for such a narrative. Born initially as a girl named *Shikhandini* to King *Draupada* of *Panchala*, *Shikhandi* actively participated in the *Kurukshetra* war on behalf of the *Pandavas*. Remarkably, *Shikhandi* played a pivotal role in the demise of *Bhishma*.

Many versions of *Mahabharatha* narrates different stories of *Shikandi's* transition from female to male. Shikandi became one of the remarkable portrayals of gender fluidity in ancient Indian literature. We can also gain an understanding of people's viewpoints regarding individuals who identify as gender non-binary.

Contemporary Indian literature does not disappoint when it comes to exploring and portraying diverse expressions and fluidity of gender. The short story *Chocolate* was written by renowned Hindi author Pande Bechan Sharma, also known by the pen name Ugra. This story explores the subject of same-sex attraction in the backdrop of precolonial India. *Chocolate* is regarded as one of the first works of Hindi literature to explore gay perspectives, and it plays a key role in examining a range of experiences. The main character of *Chocolate* is Babu, a young man who gets caught up in love and sexual feelings for another man named Ramesh. The story compassionately portrays the onset of same-sex desire and Babu's internal conflicts as he strives to deal with his feelings within the constraints of cultural standards and expectations in that time period. The narrative emphasizes the restrictive social climate and the limitations imposed on the expression of non-normative sexual impulses. Babu's battle to balance his impulses with accepted norms illustrates the difficulties experienced by those who are struggling with their sexual orientation in a culture that does not readily acknowledge or comprehend same-sex attraction.

Chocolate examines emotional problems and uncertainty that can develop when one's sexual urges collide with social expectations through the character of Babu. The self-discovery and self-acceptance path that people with non-heteronormative orientations frequently go through is depicted by Babu's introspection and internal struggle. Due to its examination of same-sex desire, *Chocolate* is regarded as a pioneering work in Hindi literature. It presents a pioneering instance of queer portrayal in Indian literature by challenging conventional views on gender and sexuality. These stories have a significant

historical impact on how Indian society views gender diversity now. They have aided in developing a sense of inclusiveness and acceptance for people whose experiences deviate from standard gender norms while also advancing a more comprehensive knowledge of human identity. This viewpoint, which has its roots in ancient cultural traditions, is still relevant in today's discussions of gender and encourages debates about acceptance, respect, and the appreciation of personal authenticity.

The analytical foundation for this inquiry is based on Judith Butler's gender theory of performativity. By using this perspective, we may analyze and comprehend how these characters go against, beyond, and even against traditional gender conventions. The study makes use of this theoretical angle in an effort to illuminate the significant consequences of the participants' identities and behaviors, particularly in light of how they disregarded social norms. Individuals, in Butler's view, perform and display their gender via their acts and behaviors, maintaining the appearance of a constant self. Although people have agency, these performances are formed by society and cultural conventions, and their manifestations are limited by the prevailing power relations.

Butler contends that people can challenge social norms through acts of parody and other subversive behaviour by acknowledging the performative aspect of gender. The experiences of the third gender group are deeply connected with their sexual orientations and gender identities, frequently defying conventional notions of both. In order to explore the complex interplay between gender, sexuality, and performativity in these tales, Butler's theory provides a strong analytical framework. By highlighting gender's fluidity and social construction, this theory challenges essentialist interpretations of gender. Butler's theories have greatly influenced feminism, queer theory, and cultural studies, igniting conversations and arguments regarding the complex interplay between society expectations and individual identity.

The three main goals of this study are as follows. It first aims to thoroughly evaluate and analyse how the characters of *Ila* , *Shikandi, Bahuchara Mata*, and Babu successfully demolish and reassemble ingrained gender stereotypes. This aspect emphasizes how gender is fundamentally a performative construct that is enacted and perpetuated via a wide range of expressions, behaviors, and roles. The second part of this study explores the interactions between these gender performances and other socioeconomic factors including caste, religion, and cultural surroundings. By incorporating Butler's theory into this complex web, we can see how these gender performances interact with and contradict these outside factors, which eventually contributes to a deeper comprehension of the forces guiding these character's travels.

Ila , a character found in *Puranas*, *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana* is a powerful illustration of gender transition and the performative nature of gender. Gender is an enactment, a continual activity rather than a static condition, as seen by *Ila* 's fluid transformation between masculine and female forms. *Shikandi's* unrelenting genuineness and self-expression, which also subvert social standards, serve as an example of the subversive power of gender performances.Through the stories of *Ila* , *Shikandi*, and *Bahuchara Mata* and Babu ,we can see how gender portrayal has changed throughout the course of history. This comprehensive method offers a broad perspective of the subtle changes and continuities in how gender identities are portrayed, highlighting the crucial function these literary tales have in forming and reflecting society norms.

We uncover how these character's gender performances operate as effective agents of empowerment and transformation by fusing Butler's theory with the larger sociocultural and historical factors. Their performances challenge strict conventions, challenge established binaries, and deepen our comprehension of the complex web of gender variety and fluidity that weaves across Indian society. Ultimately, this study sets out on a transformational journey

through history and literature, tracing the threads that bind the fabric of gender portrayal in Indian culture. A thorough story of the changing conceptions and performances of gender is presented through an investigation that goes beyond simple analysis by exposing the complexities of performance, identity, and cultural impact.

Chapter Two

Deconstructing Dynamic Interplay of Gender and Identity

The theory of gender performativity was first presented by feminist philosopher Judith Butler in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*. Butler claims that gender is a matter of behaviors, not fundamental essence. Butler places gender inside outward signs and behaviors rather than seeing it as an internal property. "Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts"(Butler 519). These performative behaviors actively build gender rather than just expressing an innate gender. Gender performance is a ritualized recurrence that is not dependent on a single incident. By complying to these standards, these activities maintain and strengthen them, giving them the illusion of validity and permanence. This repeated nature lends a perception of stability to gender Judith Butler has permanently altered the way that people think about gender and sexuality. As she explains the performative nature ingrained in the production of identity, she challenges the traditional binary framework of gender at the heart of her theory. Her observations provide a novel perspective from which to evaluate the complex nature of these ideas. According to Butler," Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" (33).

Sexual distinction is a regulatory concept that is forcefully materialized through time by highly regulated practices, not only a result of material differences. The regulatory standards of sex function performatively to materialize sexual difference and construct the materiality of bodies in the service of strengthening the heterosexual imperative. This implies that the body's fixity, forms, and motions will all be completely material, but physicality will be rethought as an effect of power, as the most productive impact of

power. Butler's theories include how gender is socially created. She denies the notion that there is a biological or psychological essence that determines how individuals should behave and contends that social norms and expectations define how people should behave based on how they perceive their gender to be. These standards are internalized and taken on by individuals, who then successfully perform their gender roles and manifestations. This framework emphasizes how social conditioning has a strong influence on how gender manifests itself. Butler challenges the traditional view of identity as a fixed core. She questions the idea of authenticity and claims that even the notion of a genuine self is shaped by social conventions. As individuals traverse the complex interaction between personal agency and the limitations of society norms, people start to see and express themselves as distinct genders. This flexible point of view questions essentialist ideas of identity and promotes a more complex investigation of how it develops.

The idea that gender is not just an individual matter but also a deeply ingrained social phenomena is at the heart of Butler's thesis. She stresses that the appearance of gender stability results from the repetition of performative behaviors, such as accepting or rejecting social standards. Social norms are reinforced and maintained through continued obedience, which serves to establish and uphold the same identity that social standards purport to disclose. Beyond the personal sphere, Butler has made significant contributions to the understanding of gender and sexuality. Her research has profound effects on wider cultural systems and power relationships. People have the power to challenge established conventions and redraw the lines of identity by understanding the performative aspect of gender.

Butler asserts that gender and sex would be aligned if sex, like gender, were determined by cultural constructions. Butler also mentions sex reassignment procedures as an example of people trying to change their sex in order to fit in with society's standards, a move that, in Butler's opinion, emphasizes how gender is socially constructed. In this situation, her

claim that gender is performative, has more weight. Butler argues that a particular action turns into a performative one when it is continuously carried out and has a number of significant repercussions. In Butler's view, a person's gender develops via the interaction of many discourse systems that cross over and have an impact on one another. A person's gender is always changing and cannot be set as a static entity since this interaction is ongoing and dynamic. This introduces performativity, a key and contentious idea in Butler's philosophy. Gender should be viewed as the cultural interpretation of a fundamental biological sex. The performativity theory developed by Judith Butler has significantly changed how we think about gender. In Gender Trouble, she highlights the performative element of gender. In this situation, there is no set criterion of identification defined by innate characteristics. Gender instead functions as a flexible and adaptive concept that takes many forms across time and in different settings.

In Butler's view, identity is best understood as a signifying practise, and the subject is the result of speech that must adhere to certain standards. inside this paradigm, Butler situates individuals based on their gender, sex, and desire inside what she refers to as the regulative discourse. Regulative discourse also establishes the acceptable ways in which sex, gender, and sexuality can be expressed. Gender behaviour is anticipated to reproduce within a limited range of patterns and forms, follow established norms, and go through stages of normalization.

When it comes to gender and sexuality, the idea of performativity is distinct from gendered and sexualized performances. Performativity addresses a fundamentally distinct component, although a performance may entail conscious control and might exhibit some degree of artificiality. When we claim that gender is performative, we are essentially claiming that our understanding of gender and how we situate ourselves within the context of gender and sexuality in relation to others is done via the repetition and enactment of

certain acts and behaviours. However, in examinations of language and gender, as well as language and sexuality, the line between performance and performativity can occasionally become hazy. Some analysts could go back and forth between the two ideas in terms of their discourse and epistemological stance. It's interesting to note that Judith Butler uses the word perform on occasion in a way that suggests a regulated and styled performance, going beyond the simple act of performativity. Butler argues further that normative behaviours that conform to our expectations tend to hide the fact that identity is fundamentally performative.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity investigates how power relationships affect how individuals perceive gender and desire. Butler believes that people don't already have a gender identity when they first learn to speak; rather, they become gendered subjects by adhering to recognisable standards of gender intelligibility. People's gender identities are thus established within a framework in which only gender expressions that follow cisgender and heterosexual standards are regarded as acceptable. This system, which Butler refers to as the "heterosexual matrix", promotes a hierarchy of antagonism between masculine and femininity through heterosexual behaviour.

The heterosexual paradigm serves as a historical narrative, influencing knowledge and power relations. Only when a person's gender matches the category to which they were born and their desire matches the opposing gender category are they accepted. In this setting, queer and trans people only receive acknowledgement provided their non-normative identities are compatible with liberal-humanist principles and follow the rules of the heterosexual paradigm. People who cross the line into intolerance risk experiencing violence, including gender-based assault . Mentioning this assault highlights the practical effects that many trans persons face as a result of their lack of acceptance inside the heterosexual system.

An in-depth understanding of the complex interplay between gender identity and social norms in historical narratives may be gained by analyzing the tales of

Shikandi and *Ila* from ancient Indian texts using Judith Butler's theory of performativity. *Shikhandi*, a diverse gender-identity figure, emerges as a compelling case study that highlights the applicability of Butler's conceptual framework in circumstances unrelated to those in which it was developed. Gender as a performance is clearly represented in *Shikhandi*. His transformation from one gender to another is a symbol of the ambiguity that surrounds gender identification. *Shikhandi* firmly personifies masculinity, embodying the role of a male warrior with apparent conviction in both appearance and demeanour. As a result, it is clear that his identity is not a fixed thing but rather the result of a succession of deceptive behaviours. Using the analytical framework offered by Judith Butler's theory of performativity to analyse *Ila 's* story within the medieval texts called *Puranas* results in an in-depth examination of the complex link between gender identity, societal standards, and divine intervention. *Ila 's* story is an engaging case study that clarifies how Butler's conceptual frameworks might be applied to historical narratives. The story highlights the critical part that societal acceptance plays in establishing and validating gender identity.

People might develop a greater feeling of agency over their gender identity by taking inspiration from *Bahuchara Mata* and taking part in her worship. This is consistent with Butler's focus on the agency contained within performative actions, highlighting the transformational possibility of adopting a performative identity. The representation of gender identities inherent flexibility and adaptability is crucial to *Bahuchara Mata's* story and the practises that surround her. This is in line with the idea that identity is not fixed in rigidity but may change and be renegotiated through the medium of performative activities.

In Pandey Bechan Sharma's story *Chocolate*, a deep and multidimensional analysis of gender roles and identity performances takes place inside the intimate limits of a household setting. A compelling line of inquiry is opened up by the use of Judith Butler's performativity theory, one that examines how the story subverts social norms, depicts identity conflicts

skillfully, and illuminates the complex relationship between societal power structures and gender performances A dynamic fusion of cultural standards, power relations, and the fundamentally performative aspect of gender and identity are embodied by the characters through their actions, wants, and reactions. Through this analytical lens, the story unfolds an invitation to reflect on the complex tapestry where social expectations, power relationships, and the performative world of gender and identity converge and divide.

The idea of gender performativity by Judith Butler has significant implications for research analysis in a variety of contexts and provides a diverse lens for examining narratives. Butler's theory resonates in research for a variety of reasons, all of which add to our understanding of the complex interactions that exist between gender, identity, and performance within the setting of multiple narratives. Butler's theory's powerful argument that gender identities are flexible and change over time is one of its core tenets. Researchers use this lens to chart the development of character's gender identities and performances throughout the course of a story. The fluctuating phases of identity reverberate with the beat of the story's heart, making this dynamic particularly strong in character-driven storylines. This dynamic is especially powerful in character-driven narratives because the changing stages of identity echo with the pulse of the narrative. Butler's theoretical framework sheds light on the complex relationship between power relations and the construction of identity.

In stories that explore power dynamics or illustrate instances of oppression and defiance, this lens takes on a greater relevance since it reveals the undercurrents of identity building. Butler's theory is effective because it resonates symbiotically with other critical structure, most notably intersectionality. We can analyse the complex relationships between gender performativity and other social variables including ethnic background, sexual orientation, class, and others. Indian literature is rich in stories that cross cultural, historical, and social boundaries, making it a perfect field for exploring how characters upend and

perform gender norms. This integration analyses depth and helps us grasp character's motivations and identities on a more comprehensive level. Desires and romantic interactions between characters are examples of areas where gender performativity is prominent. We learn how gender performances may be molded by and impact characters' emotional lives by looking at characters' romantic relationships and points of attraction.It examines instances of character's gender performances that subvert, oppose, or negotiate societal expectations. The stories are set in their own cultural contexts and take into account how caste, class, and sexual orientation connect with other social categories like gender.

Chapter Three

Gender Performative Expressions in Indian Literary Narratives

Despite being unquestionably revolutionary in some academic and cultural contexts, the idea of gender performance is not necessarily a new one in the rich tradition of Indian literature. The enormous range of this history, from the timeless stories of antiquity to the current artistic works that adorn our present landscapes, is evidence of the complex examination of gender roles and manifestations that have persisted throughout time. Finding an extensive array of narratives that have grappled with the ambiguous borders of gender identity is inevitable when tracing the evolution of gender performance within the canon of Indian literary history. There is a true treasure of stories where deities and humans alike follow pathways that violate conventional gender conventions in the ancient mythologies and scriptures, such as the *Vedas* and *Puranas*.

The gender performance concept has infiltrated the Indian literary imagination to such great depths that it is shown in transformational narratives in which gods and goddesses adopt various genders or even blur the gender lines entirely. The landscape of Indian literature is witnessing the birth of characters whose gender performances are beyond the range of social expectations as the timeline continues to unfold. "Hindu mythology makes constant references to queerness, the idea that questions notions of maleness and femaleness" (Pattanaik 12). These narratives feature heroes that defy the binary ideas of gender, from *Puranas* and epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* to the abundance of local folklore. These characters frequently manoeuvre the complex terrain of social norms, testing the bounds and going against conventional roles. Through its spellbinding narratives, the *Mahabharatha r*eveals a profound exploration of human experiences and cosmic dimensions. Two stories, those of *Ila* and *Shikandi*, stand out among its vastness like

magnificent gems, illustrating the complex interactions of fate, identity, and the perplexing threads that weave the human condition.

Ila appears in the *Adiparva*(Book of Beginning) of the *Mahabharatha* and the fourth section of the *Vishnu Purana* also provides a more extensive account on *Ila* . *Manu*'s daughter *Ila* , was born from her father's unsuccessful sacrifice ceremony. She was born as a girl, but after the intervention of the deities *Mitra* and *Varuna*, she was converted into a male named *Sudyumna*. However, this alteration was not permanent. While wandering near the hermitage of *Budha*, the son of the moon, *Sudyumna* was once again transformed, this time into a woman, due to a curse from the deity *Shiva*. During this time, she had a son named Pururavas with the Rishi *Budha*. Later, *Sudyumna* was transformed back into a man through the prayers of the noble *Rishis*. He had three sons: *Utkala, Gaya,* and *Vinata*. *Utkala* eventually received the city of *Pratishta* from his father.

Canto nine of bhagvata Purana gives further account on the curse and transformation of *Sudyumna*. He went on a hunting expedition to a forest named Sukumara at the foot of Mount Meru. In this forest, Lord *Siva* and Goddess *Parvathi* were engaged in intimate activities. Seeing them in that state, the great saintly persons who had come there left and went to the *asrama* of *Nara-Narayana*. Upon observing the sight of Lord *Siva* and *Parvathi*, *Sudyumna*'s body was transformed from male to female, and he became a beautiful woman. He wandered with other women, and *Budha*, the son of the moon, desired her and married her. *Sudyumna*, now a woman, remembered her spiritual master *Vashista* and sought his help. *Vashista* prayed to Lord *Siva* on *Sudyumna*'s behalf, who then granted that *Sudyumna* would alternate between being a male and a female every month. Every month, *Ila* was permitted to alter her gender, but this uncertainty complicated their lives.

The persona of *Ila* serves as a tangible example of the dynamic movement that is gender creation. The supernatural hand that orchestrates *Ila* 's change from a male to a female

form, driven by Lord *Siva*'s command, invites us to see a representation of gender as a fluid concept rather than as a fixed attribute.

An in-depth understanding of gender identity and social norms in historical narratives can be gained by analysing the story of *Shikandi* in the legendary Indian epic *Mahabharata*. The Mahabharata, an extensive epic that explores the complexity of human relationships, morality, and destiny, presents *Shikandi* as an intriguing and crucial character. *Shikandi*'s position at the heart of the Battle of *Kurukshetra* resonates with immense significance. The story begins from *Amba,* She had intended to wed *Shalva,* the guy she had selected, but her plans fell through when the ferocious warrior *Bhisma* abducted her and her sisters. He escorted them to his hometown of Hastinapur, where they were informed that they would have to wed his half-brother Vichitravirya, who was considerably younger and less capable.

As the thought of having to please two spouses was difficult enough, Vichitravirya agreed to let *Amba* marry the guy of her choice. *Amba* was unfortunate because Shalva would not accept her as his bride since she had been contaminated by having contact with another guy. *Amba* then went back to *Vichitravirya*. He, too, refused to accept her, claiming that once given, she was a gift that could not be revoked. Then, *Amba* approached *Bhisma* and requested him to marry her. He claimed he couldn't since he had vowed to live a celibate life. When *Amba* asked *Kartikeya* for help to get revenge on *Bhisma*, he was given a garland that, when worn by a man, could kill him. However strong it was, no guy embraced it. Even *Drupada* and Parashuram declined to support her cause. *Shiva* was then called upon by *Amba*, who was then promised punishment in her next life. *Amba* accepted death and wanted her rebirth.

King *Drupada*'s frantic longing for a son drives him to seek Siva's help. However, Siva predicting a male kid who is also a female , sets the stage for a transformational story. After *Drupada* trusted in Shiva's promise of a son, *Amba* was reincarnated as *Drupada*'s

daughter *Shikandi* and nurtured as a son. *Shikandi* was later married to a princess. When the princess discovers that her spouse is actually a woman, she wages a fight against King *Drupada*. Nonetheless, King *Drupada*, who has been aware of the scenario since its inception, pretends ignorance and even swears by it, putting himself in a web of deception and pretence.

Shikandini, *Drupada*'s daughter, goes to a secluded forest to contemplate her plight, greatly touched by the agony she has unknowingly caused her parents.. She got aid from a yaksha named Sthuna, who loaned her his manhood so she could demonstrate her masculinity. *Shikandi* afterwards assisted *Drupada* in regaining his kingdom and worked to carry out her father's desire to kill *Drona* and split the *Kuru* family. *Shikandi*'s participation in the conflict between the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas* was essential. On the ninth day of combat, she confronted *Bhisma* while dressed as a male. *Bhisma*'s promise not to cause harm to women or those who seem feminine becomes a crucial story point. *Sikhandin* attacks *Bhisma* because he perceives him to be a representation of female spirit. *Bhisma*, on the other hand, refrains from retaliating, emphasising his dedication to his promise. The situation worsens when *Sikhandin* becomes a shield in the vanguard, with the *Pandavas* using him as a strategic advantage against *Bhisma*. This allowed Arjuna to take him down, eventually killing him beneath a hail of arrows. Later *Drona*'s son raided the Pandava camp when all the troops were asleep and massacred everyone there, *Draupadi's* kids were decapitated, her twin brother *Dhristadhyumna* was strangled, and her elder brother *Shikandi* had been found cut in two.

Shikandi, is an enigmatic character whose life involves both the fight for identity and the fulfilment of destiny's complicated plan. *Drupada*'s ambition to turn his daughter into a son magnifies the cultural constraints that limit people depending on their gender. *Shikandi*'s journey illustrates the complexity of gender roles and expectations, as well as an examination of the contradiction between outer appearances and innate identities.

Another significant story of gender performance presents *Bahuchara Mata*, a narrative spread far and wide, becoming a symbol of empowerment for women and a protector of marginalised minorities, notably the Hijra community in India. Hindu deity *Bahuchara Mata* is largely worshipped in Gujarat and other regions of the country. She is frequently viewed as a manifestation of the goddess *Shakti* or *Durga*. *Bahuchara Mata* is often referred to as *Bahucharaji Mata* or *Bahuchar Mata.* She became connected with women's protection, fertility, and well-being, and her shrine at Becharaji became a pilgrimage site for those seeking her graces. Oral storytellers were trusted with the talent of telling tales like that of *Bahuchara Mata*, which are known for their vivid imagery and profound significance. These storytellers retold these tales during gatherings, rites, and communal occasions. This also resulted in variations in the details of stories due to different retellings and interpretations over time.

It is a story of mystery and transformation in which the mysterious activities of a girl's partner lead to profound realizations about identity, gender roles, and commitment. The narrative is set in a scenario in which a young woman's marriage is plagued by worry and perplexity. Her husband's late-night forays into the forest remain a confusing puzzle that cloud their relationship. The story takes a dramatic turn when the girl's chase brings her to a clearing in the forest. There, the unexpected discovery awaits, her spouse is discovered behaving in the manner of a Hijra, a person who shows a non-binary identity frequently associated with South Asian traditions. The realization shatters previous assumptions and catalyzes a shift, both in the story and inside the individuals themselves.

The transformation of the girl into the powerful goddess *Bahuchara* is a breakthrough point. It allows the girl to transcend her earthly limits and take on the title of divinity. This crucial moment not only symbolizes her elevation into a higher dimension, but it also reinforces her newfound awareness of her husband's predicament. Her husband's statement

reveals the weight of parental and cultural forces that led to his decision. *Bahuchara's* reply is a combination of empathy and justice. She proposes a transformational and symbolic solution, asking all who share his plight to engage in a process of self-actualization and commitment.

Another important tale about Bahuchara involves a monarch who begged the goddess for a son. The goddess fulfilled his desire in answer, but the emerging prince was impotent. *Bahuchara* appeared to the prince in a midnight vision and commanded him to remove his own genitals, dress in feminine clothes, and commit oneself as her servant. The story goes on to say that *Bahuchara Mata* has the ability to detect impotent males and force them to do the same thing. Those who refused were greeted with her wrath, as she would lay a curse on them, subjecting them to seven consecutive lives of impotence.

The *Bahuchara Mata* temple in Gujarat is a popular pilgrimage site for Hijras, a marginalised population who consider the goddess to be their patroness. This symbiotic relationship underscores mythology's function in offering consolation, validation, and community identity to people on the periphery of society standards. The goddess herself is frequently portrayed as having both masculine and feminine characteristics. This symbolism has a strong resonance with the Hijra identity since they also question conventional gender roles.

The Hijra community draws strength and bravery from the goddess *Bahuchara Mata*, especially during the ritual of emasculation, in which a skilled midwife guides the severing of the male genitalia. "The goddess on the rooster, *Bahuchara Mata*, is invoked in many Hijra communities during Hijra's castration ceremony which is termed '*nirvana*'. It marks the end of one identity and the birth of a new identity" (Pattanaik 107). After pleading with *Bahuchara Mata* in prayer, the date of this procedure is chosen. The Hijra calls out the goddess' name repeatedly while performing the emasculation, emphasising the close connection between the rite and the holy. Through this gesture, the Hijra and *Bahuchara*

Mata effectively establish a devotional link that is strengthened during the nirvana journey. After the procedure, the Hijra spends 41 days recovering. The Hijra obtains formal initiation into the community when these 41 days have passed. The Hijra embraces femininity during this momentous occasion, donning feminine clothing, jewellery, cosmetics, flowers, and other symbolic objects of spiritual significance for women. At the end of these 41 days, a private ceremony for *Bahuchara Mata* takes place. The Hijra vows devotion to the community during this ceremony in front of a picture of *Bahuchara Mata*.

The constant interaction between myth and reality adds to *Bahuchara Mata*'s legacy. The present practises within the Hijra community are influenced by a variety of variables, including cultural adaptability, individual belief systems, and the balance between tradition and innovation, even if the myths may work as compelling tales that question society norms. The legend and adoration of *Bahuchara Mata* are deeply entwined with the respect and power accorded to Hijras in Becharaji, as seen by their capacity to bless or curse.

The short story *Chocolate* by Pandey Bechan Sharma, also known as Ugra, offers a fascinating lens through which to examine the social atmosphere of the era and its relevance to the present. Despite the passage of time, the topics raised in Ugra's stories remain important, illuminating the complex relationships between cultural expectations, sexual identity, and the debate over homosexuality. It is interesting that Ugra's collection was created at a period of time marked by colonial control and the emergence of a national identity. As they develop against the backdrop of a country's battle for independence, the stories indirectly explore the details of male-male desire in this setting.

Protagonist Prasad, also known as Dinkar Babu, revealed his love-related grief in a moment of vulnerability. He read lyrics that exposed his inner anguish while somewhat drunk, holding his companions attention. They were intrigued by his demeanour and keen to understand what was bothering him. Dinkar Babu reflected about his happiness before to

giving in to love, which confused his companions. Even the talkative Manohar Chandra was intrigued by Dinkar's cryptic looks. As soon as Manohar brought up the idea of 'Chocolate', young lads who have been misled by cultural negativity, the talk took a depressing turn. Later Ramesh was introduced by Dinkar Babu, who said he was the son of a friend. However, their conversation revealed a strong bond between them. Dinkar's feelings were evident, but Ramesh seemed uncomfortable with his approaches. Dinkar's shame somehow gave him a sudden clarity. He then disappeared for a period of six months. Ramesh's father began to keep a close eye on his son's actions. The story explored complex issues of love, desire, and social pressures, making readers think about various emotions and effects they may have. "Ugra's opponents argued the while he claimed to be opposing homosexuality, the actual ches of his writings was to titillate and excite his readers and this no encourage, not discourage, homosexual desire"(Vanita and Kidwai 282).

In the narrative, Dinkar Babu's actions and wants are linked to cultural standards and expectations around masculinity, desire, and power relationships. Ramesh's presence elicits a response from him that shows how he navigates and acts upon his own concept of masculinity and desire. Dinkar's pursuit of Ramesh may be regarded as a dominating masculinity act in which he displays ownership and control over Ramesh, so reaffirming conventional gender norms and power relations. Dinkar's emotions and actions challenge traditional gender roles. His sensitivity defies stereotyped masculine expectations, demonstrating that males, like women, can be tender, emotional, and moved by love. *Chocolate* by Ugra is a contemporary work that contributes to the ongoing discourse about gender identity by shedding light on modern opinions and challenges faced by persons who do not subscribe to binary gender stereotypes.

The investigation of various narratives has opened the way for a more in-depth understanding of the complex fabric of gender identities. The incorporation of mythological

tales such as *Shikandi*, *Ila* , and *Bahuchara Mata*, as well as the account of a contemporary piece *Chocolate* by Ugra, provides a fascinating channel for diving into the varied nature of gender debate. As we examine these stories, we see how they collectively function as informativeness tools, amplifying voices that oppose conventional gender roles and inspiring thoughtful reflections on the profound role that culture, spirituality, and personal stories play in influencing how we perceive and embrace gender diversity.

Chapter Four

Dissecting Gender: : Butler's Performativity Theory in Literary Critique

According to Judith Butler, gender is proposed as manifestation of a series of repeated behaviours or performances rather than having any ingrained stability or essence. The enactment of gender roles and identities by individuals occurs via their acts and behaviours and these enacted performances actively contribute to the creation of social norms and prevalent expectations. Butler makes a very important argument in gender studies when she asserts that nobody really is a gender from the start and that gender is performative. Butler acknowledges that gender is culturally formed, but she also emphasizes the freedom of the individual and the need for those who identify as a different gender to reject conventional gender roles.

The way *Ila* 's story develops serves as evidence of the gender's intrinsic flexibility. The mobility of gender roles in Indian mythology is embodied by *Ila* 's account. The way they change between male and female forms demonstrates how gender identity is more complex than a simple distinction. *Ila* 's gender performance changes when they switch between genders, showing that these roles are socially produced rather than fixed. *Ila* navigates and displays their gender identification in a variety of ways as they navigate the ups and downs of life, overcoming the conventional limitations of a binary worldview. *Ila* clarifies the idea that gender is a dynamic performance that is intricately related to the social environment in which it takes place. Butler's central argument is that society's norms and expectations have a significant impact. *Ila* 's interactions with these social norms provide a vivid scenario that demonstrates how outside factors influence the performative part of gender.

Ila actively participates in the complex movement of creating their gender identity, whether they follow or reject these predefined conventions. *Ila* 's story also highlights instances of resistance and rebellion. These examples of *Ila* defying and subverting gender expectations serve as powerful reminders of the underlying agency in the performative nature of gender. *Ila* 's acts highlight the performative world's capacity for transformation. Whether via interactions with the larger environment, obedience to society standards, or introspective journeys of self-discovery, societal influences serve as potent shaping factors in the characters' gender identity development. Some characters bravely question and reconstruct deeply rooted gender conventions, functioning as leaders in the effort to dismantle the mainstream gender narrative. Characters in this story demonstrate how gender identity may be enacted differently in different circumstances or how individuals embody several parts of their gender identity at different points in their lives.

The traditional conventions linked with gender and lineage are illustrated by King Manu's initial disappointment with the birth of a girl, his desire to change her into a son, and the heavenly intervention that follows. A complex interaction of power dynamics and mutual dependency is shown by *Budha's* manipulation, which withholds identity while promoting sexual pleasure. "Gender often proves remarkably tenacious. Even the Vedantic theory of illusion, which disparages the body in favor of the soul, implies that you may very well remain a male in some essential way even when you happen to take on a female body; even when memory is transformed, the male almost always reverts to his maleness in the end" (Shulman and Stroumsa 68). The final choice of *Ila* to assume a male form strikes a deep chord, highlighting the cultural disadvantages and difficulties that are intimately entwined with gender.

Within this narrative, power dynamics also unfold their complicated threads. The external force which changes Sudyumna's gender emphasizes how external

influences, whether cosmic or societal, have the capacity to mould and form identity. This is consistent with Butler's concept of performativity as a balancing act between agency and external structures, in which the act of acting gender is filled with a patchwork of societal and individual influences. The myth reflects society's reliance on male heirs and dynastic continuity. The profound significance of gender performativity is revealed in all of its complex sides as we dive deeper into the Sudyumna narrative, which unfolded within the ageless bounds of ancient mythology.

This story develops as a canvas where gender metamorphoses materialize, mimicking the same principles that support Butler's revolutionary theory. Through the prism of Manu's grief, the social effects of gender change are brought to light, mimicking the complex ways in which civilizations create gender roles and assign value depending on them. *Sudyumna*, who alternates between male and female forms, sets off on a trip that perfectly captures the spirit of performativity. The regularity of alteration on a monthly basis challenges the idea that gender is an immutable constant and acts as a concrete metaphor for the malleability of gender identity. The fact that Sudyumna exists serves as a witness to the complex interaction of society norms, divine intervention, and personal choice in determining how gender is performed.

The tale of *Shikhandi*, which is embedded within the great *Mahabharata,* offers a complex narrative that adds to the discerning standpoint of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. *Shikhandi's* very existence questions conventional gender limits, prompting both the characters and the audience to do the same. The story looks into the complex interplay between one's sense of self and the performative components of gender by examining self-identity and self-perception after the shift. *Shikhandi's* development into a fierce warrior sheds light on how

power dynamics and gender performance interact. *Shikhandini's* gender identification is first determined for her based on the strict biological sex classifications, which is in sharp contrast to how she perceives herself. She embarks on a transformative journey as a result of this stark mismatch, one that goes beyond simple self-realization and digs deeply into the complex web of how gender is enacted and perceived. *Shikhandini's* journey is especially moving since it openly challenges conventional social conventions and prescribed roles. She decides to live her life as *Shikhandi*, which is a drastic deviation from her assigned female identity, in an audacious act of defiance. This bold decision proves conclusively that gender identity is a performative expression with a strong foundation in both personal agency and social norms rather than a fixed, unalterable aspect of one's existence.

The capacity of society to accept and recognize *Shikhandini's* new gender identification is crucial to the success of her change into *Shikhandi*. This aspect flawlessly meshes with Judith Butler's claim that the external recognition one's gender identity receives is organically tied to its validity. *Shikhandini's* trip highlights the crucial part that social recognition plays in the performative construction of gender and consequently, the dynamic character of that construction. It's important to recognize that *Shikhandini's* metamorphosis is the result of an ongoing process. Butler argues that gender identity is not a static concept but rather a dynamic performance that includes a wide range of aspects, such as sartorial choices, behavioral modifications, and social interactions. *Shikhandini's* everyday activities weave together into a complex pattern that culminates in her gender identification as *Shikhandi*.

The narrative of *Shikhandi*ni serves as a powerful reminder of how closely linked gender is to other aspects of an individual's identity. Her story links with

both her reputation as a fearsome warrior and her relentless pursuit of vengeance, weaving a complicated web of influences that both shape and are impacted by her performative display of gender. This intersectionality reinforces the notion that gender cannot exist in isolation but is intricately intertwined into the idea of one's whole identity by reflecting the multidimensional nature of identity itself. In essence, *Shikhandi's* persistent belief that he is a man serves as an example of the persuading influence that societal norms have on forming personal identity. From birth, society assigns individuals to specific roles, behaviours, and expectations based on the binary notion of gender.

Shikhandi's strong adherence to the masculine gender identification is an example of how these cultural conventions persist despite personal reflection and conflicting biological indicators. In this instance, *Shikhandi'*s wife's revelation of his reality acts as a catalyst for a more extensive debate on the performative aspects of gender. The continual process by which people negotiate the complex network of cultural expectations and self-expression is mirrored by his cautious upholding of his identity as a male through performative behaviours and social encounters. It emphasizes how gender identity is not a fixed, inherent trait but rather a constantly changing, dynamic performance influenced by society influences and individual experiences.

This ancient folklore of *Bahuchara Mata*, which has its roots in Indian culture, eloquently demonstrates how gender identity can be actively created, played, and modified within the complicated framework of societal and cultural situations. Her transition represents the fluidity of gender in the context of cultural and religious beliefs and involves more than just a physical change. In the case of *Bahuchara Mata*, a performative ritual enacts her gender identity transition. This ritual is an ongoing

process that involves acting and taking on a new gender role. The followers of *Bahuchara Mata* participate in a variety of performance manifestations that go against and beyond conventional gender roles. They accept a flexible view of gender and acknowledge that it is not restricted by ideas of male and female. Instead, they acknowledge that people may actively form and express their gender within the parameters of their beliefs and practises and appreciate the diversity of gender identities and manifestations. In the particular religious and cultural framework that surrounds *Bahuchara Mata*, castration is not seen as a mut*Ila* tion but rather as a sacred act that aligns the person with the goddess's particular idea of gender variety. It represents the acceptance and celebration of a gender identity that goes beyond the conventional dichotomy of male and female.

Butler's theory sheds light on how the adoption of a gender identity that is at odds with the sex that was assigned to them at birth represents a deliberate and purposeful performative act when examining the transgender community's relationship with *Bahuchara Mata*. This intentional decision challenges gender conventions since it goes beyond the traditional binary conception of gender and is consistent with *Bahuchara Mata*'s divine embodiment of gender variety. Also this gender performance occurs in the context of cultural and religious beliefs, illustrating the crucial role that cultural norms have in validating and establishing the gender identities of those involved. The fact that the community has accepted and acknowledged these gender performances highlights the social construction of gender and serves as an example of how communal practises help to define and confirm gender identity.

Characters in the story of *Chocolate* are shown performing in ways that exemplify the fundamental idea that identity is not a natural trait but rather the

result of recurrent social behaviours affected by societal norms and expectations.

Dinkar Babu's persistent image of a devoted lover and Ramesh's changing responses

are moving illustrations of the performativity theory ideas of repetition and fluidity.

The narrative powerfully illustrates how societal norms and expectations have a

significant impact on how people behave, giving rise to concealment, shame, and the

active shaping of individual identities. As a result, when examined through the lens of

Butler's theory, the story reveals a complex interaction between social expectations

and personal preferences, providing insightful information on the complex processes

driving identity development and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

In a culture where gender roles dictate that a man should be drawn to a woman,

Dinkar's desires don't line up with these societal conventions. Instead, he discovers

himself drawn to Ramesh, defying the norms of society. The story's depiction of

society's expectations of Dinkar is a striking illustration of the deeply rooted gender

and relationship conventions that are prevalent in the local setting. These standards are

based on the conventional, heteronormative framework, which holds that a man must

be attracted to women and pursue romantic relationships within. This cultural

contradiction has a direct impact on the guilt and secrecy Dinkar feels about his

feelings. His acts are motivated by sincere objectives, but the guilt and concealment

arise because his sincere actions run counter to what society considers to be acceptable.

This demonstrates how cultural standards have a powerful influence on how people

behave and reinforce the notion that some desires are abnormal or aberrant.

We discover many levels of gender identity when we look at these stories

through the theoretical lens. *Ila* 's effortless transition between masculine and

female forms emphasizes how gender is malleable and subject to social norms and

outside influences. *Shikhandi's* path is a perfect example of how gender identification may be flexible and how deeply cultural standards can affect a person's sense of self. The necessity of asserting one's own gender identity is highlighted by Dinkar's journey of self-discovery and *Bahuchara Mata's* heavenly change, whether via introspection or societal and religious acceptance. These stories from the ancient and modern Indian literary genre demonstrate how gender is dynamic and performative. They disprove the idea that gender is binary and emphases how cultural settings, personal inquiry, and societal conventions may all have an impact on one's gender identification.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This research paper has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of gender representation in Indian literature using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. The characters *Ila , Shikandi,* and the tale of *Bahuchara Mata* served as lenses through which to examine the portrayal and performance of gender in this study of the intriguing world of Indian literary tradition. This study has illuminated how these characters defy and transcend conventional gender conventions, highlighting the fluidity and diversity of gender identities in Indian literature by using Judith Butler's gender theory of performativity as a framework.

Ila 's transition between masculine and female forms throughout our study served as an example of the performative aspect of gender. By upending social norms, *Shikandi's* genuine self-expression highlights the pliability and subversive possibilities of gender performances. Additionally, this study has revealed the connections between these performances and other significant social factors like caste, religion, and cultural settings, providing a deeper understanding of the complexity of gender in Indian literary narratives.

It becomes evident that these literary representations of gender challenge and subvert societal norms, disrupting traditional gender binaries and offering narratives that contribute to the understanding of gender fluidity, diversity, and empowerment within the Indian literary tradition. This study emphasizes the value of literature as an indicator of society's changing conception of gender and provides evidence of the persistent ability of narrative to alter our perspectives on the world. By continuing to explore such narratives and characters, we can further enrich our comprehension of the complex relationship between gender, performance, and culture, not only in

Indian literature but also in the broader context of global discourse on gender
identity and representation.

When rigorously analyzed via a lens of Judith Butler's performativity theory,
the narratives of *Ila , Shikandi, Bahuchara Mata* and *Chocolate* by Ugra elegantly
unravel the representation of gender fluidity within Indian literature. Collectively, these
stories highlight the idea that gender is not a static binary but rather a performative
construct that is heavily impacted by society and personal perceptions.

Additionally, these literary works show how Indian literature has been at the
forefront of discussions regarding gender fluidity and performance, providing a forum
for underrepresented voices and upending the established quo. These tales continue to
be essential in moulding our conception of gender and promoting acceptance and
celebration of various gender identities inside Indian culture and outside, as society
develops and becomes more inclusive. Stories from Indian epics like the
Mahabharata, where characters like *Ila* and *Shikandi* traverse difficult gender
changes and expressions, show that Indian culture has recognized and supported
gender fluidity for millennia. By highlighting the social construction of gender, *Ila* 's
metamorphosis between male and female forms undermines the essentialist
conception of gender.

 Also supporting the acceptance of gender variation within India's spiritual
landscape is the existence and adoration of goddesses like *Bahuchara Mata*, who is
frequently portrayed as a transgender goddess. These stories demonstrate how gender
fluidity and performativity are firmly ingrained in Indian culture and refute any claims
that they are Western imports by predating debates on such topics by centuries. These
narratives question the strict definitions of gender that have long existed, urging readers
to reconsider and deepen their comprehension of this sensitive aspect of

identity. These stories effectively dismantle ignorance and prejudice by showcasing individuals who defy accepted gender roles. As a result, empathy is fostered and a variety of gender identities are accepted.

Ila 's extraordinary change demonstrates the range of gender fluidity and emphasizes the fluidity of gender identities, which is exactly in line with Butler's claim that gender is a performative, dynamic construct rather than an innate characteristic. The journey of *Ila* is used as an example of a story in which gender identity is not restricted to the traditional binary categories but rather appears as a fluid and constantly changing performance. Sim*Ila* r to this, *Shikandi's* dramatic transition from a woman to a man pushes and defies conventional gender conventions. This fictional example of gender fluidity illustrates how one's gender identity is a dynamic entity that develops via actions, experiences, and self-exploration rather than an unchangeable essence. *Shikandi's* tale serves as a powerful example of how gender is performative and has the power to change.

We find a manifestation of the divine component of gender fluidity when we turn our focus to *Bahuchara Mata*, a venerated deity in Gujarat. The tale of *Bahuchara Mata* goes beyond human experiences to highlight the holy aspect of gender diversity in Indian historical and spiritual traditions. This dispels the myth that the idea of gender fluidity is a recent Western import and supports the claim that it has a significant presence in Indian cultural and spiritual traditions. Finally, *Chocolate* a recent piece by Ugra, presents an engaging discussion of gender and sexuality in modern India. Ugra emphasizes how identities are created via repeated performances, reflecting Butler's idea of performativity, through realistic character depictions and elaborate tales.

Chocolate acknowledges the fluidity of gender identities and how they are always changing in response to society expectations and personal experiences in the context of contemporary Indian literature. *Chocolate*, gives an interesting study of gender and sexuality in contemporary India via believable character portrayals . Ugra underlines how identities are built via repeated performances, echoing Butler's concept of performativity. In the framework of contemporary Indian writing, *Chocolate* emphases the fluidity of gender identities and how they are always shifting in response to social expectations and personal experiences.

The destigmatization of non-binary and transgender identities is among these tales are important results. These tales assist in lessening the prejudice and discrimination that gender-diverse people frequently experience in their daily lives by presenting these identities as legitimate, real, and deserving of respect. The stories emphasize that there is no one-size-fits-all paradigm for how people should show their gender and aim to normalize gender variation.

Further, these stories provide as starting points for important societal discussions. They encourage readers to challenge preconceived notions and social conventions, which results in greater knowledge and comprehension of the many gender experiences that people go through. These stories add to the continuing discussion regarding gender, identity, and the function of societal expectations by igniting these exchanges. They have a significant influence on society outside of the literary world by influencing legislative and policy changes. There is frequently more support for laws and regulations that safeguard the rights and welfare of those who identify as gender nonconforming as cultural attitudes change. These narratives have a lasting influence on younger generations who were raised in more liberal gender ideologies. A more tolerant, open, and understanding society that accepts the full

variety of gender identities will eventually come from the cultural changes brought about by these tales as a result of generational impact. Using this strategy, literary narratives that explore gender fluidity and performance serve as both powerful catalysts for society's shift towards more acceptance and tolerance and as mirrors that reflect societal changes. This study adds to the current conversation on gender at a time when activism for LGBTQ+ rights and gender diversity is growing in popularity. It presents a historical and cultural viewpoint that might enliven current conversations on gender identity and expression, promoting more acceptance.

The study offers a potent counter-narrative to those who may claim that these concepts are culturally foreign by showing the long-standing acceptance of gender fluidity and varied gender identities within Indian society. It has been showed that Indian literature, far from being a passive reflection of gender norms, is a dynamic environment where the performative aspect of gender is clearly depicted, disputed, and recreated. These stories, which span many eras and cultural situations, prove that gender fluidity and the performative elements of gender are not only prevalent in present India but also part of its rich cultural past.

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