

## PINKIFICATION OF WOMEN: WESTERNISING KERALITE WOMEN

BIBIN MATHEW SEBASTIAN

**Abstract:** The rapidly changing women empowerment scenarios have a significant implication for gendering governance in Kerala. The spatial location of women in the different strata of the society is central to the formulation of an identity. The implementation of various empowerment projects of women like Pink Police, Pink Buses, association of the colour Pink with the *She* Taxi, *She* Pharmacy, Gender Park and the self-help group *Kudumbasree* has given rise to a societal situation in which pink has become a determinant in the association of a feminine identity. Women as a gender are by no means completely empowered: but there is, nevertheless a tendency towards an alignment of Keralite women with that of a Westernised Barbie. This paper calls for a relooking into the policy of the identification of the colour pink with the women by the Government in the process of policy making in the light of Standpoint theory of Gender Theory. The correlation between the colour pink and the politics of identity created in this regard also calls for a re-reading of the policy itself.

**Keywords:** Gender Theory, Pinkification, Standpoint Theory, Westernisation.

**Introduction:** Twenty first century is marked both by the empowerment and exploitation of women in the society at various levels. The new media technology, social networking and entrepreneurship has created a 'new women' out of the pluralistic and polyphonic voices raised by them. The governmental policies are significant in the forefronting of the women in the society. This paper intends to delve into the association of the colour 'pink' with that of the women and the social empowerment projects has resulted in the creation of the hybridized women.

Culture as an umbrella term refers to different groups of people, their ways of living, habits, customs, leisure activities such as art, music, film, food, clothing sports etc. Cultural division is based on many other criteria or factors like region, religion, class, caste and gender. It is the culture and the society that impose the behaviours or patterns of activities for men and women. Therefore Gender is a set of complex multifaceted qualities that culture associate with masculinity or femininity that are culturally determined and socially constructed. The language and the terms which we use in our day to day life has become increasingly Gender biased. The terms like 'mankind' and 'man' instead of 'human kind' and 'people' point towards an androcentric culture we live in. Men are usually the bread winners of the family and enjoy an essential superiority in the society whereas the majority of women are confined to the four walls of the household. The ancient Manusmritic dictum '*nasthree swathanthryam arhati*' (women does not deserve freedom.) plays a significant role even in the division of labour. Her labour has always been attached with her father, sister, wife and mother. The ideology is being instilled indirectly through various agents like attachment of various attributes to gender. Patriarchal perspectives of femininity distort women's true capacities and the society continues to rein-

force the patriarchal values through the process of socialization.

Feminist movements have tried to analyse and question the system of male domination by exploring the economic, social, political and psychological forces within the society. The movement was primarily associated with the English, later spread to America and finally to the Third World Countries. The various waves of the feminists tried to question the various movements existing within the society. The late nineteenth and twentieth century of the first wave feminism had laid its focus on the legal issues primarily gaining women suffrage. The second wave feminism as a movement began in the 1960s in United States focusing on sexuality, family, workplace, reproductive rights, domestic violence, divorce law etc. Third wave feminism began in the early 1990s and continues to the present. It includes multifarious identities like women of many colours, ethnicities, nationalities, religions and cultural backgrounds. These waves have been instrumental in analyzing the stigma, symbols and ideologies associated with women, femininity and their issues.

Pink has been a colour associated with femininity. There are various other stigmas associated with romance, flowers, Barbie dolls, breast cancer etc. A variety of psychological attributes are also attached with the colour pink like lightheartedness, cuteness and softness. Peril Lynn points out the existence of a Pink think, which means "a set of ideas and attitudes what constitutes proper female behavior; a group think that was consciously that was consciously not adhered to by advice writers, manufacturers of toys and other consumer products, experts in many walks of life and public at large, particularly during the mid-twentieth-century." (Lynn, 7) There are various brands who use the colour code pink especially cosmetics, loungewear, toys etc. The binary of the colour pink is sometimes identified as blue attached with

the image of Ken/GI Joe, a stable, white collared military man.

Barbie is a fashion doll manufactured by the American toy company Mattel, Inc. It had its inspiration from the German doll Bild Lilli as an inspiration. The doll was introduced by Ruth Handler in 1959. She named it after her daughter Barbara. Barbie has been portrayed with different careers attached with the set of clothes and accessories. The thrust areas include Educational, Medical, Military, Political, Public Service, Arts, Transportation, Business and Science and Engineering. There are also series of animated films and video games associated with her. There has been an association of the colour pink with the Barbie and sometimes the colour is termed as Barbie Pink or Pantone. The extent of influence on people in creating a Barbie Lifestyle is very much evident in the society through the Celebration of Barbie Runaway Show by Mercedes Benz to the introduction of Barbie themed restaurants. Social Scientist have termed the imitation of the Barbie Lifestyle as Barbie Syndrome. The image of a Barbie is ubiquitous in western society. They represented largely, Caucasian, heterosexual and monogamous nature of the Western people.

The Indian society had the lulls of feministic voices both indigenously and through the impact of Westernisation. Westernisation has been equated with the synonyms of global standards, modern and elite. There has been an increasing trend of Pinkification or Barbification of the image of women in the urban arena. The urban lifestyle has started to identify the gender based on Barbie or Disney. There has also been addressal of complex issues like religion also. The emergence of 'hijarbie' or a hijab wearing Barbie is quite significant. Pink has been increasingly instrumental in creating a 'gender sensitivity' and 'gendered perspective'.

Standpoint theory has been developed in the light of the epistemological sense of the evolution of knowledge and action by particular collectivities in a given point of time. The standpoint exegesis has its roots in Marxist thought. The first claim of the standpoint theorist is that a specific social situatedness (constructed in different ways) gives primacy to the subject or person with a privileged access to truth. The second view is the reversal of the first view the process of 'approximating the truth as part of a dialogical relationship among subjects who are differentially situated'. Standpoint theory is often attached with the feminist school of thought. Dorothy Smith through her view points on feminist standpoint theory point out how the male authorities silence women. They 'grasp power, organization, direction, and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by the discourses of power' social positioning of the social agent. Therefore the material life, whether experi-

enced by a given class or a given sex, both structures and sets limits on the understanding of social relations. The theorization of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on 'rhizomes' can be read in this line where, there is an expression of the multiplicities that exist in the society. There needs to be a Gender nonconforming or Gender expansive, Gender Fluid view. Therefore while formulating policies by the authorities the government should take into account the factors like caste, religion and region which are particular to the people. This leads to the creation of complex identities.

The women of Kerala are ahead of their all-India counterparts in Sex ratio, Infant mortality, Literacy, Life expectancy, Sports etc. Many figures like Ammu Swaminathan, Lakshmi Sehgal (Captain Lakshmi), Accamma Cherian, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Balamni Amma, Kamala Das, Sarah Joseph, Arundhati Roy et. al have established their influence on the various arenas of life. Though they are much ahead in the social space there needs to be a social change that can have a greater impact on the society. The Government of Kerala has adopted various kinds of Gender mainstreaming projects to bring the marginalized genders to the forefront. They aim at providing an equal opportunity to excel as well as providing access to avail the various facilities in the society. Pink Police, Pink Buses, *She Taxi*, *She Pharmacy*, Gender Park and the self-help group *Kudumbasree* are some of the prime projects put forth by the government. The question posed here is whether the government aims at creating a woman travelling in a Pink Bus or *She Taxi* protected by the Pink Police running a *She Pharmacy* or an establishment of a unit of *Kudumbasree*, creating a 'Pink Space' for women in the society.

There have been many voices of resistance from the West with regard to the stigmatization of Gender based on colours of Pink and Blue. Dr Hannah Dee, a senior lecturer in computer science at Aberystwyth University points out:

I think there is a real polarization going on at the moment on gender lines. Allied with that, is this kind of pinkification of girlhood where girls are expected to be wearing pink and being girly and doing princess stuff and boys are expected to do the creative, playing with mud kind of side of things. And computing... there is no reason it should be a masculine domain but it's seen as part of that STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) area, so it's seen as being for boys. And because childhood is so polarized now we find that girls are moving away from it. (Dr Hannah Dee)

The Government's policy of pinkification is sending an alarming message that the Westernisation of the Feminine Gender through various projects is going to make a reverse impact in the society.

*Kudumbasree* the self help group wing of the women in Kerala, one of the largest women network in the world is known for its legacy in creating sustainability and empowerment of women in the society. A tripartite structure is part of the hierarchy in which the Neighbourhood Groups (NHG) as primary level units, Area Development Societies (ADS) and Community Development Society (CDS). It is undoubtedly the most successful enterprise in strengthening women in the society. The emblem/logo of the wing and the website was pinkified. It has been always a forerunner in enhancing skills for women in male dominant areas. But the association of the colour pink will tend to attach all the non existing meanings to them.

The Kerala State Women's Development Corporation has adopted various projects for the empowerment of women. One of the primary things adapted by the wing is the changing of the androcentric logos to a gynocentric one. The attachment of a prefix 'She' aimed at forefronting women in the society. The various projects like *She Pharmacy*, *She Taxi* and *She Toilet* aim at better facilities for women in the society. The department had also conducted a photography contest called 'her story'. Pink was one of the major colour code attached with attached to it. Suzannah Weiss in her article 5 Things to stop "Pinkifying" Because all this Gendering is Totally Unnecessary points out that

a car designed for women. Its features, including 'easy to get in and out of' and 'easy to park,' serve to prove why all that pinkification really does is encourage offensive stereotypes. (Suzannah Weiss)

The association of the colour pink and association of the feminine prefix has surely given an essential meaning of the preference over women. But it has led to the failure of such system in attaining the goal of Gender equity where a feminist colour was attached to it. Prior to the introduction of such projects there were women in the society who had successfully proved their presence in the male dominant fields. The Westernised Gender Codes of behavior has established a Keralite women attached with the stigma of Pink. The society has excluded it as a facility exclusively for feminist and women.

The Kerala State Road Transport Corporation has introduced a new bus service exclusively for women called "Pink Bus". It aims at providing a better facility for the mobility of women. Katiee a foreign traveler puts forth a relevant question,

There's even a new 'She -Taxi' and 'She - Bus' which look at providing safe and reliable transportation for female-only passengers. How can men stop victimizing women if they are kept in separate places with such strictly defined gender roles? On a practical level, these separate sections make sense. I would never dream of entering a men's section for fear of being harassed, groped or leered at. How can we possibly

make public space more accessible for women if we are constantly "othering" them? How can we teach young boys to respect girls if their opportunities for interactions with opposite sex are eliminated? (Katiee's Journey to India)

The association of the colour Pink is quite unnecessary as the women are encouraged to travel in a 'Pink Space'. It has created a sense among the men that the women is an object or the other that is a source for desire. The Kerala State Road Transport Corporation had earlier run Ladies only buses successfully and *Kudumbasree* is also successfully plying gender neutral or gender flexible service. The important question posed here is the attachment of the colour pink with that of the service has a politics behind in creating a subaltern image or a 'weaker sex'.

The introduction of the Pink Police system has resulted not in viewing the society from a 'herstorical' perspective in order to understand the position of women in the country, and identifies the problems faced by them due to the strict impositions placed by the male-dominated society. The Pink Police trained under a male dominant system has been instrumental in reinforcing the image of a typical Barbie. There were incidents of fury where the police women went on moral policing. Attaching of the colour pink to the police has attached all the attributes of pink to it, but the reality is only a reproduction of the 'old wine in new bottle.' Gender theorists West and Zimmerman (2003), point out the use of Ethnomethodology points out how Gender is achieved through the disciplining of bodies, actions and language. This affects the organizational and institutional agents aimed in producing 'men' and 'women'. (Bacchi and Eveline, 96) Thus the launching of Pink Police becomes a disciplining force in producing a Pinkified, Hybridized 'Women' in the society.

The WE mission Kerala of the Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation for Women Entrepreneurship of the Government has also wrapped it in Pink. There is no doubt that the government should move forward with such projects and policies but the attachment of them with the colour pink should be rethought because it fosters gender sensitivity. There is an arbitrary sense being created that the pink stands for women in the societal parlance. Another problem associated with the colour pink is that it is not inclusive of the problems of the Keralite women.

Pinkification has resulted in creation of a hybridized identity where the image of a Keralite women is mixed with the image of a Barbie. Lefebvre's construction of a space points out the creation of an urbanized space through the modernization. The adoption of a Western Pink colour as part of gender coding has resulted in the production of a 'Pink space' for women through Pink Police, Pink Buses, association of the colour Pink with the *She Taxi*, *She Pharmacy*,

Gender Park and the self-help group *Kudumbasree* has given rise to a societal situation in which pink has become a determinant in the association of the identity of women. Thus the colour Pink has become an essential factor or rather determiner of the creation of a new women thereby submerging parallel voices that exist in a society. This has resulted in an epistemic violence that might be irreversible in the creation of a false Identity.

A Foucauldian outlook with regard to the notion of 'power' and the concept of 'governmentality' points out that 'the state' becomes an important force in formulating an idea. All the policies has demonstrated in the creation of a Barbie out of the pinkification is nonetheless different from that of the creation of a Sita, Sati, Savitri image of the women and arraignment

of the mythical image of Seetha, Kunti or any other women. The colour pink shows how both articulated and unarticulated voices can be attached with it. The adoption of a westernized barbie pink has resulted that no great change can be introduced in the lives of the women but rather a sexist stigma can only be attached with the colour pink. The Standpoint theory points out at the individualistic role in formulating the idea of Gender. This has led to the existence of a plural 'men' and 'women'. The primacy of Pink as a discourse leads to the colouring of Gender Sensibilities would be hazardous in unifying Gender and reducing it as a singular entity. Therefore, the government should think of a Gender Neutral Policy where it would not produce gendered lives and accentuate gender inequality.

### References:

1. Bacchi, Carol, and Joan Eveline. *Mainstreaming Politics: Gendering Practices and Feminist Theory*. University of Adelaide Press, Adelaide, South Australia, 2010.
2. Best, Joel. "Too Much Fun: Toys as Social Problems and the Interpretation of culture." *Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1998, pp. 197-212. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/si.1998.21.2.197](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/si.1998.21.2.197).
3. Lynn, Peril. *Pink Think: Becoming a Woman in Many Uneasy Lessons*. New York and London: W W Norton, 2002.
4. Morton, Katie. "The Right to Social Existence." *Katie's Journey to India*, 21 Aug. 2015, [katieemorton.wordpress.com/2015/08/21/the-right-to-social-existence/](http://katieemorton.wordpress.com/2015/08/21/the-right-to-social-existence/). Accessed 26 June 2017.
5. Rogers, Mary Ann. *Barbie culture*. London: SAGE Publications. 1999.
6. Weiss, Suzzannah. "5 Things to Stop 'Pinkifying' Because All This Gendering Is Unnecessary." *Bustle*, BDG Media, 26 Jan. 2016, [www.bustle.com/articles/137609-5-things-to-stop-pinkifying-because-all-this-gendering-is-totally-unnecessary](http://www.bustle.com/articles/137609-5-things-to-stop-pinkifying-because-all-this-gendering-is-totally-unnecessary). Accessed 26 June 2017.
7. "'Pinkification' Putting Girls off IT, Says Dr Hannah Dee." *BBC News*, BBC, 12 Apr. 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-mid-wales-39575581](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-mid-wales-39575581). Accessed 28 June 2017.

\*\*\*

Bibin Mathew Sebastian, Assistant Professor on Contract  
Post Graduate & Research Department of English Devamatha College, Kuravilangad, Kerala