Editorial

What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails and puppy dogs' tails,
That's what little boys are made of.
What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice and all that's nice
That's what little girls are made of.

It would be hard to find a better example of normative gender performativity than this infantile rhyme. It is precisely through such apparently innocuous texts that gender stereotypes are perpetuated and gender normative behaviour perpetuated from an early age. The current issue of Colloquium seeks to present articles which discuss how gender normativity is countered and transcended in literary texts and cultural practices.

Gender Studies have expanded the scope of Feminist Studies by bringing to the fore issues of identities which defy the binaries of male and female. The issues that are increasingly under scrutiny relate to psychology, economics, representations and the performance of gender as opposed to biological functions. The difference between biological sex and gender is something that has been argued since Simone Beauvoir proclaimed "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman". This statement is the starting point of Judith Butler's 1988 essay, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* in which one can see the kernel of her later work, *Gender Trouble*. The critique of gender roles considered normative in the western world, however, started even earlier with Mary Wollstonecraft's critique of

Rousseau's condescending attitude towards women which reflects the naturalisation of the idea of women's subordination, which led to Beauvoir's ironic coinage "The Second Sex".

In India, where family bonds are still strong, strict codes of gender normative conduct are a powerful means of maintaining control and preserving entrenched structures of kinship, marriage and inheritance in a patriarchal society. It is quite another matter that the heterogenous culture of India actually has several pockets of practices which run counter to the patriarchal culture projected in the mainstream. Thus, the presence of matriarchal societies in certain parts of India is conveniently side-lined in all kinds of media representations. The distinction of gender roles mostly coincide with the divisions of public and private domains, and, economic and domestic division of labour. Ironically, even when modern women's versatility in balancing both the fronts are sometimes fèted by equating her with the ten-armed Devi Durga, no question is raised why there is no comparable male deity on whom the Indian men may model themselves. The acknowledgement of gender fluidity found in the story of Arjuna's disguise as Brihannala, or the idea of *"Radhabhadyutisubalitatanu"* associated with Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, is largely suppressed in the dominant Indian mores of gender. Probably, this is partly inherited from the nationalist backlash against colonial feminising of India and Indians. Unfortunately, in their desire to counter such images, the nationalist intellectual elite may have ended up adopting westernised binaries of behaviour at the cost of other possibilities sometimes suggested in older Indian texts. Recent re-readings of these texts which have been encouraged by the rise of gender studies lenses, have yielded some interesting insights into the workings of sexual politics in privileging certain predominant attitudes linked to gender, sexuality and morality.

The essays in this volume examine how literary texts challenged the constructions of gender in various societies at different historical periods.

In *'This house is mine': A Rewriting of the 'Doll's House' Legacy in BuchiEmecheta's Kehinde*, by Jashomati Ghose, the sound of a door banging shut is repeatedly invoked. This paper examines the evolution of women's self-identity from Ibsen to Emecheta. In her analysis Ghose shows how the ending of the latter's novel empowers the heroine to assert her rightful hold over her property; instead of exiling herself from a home that denies her the rights due to any human being, she reverses the gender stereotype of patrilineal and patrilocal society to the shock of her son, who is the one left banging the door in this novel. The diasporic context of the novel serves to challenge notion of patrilocality. By returning to her land of domicile in order to retrieve her agency over her own life, Kehinde, the eponymous heroine , subverts the constructs of both gender and race.

Soumyasree Banerjee's essay, *The Female Superhero: Politics of Sexuality and the Attempts to Transcend the Boundaries of Gender*, provides insights into how the idea of sex versus gender is reflected in the subversive gendering of female superheroes. The detailed discussion of the various phases of the Captain Marvel series traces the broadening scope of the series as it incorporates issues of race and religion within the broader concern with gender and identity. Banerjee skilfully portrays how the various seasons of the series have succeeded in keeping pace with developments in feminist discourse.

Barnana Hemaprava Sarkar distinguishes between 'transcending' and 'transgressing' by examining the interwoven webs of friendships in the novels of Toni Morrison and Elena Ferrante. Her article, *TRANSCENDING - A Choice or a Need? A study in Elena Ferrante's 'Neapolitan Series' and Toni Morrison's 'The Bluest Eye'* addresses

gender as well as racial transgressions/transcendence, by revealing how desire and ambition become intertwined in both the novels.

The possibilities of interpretations inherent in the rich tradition of Indian myths and classical literatures have provided material for three of the essays in this volume. The empowering of women's bodies as sights of power rather than as objects of male desire, and the subversion of expectations of modesty and shame have existed as sub-texts even within the patriarchal mode of classical Indian literature .The discipline of Gender Studies may have started in the west, but the prospect of transgressing expected norms of womanliness and manliness have been inherent in Indian myths and literatures for a long time. The figure of Surpanakha, whose humiliation and mutilation by the 'ideal' men of the Ramayana launched an epic war, is a recurrent subject which has been addressed in more than one article.

The Woman as Other: Analysing Complex Gendered Narratives in Ramacharitmanas, by Nidhi Shukla , discusses the role of Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas as a cultural text which is deployed in enjoining commonly accepted tropes of womanly virtues in India. Shukla traverses a broad sweep of history in connecting the continued survival of the values espoused by Tulsidas, to current discourses in Indian public life

In Surpanakha- More Hated than Hateful: Exploring the Possible Nuances of Mytho-fiction in Kavita Kané's Lanka's Princess, Manisha Bhattacharya. examines Kavita Kané's modern retelling of the story of Surpanakha, Ravana's sister in the Mahabharata to pose questions regarding the representation of a catalyctic female character in epic versions written by male poets. Can a woman author change our perception of Surpanakha? Was she the instigator of war, the cause of Lanka's annihilation, or was she a sacrifice at the altar of

male aggression? The mutilation of her nose is a symbolic castration of a powerful woman whose "monstrous femininity" challenges the patriarchal conceptions of "submissive femininity". Bhattacharya's essay is an examination of the imbrication of mythical narratives with predominant societal norms.

Paromita Chakrabarti has explored the Mahabharata in *Shakuntala and Satyavati: Transcending Gender Roles*. She discusses the subversion of the gender roles traditionally assigned to women. In her discussions Chakrabarti reveals how Shakuntala and Satyavati, iconic female characters, overcome their positions as romanticised objects of lust and manage to use the norms of a patrilineal system to resist the subjugation of the womb. They achieve this by making their surrender to sexual lust conditional upon their right to mother sons who would become Kings.

Feminising the Body and Institutionalising Gender through Smartphone Applications by Aaheli Sen takes us from myths to the geography of the virtual world, where the ambiguity of human behaviour results from equal measures of narcissism and willing submission to governability. Combining geography and sociology, Sen takes a critical look at the governability implicit in women's voluntary use of editing tools on smartphones to project self-images on social media sites. Sen employs a number of critical approaches to look at this modern behavioural phenomenon to comment on the nexus between commercial interests and normative conceptions of beauty and body images.

A discussion of the limitations of gender normativity was deemed to be crucial at a time when these are being questioned by various segments of society which shows an increasing disruption of socially acceptable behaviour. Colloquium, meant for the entire academic community, of which students are also a large part, seeks to highlight

the emerging discourses surrounding gender and sexuality. By doing so, it is to be hoped that this generation of the youth will be more receptive to the diverse possibilities of self-actualisation.

The focus on students have also prompted the editorial board to include an article on an entirely different topic, but one that would be very helpful for students of literature. The last article in this volume, How Ben Jonson Rose from the Stage to the Page, By Mallika Ghosh Sarbadhikary, is relevant to the syllabus of English Literature, though it stands apart from the rest of the contributions.

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