

GENDER AND SPACE

Multidisciplinary Insights

Gender and Space

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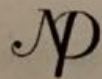
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The Body as Space: Gender, Sexuality and Politics of Power in Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf* and Sadaat Hasan Manto's *Thanda Gosht*

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The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir famously declared "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman". Beauvoir's thesis distinguishes the two categories sex and gender and suggests that while sexuality may be natural and physical, gender is a social construct inculcated through cultural conditioning. Sex is understood as something unalterable, constant, associated with the anatomy whereas gender is the cultural meaning and the form that is ascribed to the body. Despite the fact that gender and sex are distinct from each other unequal power play and sexual politics continues to be important between different gender roles. Beauvoir is also of the view that the prime category of human thought is relation between self and the other. Society has created woman as the 'other' and the other is needed for the self to get defined. Although biological differences do not provide a causal explanation for women's oppression, in a patriarchal society, women have been placed at a disadvantage due to their reproductive function. Over the centuries the concept of a woman's acquiescent maternal role has become so deeply ingrained in culture and society that it is presumed to be a woman's natural destiny. This ideatifies them to the domestic sphere associating them with the body and thus with animals and nature. Just as man considers himself superior to nature so he considers himself superior to woman. Man is the subject self, the 'I' while woman is always the object the other.

This belief says Beauvoir permeated the whole of human history and informs the entire Western philosophical thought. It is for example central to the thought of Sigmund Freud who based his theory of sexuality on the possession of the phallus. According to Freud a man is a man because he possesses the phallus: a woman, simply is, not a man. Therefore, a woman is a lack, a negative; she lacks the phallus that confers subjectivity. Beauvoir proposes that the female