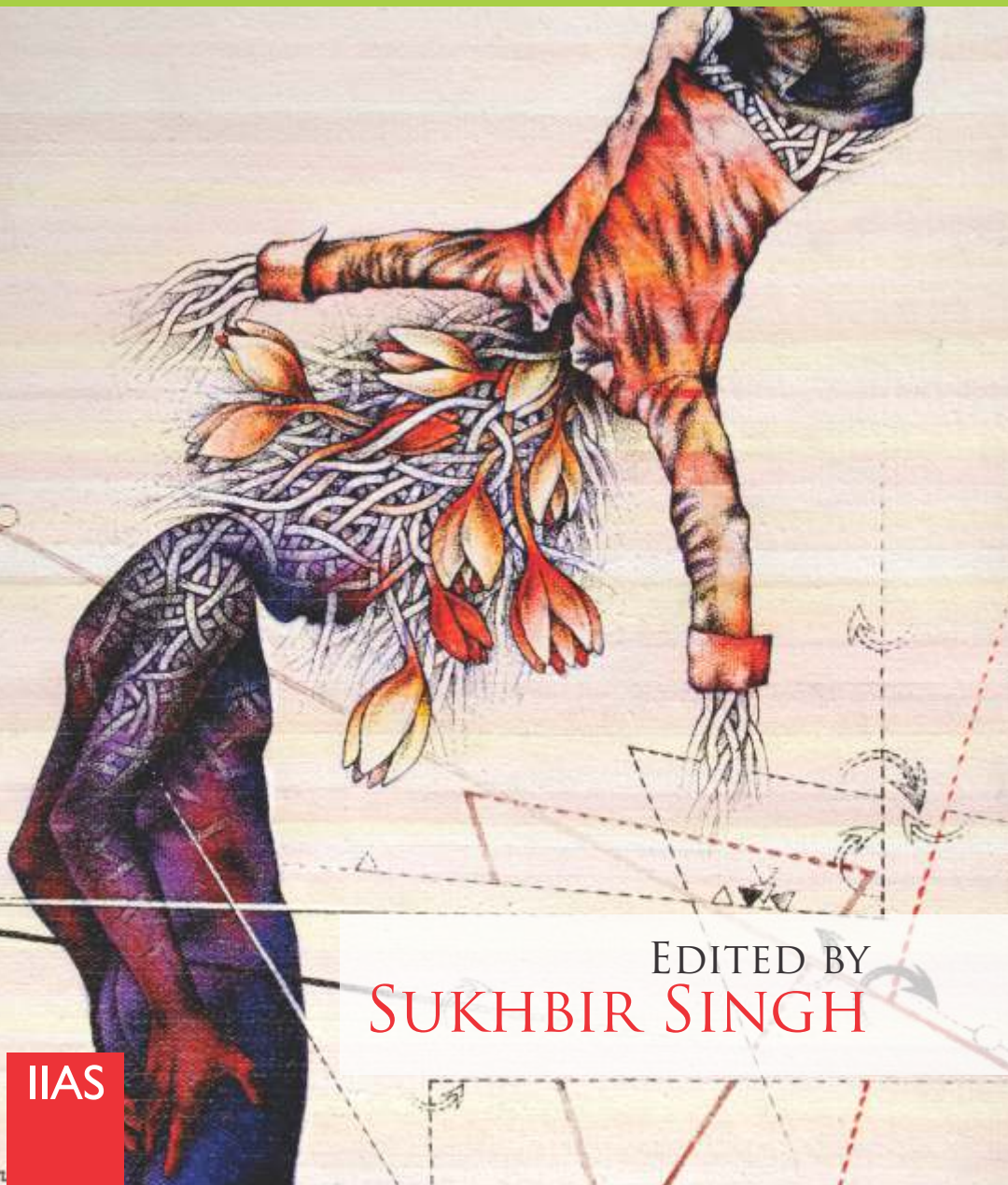
Gay Subcultures and Literatures

The Indian Projections



Edited by

Sukhbir Singh

IIAS

Gay Subcultures and Literatures
The Indian Projections

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Edited by
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Indian Institute of Advanced Study
Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla

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Introduction

Homosexuality is as old as humanity. The queer practices were secretly existent among the queens in harems, cowherds, soldiers, slaves, prisoners, nuns, priests, harvesting women, and the nightly spinning maidens in the olden days. The instances of "Ghilman" in Islam, "Sodom and Gomorrah," in Christianity, and "Ardhnarishwar" in Hinduism testify further to the ancient inscriptions of homosexuality in the prominent religions of the world. The civilized Greeks and Romans of the yore were known as highly tolerant to homosexuality. Sappho, a Greek poet and teacher of arts, who lived between 630 and 612 B.C. in the city state of Lesbos preferred women to men and had affairs with several of her female protégés at her Center of Arts. Yet, she was highly revered by her countrymen, both for her artistic sensibility and her lesbian poetry. Plato extolled her as the tenth Muse and the Greek coins of her time were embossed with her visage. Influenced by the Greek culture of pederasty, the patriarchal Romans too accepted same-sex relations and treated homosexuals, especially the active ones, respectfully even though it was against the Roman law of male sexuality. One comes across several allusions to homosexuality in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, and Petronius's *Satyricon*. The illustrations of male-male/female-female coupling can as well be seen in the friezes and grafittis at Suburban Baths in Pompeii. Similarly, no one took exception to the gay and lesbian bonding earlier in India, so much so that their erotic forms were spectacularly inscribed in the myths, literature, temple architecture, and cave paintings. Some well known examples are the dual feminine deities of Creation Myths in the *Rg Veda*, lesbian sexual postures in the iconic temples of Khajuraho and Konark, and Queerness in Vishnu Sharma's *Panchatantra* and Vatsyana's *Kamasutra*. These precedents stoutly contradict the Right Wing view that homosexuality is of the

colonial import and hence alien to Indian culture. But, for various cultural and religious reasons, the institution of marriage grew stronger, giving prominence to heterosexuality over the other forms of alternative sexuality. With the subsequent dominance of Moslems and Christians in India, homosexuality came to be morally stigmatized and socially segregated to the margins of the mainstream sexuality. The Quranic dictates of Islam and the meta-narratives of Christianity demonized homosexuality and circumvented it within the inviolable boundaries of the devil's domain. The British colonial government added Article 377 to the Indian Penal Code in 1868, which criminalized homosexuality and laid down stringent punishment of fine and/or life imprisonment for sexual acts against the so called "order of nature." Only the penetrator was punished; the receiver was seen as a victim in the act. Lesbianism was kept out of the law's recall. Under the colonial influence, the non-heteronormative sexual identities came to be abjected and outlawed. However, same-sex love did not cease to exist in India despite the criminalization of homosexuality and heterosexualization of the homoerotic literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For that reason, eminent scholars such as Ruth Vanita and Salim Kidwai in *Same-Sex Love in India* (2000) and Ana Garcia-Arroyo in *The Construction of Queer Culture in India* (2006) affirm that there is a "Queer Continuum" (*a la* Adrienne Rich)) in India. Later, in the twentieth century, the dominant sexological discourses pathologized homosexuality in the West. Sexologists such as Karl Westphall, Karl Ulrichs, Richard von Kraft-Ebbing, and Havelock Ellis projected homosexuality as an inversion. Gays and lesbians were therefore scorned, discriminated against, and victimized to no end. No surprise therefore they remained closeted within their un-safe closets and there was hardly a gay/lesbian literature, though there were many repressed gay/lesbian modernist writers such as Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, Somerset Maugham, T.S. Eliot and E.M. Forster until the English author Radclyffe Hall published the first lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928. However, Hall swam along the sexological stream and showed

the lesbian protagonist as an invert. Hence, homosexuality still remained a secret subject for debate within the intellectual closets of the European academia.

The cultural environment has therefore been hostile to gays and lesbians in India. They do not cross the boundaries and come out of their closets in the fear of physical violence and social opprobrium. Any cultural or literary expression of gayism/lesbianism invites anger and retaliation, especially from the Right Wing forces of the Hindutava, Islam, and Christian hues. They openly display their abhorrence and intolerance toward homosexuality in art and literature. The fiery protests against Deepa Mehta's lesbian film *Fire* (1996) and forceful denunciation of Karan Razdan's film *Girlfirend* (2004) were symptomatic of such hostility. Shobhaa De's novels *Strange Obsessions* (1992) and *Snapshots* (1995) and Manju Kapoor's *A Married Woman* (2003) also met a similar reception even though they did not project homosexuality so very favorably. A mention needs to be made here that the representation of gays and lesbians, whether in Indian films or literary works, remains largely negative—merely as marginals, criminals, mentally sick, and morally depraved.

However, the situation slowly began to relax following a change in the social and religious attitudes toward the secret forms of sexuality in the West. In the nineties, the issue of identity assumed importance both in the realm of lesbian and gay theory and the Movement. The idea of biological essentialism was found to be limiting and exclusionary as other non-heteronormative sexualities such as trans-genders, trans-sexuals, hijras, kothis, and panthis (women trapped in man's bodies) were ignored. Therefore, the overarching umbrella term "Queer" came to be used for all these categories. Judith Butler's theory of "performativity" in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), using the post-structuralist tools of Jaques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jaques Lacan, conceptualized gender/sexuality as "performative"—that is, a role performed by the subject according to her/his choice determined his/her gender. It resulted in (i) pluralism of gender identities, and (ii)

considering of gender/sex as fluid and a matter of choice. The westerly winds slowly warmed up the Indian climate, pushing the homosexuals out of their stuffy closets. The new theoretical/philosophical awareness in the West led to the legalization of gay and lesbian marriages in several Western countries and gave rise to the Gay Pride Marches of Quee Non-government Organizational (NGO's) protests against the suppression of gay rights in democratic India. In recent years, organizations such as the Naaz Foundation, Voices Against 377, CREA, and Tarshi have assiduously fought the homophobic attitudes and perceptions at several levels and in many ways. But, the number of such organizations remains small and their reach limited, confined mostly to the metropolises. The Naaz Foundation waged a long and relentless legal fight and succeeded in securing a reading down of Article 377 in the Indian constitution that penalized homosexuality since Macaulay's days. The judgment of the Delhi High Court some time ago decriminalized the same-sex consensual sexual relations between the two adults in private. The gay activists and liberal sections of society welcomed this judgment as a landmark in ensuring equality and freedom to homosexuals in the choice of their partners. The judgment, however, has been challenged in the Supreme Court and the case is under further legal scrutiny. The government did a flip-flop in its submissions to the Supreme Court till the latter chided it for not taking a clear stand on the issue of homosexuality. Finally, the Attorney General submitted an affidavit agreeing with the Delhi High Court judgment, on grounds of a renewed perception toward sex on the global level. This is an agenda of globalization. One important aspect of the governmental submissions was to locate the discussion about the issues concerning LGBT people in the academic-intellectual-public domain, to change attitudes and perceptions towards the gays and to sensitize the heterosexual majority towards the human rights of the Gays. The anthology seminar on "Gay Sub-Cultures and Literatures: The Indian Projections," was held at the Indian Institute for Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla to engage with, debate,

problematize and discuss issues relating to the gay identity, activism, and gay narratives of all genres – literary, cinematic, autobiographical, and others—in the aftermath of the reading down of the Article 377.

Before I touch upon certain other key issues concerning the gays and lesbians in India, I would make a conjecture in retrospection and even give a clarification to avoid the apprehended confusion. It perhaps would have been more appropriate to slightly twist the title of the anthology as "Gay Cultures," rather than "Sub-cultures," for that is how we would wish the gay subjects and their sexuality to be slotted—along a horizontal spectrum of identities and cultures in a non-binary way. And, it would also be appropriate to clarify that the use of the term "Gay" signifies, like the Queer, diverse alternative sexualities, such as gay men, lesbians, trans-genders, trans-sexuals, hijras, kothis, and panthis though often it is used only to refer to the gay men. Therefore, I would be using the terms Gay and Queer interchangeably.

As it is well-known, the "Gay" discourse in India is nearly non-existent or at best has a feeble presence on account of undue hostility by the establishment and society at large. It is so because the subject of the Gay or Queer identity and sexuality in a homophobic Indian society constitutes a vast and complex terrain. The complexity accrues, first of all, from the mutual acrimonies and internal dissensions among the Queers themselves. The segregation of the gays and lesbians from the mainstream feminism sowed the first seeds of ideological divide among the three segments of the Movement. The heterosexual feminists or "straight" women wanted freedom from patriarchal dominance in the domestic space and equality of opportunities in the professional sphere. The lesbians discarded dependence on men altogether and thereby threatened the domestic complacency of the heterosexual feminists. Similarly, the gays abandoned sexual liaison with women and thereby challenged the heterosexual men's patriarchal sense of superiority. The subsequent hostility between the gays and lesbians, together with the submerged

heteronormative notion of "masculinity" and "femininity" among the "active" and "passive" gays, an uneasy sense of superiority and inferiority among the kothis (receiver) and panthis (giver), and several professional and other appearance (masculine/feminine) related rivalries have rendered the Queer sexuality highly vulnerable to the homophobic social forces in India. This is due to imposition of a heterosexual paradigm (penetrator/receiver) on queers and its internalization by queer people themselves. Secondly, the gay discourse intersects and is enmeshed in several dominant discourses which position gays on the margins, oppress them, discriminate against and victimize them. Just to give a few examples, while the legal discourse has criminalized and thereby demonized the gays in India, the medical discourses have looked upon homosexuals of all categories as diseased, who can be cured. Way back in 1973, American Psychiatric Association deleted homosexuality as a disease from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III. Contrarily, Indian Medical Establishment retained homosexuality as a mental disorder in compliance with the WHO list of classification. The AIDS scare in India has further segregated the gays from the social space and has further intensified the tendency of "closeting" and "passing" ("homosexual panic") among them. Likewise, the religious discourses across the world have viewed them as depraved and ignorant, who can be lifted out of the morass of sinful darkness by religious counseling. It was only recently the Roman Church under Pope John became soft toward the same-sex marriages in the Christian world. But, the new Pope is *very* harsh on gays. Also, Hinduism in India still remains hostile to homosexuality, making it difficult for the Queers to practice their sexual preferences freely. However, monks of Ramakrishna Ashram are sufficiently enlightened on this subject. Interestingly enough, various religions over the world, their mutual intolerance and antipathy notwithstanding, join hands in condemning homosexuals as the fallen. The homosexual becomes a convenient whipping-boy. In the Indian context, the positioning of the "gays"

is further complicated by caste, which puts lesbians for example in a "triple jeopardy" with respect to gender, class, and caste. Here, it would be pertinent to point out that while speaking about the Gay or the Queer identity, theory or the movement, one needs to be cognizant of the complexities, even contradistinctions that inhere in the internal dynamics of the concept of the Queer or the Gay. Thirdly, gay/lesbian theorists too seem to sail the divergent streams, adding further confusion to the chaos. Their dissonant theoretical/ideological posturing in a way prevents the emergence of a cogent and convincing Queer discourse. For instance, on the one hand, lesbian theorists such as Catharine Stimpson, Terry Castle and Christine White consider genital sexuality as germane to the lesbian experience. The sexualisation of the lesbian got further impetus from the sex wars of the eighties. The "pro-sex" lesbians resorted to and justified such means of erotic self-expression as pornography, fetishism, and sadomasochism, etc. These means were considered as liberating aspects of the "lesbian lifestylism." For that reason, censorship of and laws against pornography and prostitution met a stiff resistance from them. On the other, Adrienne Rich,* Ann Ferguson, and Lillian Fademan do not consider genital sex as an essential content of the lesbian relationship. Their "continuum" extends along a rich variety of emotional/romantic bonding conducive to the creation of a transhistorical/transcultural lesbian community and creative tradition. For them, lesbians are women who *love* women instead of men with a view to countering the patriarchal dominance.

How are we then to conceive of the relationship between the discordant Queer relationships/theories and Activism or the Movement, in the first place? Activists have been a little impatient with the theorists, especially the likes of Judith Butler and her loyalists, who at one time, deconstructed gender with gusto, destabilizing in the process the category of Gay and other Queer

* Rich was a Jewish intellectual and a great poet of the old days (1970s). She married her Professor who suicided when she came out leaving her to support 2 boys by teaching grammar at Hunter College.

gender identities and throwing out the baby with the bathtub. Can there be activism without the identitarian dimension of the subjects? Unless one conceives of gender as an identifiable category and talks about the person of the subject, can one fight against the entrenched negative attitudes and perceptions that have persisted in the society for centuries altogether? Obviously, the postmodern postulates, which make identity contingent, fluid, and open ended, need to be applied carefully, or, let us say, eclectically. On the other side, if one does focus on the identity, then how does one problematize and displace the inferiorizing notions of homosexuality, which have been perpetrated by the so called liberal humanists? These are some of the issues that have still not been fully resolved. In the meantime, Butler in her later book, *Undoing Gender* (2004), has moved beyond her concept of "performativity," according to which, as mentioned earlier, gender identity is as transient as role playing; it makes the performance of a role and the process of gendering co-terminus. Here, Butler's revised observation comes closer to Martha Naussbaum's view, which in the context of women, accords primacy to the body, the human subject, as it is the body which suffers oppression and victimization. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler talks of the recognizable "personhood" and her critique of gender is clearly situated within the framework of human persistence and survival, assuming thereby the existence of the *person* prior to the gendering process.

Then there is this contentious issue of what is a Queer text? Does the text automatically become Queer if it is written by a Gay? Or, there has to be something in the narrative itself which qualifies it as a Queer text. While defining a lesbian novel, Margaret Reynolds in her "Introduction" to *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories* (1993) affirms that it is "in the writing" and not in the writer. On the other hand, Bonnie Zimmerman in "What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism" (1991) distinguishes a lesbian novel as having three defining characteristics: it has a central lesbian character; it places love and sexual passion between women at the centre of its story;

and it is read by lesbians to "affirm lesbian existence." While for Reynolds the sexual dimension is not all that important, Zimmerman is particular about it. However, there is a commonality between the two: that it is the *narrative* which makes a text Gay or Queer.

A related but equally important question is: "Who is a Gay? Is it the public self- identification which makes a person gay, or his/her sexuality that becomes the source of identity, as long as the person has come out to himself/herself?* Similarly, what about the bisexuals? Can they be categorized as Queer? Yes, indeed! There are other categories in addition to the ones listed above who are not heterosexuals, but do not follow gay sexual practices either. For example, there are fetishists, S/Ms or sadomasochists, panthis and transvestites *who follow non-heterosexual practices and yet are not talked about as Gays, though they too are equally suppressed and are deprived of human rights. They further problematize the term Queer.*

Perhaps, it is best to make use of Adrienne Rich's idea of "lesbian continuum," which she formulated to retain a bridge between feminism and lesbianism. She did it for the purpose of a united political struggle against gender discrimination. All the categories subsumed in the term Gay or Queer, as mentioned above, need to conceive of them as Queer, forge a firm bonding against the heterosexual tyranny, and give and receive political and emotional support from each other. Care needs to be taken, however, that no category is relegated to the background in terms of visibility and priority. For example, lesbians felt neglected within the gay movement, which could be due to feminist exclusiveness as much as male chauvinism of gays. The lesbians responded with separate "Dyke Marches" to make them socially visible. One of the first documented lesbian pride marches in North America took place in May, 1981, in downtown Vancouver, B.C. Canada, and the first U.S. nationwide "Dyke March" was

* Homosexuals were loath to adopt "gay' once, and now they are loath to label themselves "queer." These are just conservative mind-sets which erode and evolve, given time. They all come under the umbrella term "Queer. So, everyone is queer, and no one can label anyone else.

held in Washington, D.C. on April 24, 1993. Later, many more Dyke Marches were held in and around the other U.S cities.

This way the lesbians have begun to practice separatism from the gays, even though the first landmark protest against the frequent raids and violence by the New York City police on lesbians and gays, assembling at the Stonewall Inn, was launched by all of them jointly on the night of June 1969. As we know, this first step grew into a strong movement in several other countries. However, in India it is still in a fledgling state. Though, so far in India, the Pride Marches have included all non-heterosexual categories, care needs to be taken to prevent an inherent rift among them. Of course, the united movement in India augurs well for the Indian Gays.

One can sustain this optimism keeping in view the bold visual representation of the LGBTs in the current Bollywood films such as *Na Jane Kyon* (*Dunno Y*), *Memories in March*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (*A Little Little Happens*), *My Brother Nikhil* and *Kal Ho Ka Ho* (*Tomorrow May Come or Not*) etc., and literary portrayal in fictional works such as *Strange Obsession*, *Snapshots*, *Married Woman*, and *Kari* etc.

Last of all, how should the Queer respond to the non-heterosexuals who are Queer-allies? In Washington there is an organization called PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) which elicits and welcomes the support of non-heterosexuals to strengthen the Gay movement. Why I bring it up is because at the Conference on the Asian Queer held in Bangkok in 2005, two heterosexual delegates who presented papers were 'queered' by the Queer. That is they were looked upon as the "Other," were treated with indifference and made to feel outsiders. This amply proves that power and politics have nothing to do with sympathy or the truth. I think the continuum should include the Gay allies as well and PFLAG is a good example to follow by the Indian Gays. Besides, reversal of any existing binary only replicates the social flaw.

One of the controversies about the Queer that has remained unresolved is whether the cause of homosexuality is biological, determined by genes and chromosomes, or whether sexual

orientation is a matter of choice. The activists generally take the former position and the reason for that is the hate campaign unleashed by the Church leaders against homosexuals, propagating that it is a sin which a person chooses to commit. They associate it with human depravity and regard it as merely a matter of choice. They argue that since it is a lifestyle choice, a person can be cured of this aberrant behavior through religious teachings. In support of their view, The Church leaders quote Apostle Paul from the *Bible* in support of their standpoint: "*Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God"* (I Corinthians 6:9-11). The activists counter the Church and draw support from the scientific evidence to buttress their formulation that homosexuals are born with queer sexual orientation and that it is not a matter of choice. Being a homosexual is as biological as being a left-handed and both are beyond the pale of individual's control. Scientific research has revealed that prenatal stress disrupts the development of hypothalamus, which in turn causes feminized males and masculinzed females.*

However, the activists' view conflicts with the queer theorists, such as Judith Butler, who, as pointed out above, argues that sexual identity has nothing to do with biology; it is fluid, unstable, and shifting and is performative. In other words, sexual identity is a role an individual chooses to perform from amongst a range of identities, such as, heterosexual, gay, transgender, kothi, panthi etc. In Butler's view, "it [sexual identity] is a production which, in effect—that is, in its effect—postures as an imitation. This

* D.F. Swaab and M.A. Hofman, "Sexual differentiation of the human hypothalamus in relation to gender and sexual orientation," *Trends Neuroscience,* 1995 June, 18(6): 264-70.
D.F. Swaab, Chung, F.P. Kruijver, M.A. Hofman, and T.A. Ishunina, "Sexual differentiation of the human hypothalamus," *Adv Exp Med Biology*, 2002; 511: 75-100; discussion 100-5.

perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignificcation and recontextualization. She thus discards the essentialist notion of sexual identity and deconstructs the binary of heterosexual and homosexual identity. Instead, Butler proliferates sexual identities, to delegitimize the hegemonic heteronormativity.

With the wave of globalization/liberalization sweeping across the Indian terrain, the native cinematic and literary minds have opened up to some of the long closeted social issues. The diverse cultural influences have slightly cooled down the patriarchal temper in India and consequently people have become somewhat tolerant to the display or discussion of the forbidden subjects such as sex in cinema and literature. As a result, we have now a good number of Hindi movies and English literary works projecting homosexuality as a viable subject of intellectual discourse. The recent Hindi cinema has made a mixed response to the plight of Gays in India. Actually, the mainstream Hindi movies project queer sexuality in multiple ways. Some of them present stereotypical images of the gays and lesbians much to the amusement of the audience. They portray them as abnormal, sick, and perverted outcasts of the Indian society. The Gays become the object of caricature and castigation. Contrarily, some others deviate from the beaten track to depict them as the legitimate citizens of our society like the heterosexuals. They project them as normal, sane, and healthy humans with only a different sexual orientation. The Gays receive genuine sympathy from them as the victims of our society's patriarchal homophobia. Though one can credit the Hindi cinema for providing the much needed visibility to the Indian gays and lesbians on the screen, it has indeed not done much to redeem their pathetic plight through a cogent and convincing portrayal of them. As a matter of fact, the current Hindi cinema, engaged with the Queer issues, lacks the required allegorical and edifying element to disorient the common man's heteropatriarchal mind- set in India.

The Shah Rukh Khan starrer, *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Tomorrow May Come or Not), touches upon male homosexuality only marginally. When the Bai stumbles upon the scene of horseplay

between Shah Rukh (Amar) and Saif Ali (Rohit), Bai's reaction is imbued with shock, surprise, and sarcasm. Nevertheless, it evokes a loud laughter among the audience displaying homosexuality merely as a matter of amusement. Similarly, in another Shah Rukh blockbuster *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (God Has Made the Couple), the side hero Bobby in his macho image is ironically averse to woman, which is akin to the misogyny of a self-loving homosexual. He thus acts as a mock heroic male and provides the intended entertainment to the spectators. On the other side, Deepa Mehta's *Fire* portrays two lonely Indian women, Radha and Sita, the modern versions of the mythical ones, as sexually starved housewives in a traditional Indian household. When their husbands become unavailable to them for sex for different reasons, they rely on each other for their emotional satisfaction. Both discover lesbian bonding more as a means of overcoming their loneliness and boredom than a substitute to heterosexual coupling. However, Radha and Sita practice their lesbian liaison secretly and remain custom bound apparently. None of them dares walk out of her marriage to enjoy freedom and an autonomous selfhood. Hence, Deepa Mehta, with all her avowed feminist radicalism, depicts homosexuality not as a natural accessory for the actualization of their identity, but as a surrogate or secondary means of emotional sustenance. Similarly, Karan Razdan in *Girlfriend* projects lesbian relation as a pathological perversion, which afflicts women due to their faulty upbringing in their childhood. The lesbian Tanya is initially portrayed as an uncouth, wild, and a womanly man. She has grown up without her father's love and therefore has remained fixated to her mother. It makes her a woman lover and a lesbian lover of Sapna (an ephemeral dream). Here, Razdan implies the patriarchal idea of daughter's subservience to her father—that the girls who grow up without their fathers and sons who grow up without their mothers in an Indian family contract psychic abnormalities which later in life emerge as full blown perversions in behavioral matters. However, Tanya has to finally succumb to the patriarchal control. Hence, Razdan treats homosexuality as something temporary and terminable. None of these films projects gay/

lesbian bond as rooted in the indisputable secular codes of love, i.e. truth, loyalty, and lasting passion. Finally, the overbearing social realities and domestic compulsions win, rendering homosexual love as a temporary respite in the breathless journey of sterile life. Unless gay/lesbian liaison achieves the condition comparable to that of a heteropatriarchal love, homosexuality cannot compete with heterosexuality for equality and parity among the Indian masses. Perhaps, gay/lesbian love drew upon these transcendental values and thereby attained acceptability and respectability with common people in the ancient times.

The situation is not much different in the gay/lesbian fiction by the Indian English novelists. In Hoshang Merchant's *The Slaves* (1999) and Raj Rao's *Boyfriend* (2003) the gay men are constantly at a lurking unease due to the homophobic guilt, class consciousness, and caste complex. Even these two well-known gay writers are not cock sure about the future of the Queers in India. Their same-sex love depiction points to some of the serious pitfalls for the gays in a society where they are shaky of their beliefs/ideas and heteropatriarchy reigns supreme. The lesbian women do try to find solace in the same sex love, but it remains a temporary resort as they finally prefer to return to their husbands and children. They ultimately yield to the homophobic society on the pretext that they cannot sacrifice the future of the innocent children for their own freedom. Or, they cannot forgo the joys of motherhood for a sterile physical relationship. For instance, in Shobhaa De's *Strange Obsessions*, Minx's stormy lesbian liaison with Amrita ends in the silence of the latter's hunger for motherhood. Again, the lesbian remains lovelorn at the end. Likewise, in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2003), Astha is married and has two children from her husband, Hemant. But, she gets bored with her routine domestic life and feels trapped with her infidel husband. Consequently, she develops migraine and helplessly craves for relief. Her chance meeting with Pipeelika brings about the much required change in her lonely life. Their acquaintance turns into a lesbian liaison between the two. It comes as a gust of fresh air to Astha and she feels utterly transformed. But, she declines Pipeelika's offer for a lasting bond with her

and finally decides to return to her family in the interest of her children. Pipee decides to leave for the US to do her Ph.D. It signifies an archetypal excuse with women in India to conveniently quit an unsavory situation at home and find new avenues abroad for a better future. Hence, finally patriarchy wins for whatever reason and homosexuality remains a means of temporary respite from boredom and frustration. However, Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008) surely raises hopes with the lesbian protagonist Kari's ultimate survival in a killer homophobic society. Kari struggles alone to sail through every odd on her way to freedom. She finally denies her rejection by society and decides to live and continue her search for love of someone like her—the "missing other." This is all due to changing times and globalised lives.

SECTION I: GAY/LESBIAN: SERIALS AND CINEMA

Kuhu Chanana's paper traces the adaptation techniques employed by the Indian filmmakers to make mainstream gay movies palatable to seemingly straight audience . She has ingeniously used Foucaldian interpretation of 'heterotopias' to evince theatre as a heterotopic site for the articulation of gay concerns. In all, five exclusively queer movies have been discussed and they are *I AM, DUNNO Y na janne kyon*, *My Brother Nikhil*, *Straight*, and *Memories in March*. The paper charts out the questions pertaining to spectatorship, specific queer gaze (that turns seemingly heterosexual matrix innocent of homoeroticism into a space loaded with gay insinuations) and the tools of queering the commercial mainstream Bollywood cinematic spaces. Kuhu has not only discussed the broader issues of the fluid position of general spectator, but also of the specific subjectivities of queer spectators that have been brilliantly argued by Brett Farmer in *Spectacular Passions*. In all, paper cogently argues the two steps forward and one step backward adaptation techniques still used by mainstream queer film makers.

Niladri R. Chatterjee's article seeks to gauge the socio-cultural ramifications of a Hindi soap opera. The paper shows two gay men in a committed relationship with reference to the Gaurav-

Karan bond in the TV soap opera "Maryada...Lekin Kab Tak?" The relationship that was portrayed on Indian television screens from 10 June 2011 to 31 January 2012. The fact that neither character is shown to embody the stereotype of the limp-wristed, lisping caricature of a gay man is analysed and the soap opera is contextualised with respect to the Delhi High Court verdict of 2nd July 2009. Chatterjee suggests that the portrayal of two gay men as not effeminate may be read as subversive of the heteronormative conflation of male homosexuality with effeminacy. The depiction of sexuality in films and books often portrays sexual dissidents using pejorative stereotypes in order to re-emphasize heteronormativity.

Namita Paul's paper analyzes Shobhaa De's book *Strange Obsessions* and Karan Razdan's film *Girlfriend* with a view to seeing how they perform the dual function of introducing and recreating stereotypical images of non-conformist sexuality. Her paper isolates the stereotypes that are prevalent in popular culture and reveal the biases behind them in order to search for feasible techniques to counter them.

Anita Singh's essay looks at "sexing" and "queering" and includes discussions of sexualities, compulsory heterosexuality, and heterosexism. The representation of gender and sexualities, by powerful social technology such as mainstream cinema undoubtedly affects the way our individual self-representation of gender and sexuality impacts the broader social construction of gender and discourses on sexuality. The paper begins with examples and goes on to briefly discuss Bollywood films that have appeared in the last few years, written from different viewpoints and political orientations.

Kaustav Bakshi in his paper contextualizes the first "gay" Bengali film and dissects how class hierarchy informs queer identities. While analyzing why there cannot be a monolithic homosexuality instead of homosexualities, he dwells at length on Rituparno Ghosh (the lead actor of the film and a cultural icon in Bengal) and how his queer disposition has influenced the understanding of queer lives amongst the urban Bengali middle class.

Himadri Roy in his article tries to look into the details of a gay child's psychological stresses about disclosing oneself in front of everyone –from friends to family and colleagues to relatives, taking the example of *Memories in March*, released in 2011. His article explores the reasons of coming out and not coming out of a gay son in an Indian family and the aftermath of coming out within a parameter of life and death. Himadri further describes the struggle of a mother to accept her only son's sexual identity, depicting through emotional bondage and sentimental affinity between the characters of *Memories in March* (2011).

The above controversies, questions, and issues will be discussed in detail with reference to certain specific examples and illustrations in the following essays and articles by some of the well known scholars in the fields of gay and lesbian subcultures and literatures.

SECTION II: GAY/LESBIAN: BIOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE

Hoshang Merchant's paper views his own work through his own eyes and with relation to Deleuze's. Foucault, the founding-father of sexuality-discourse dealt with Power. Deleuze and Hoshang, both sons, push power into Desire, through *A Thousand Plateaus*. It is a study of Capitalism and Schizophrenia, capitalist fathers breeding homosexual sons. Freud deals with roots, causes, strata. Deluze deals with the rhizome, all 'lines of flight', with multiplicity, different positioning of material, assemblages. Hoshang's books, of a son, written against the father—against capitalism—are not trees but grass. That is, they deal not in hierarchies but in assemblages. They seek to escape dialectics. Hoshang's books are *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* (Delhi: Penguin, 1979), republished 10 years later as *Gay Writing from South Asia* by the same publisher; *Indian Homosexuality* (Delhi: Allied, 2008) which is about gay history or a re-writing of India's history in light of gay discovery, *Forbidden Sex/Text* (London: Routledge, 2009) which is gay criticism and my Autobiographical Fiction, *The Man Who Would Be Queen* (Delhi: Penguin, 2012), written continuously as an assemblage over 30 years from 1979 in Tehran to 2007 in

Hyderabad encompassing his life in Bombay, USA, the Middle East and the Deccan. The paper is a reading of Merchant's own work in the light of Guattari's postmodernism.

Ruth Vanita in her article "*Cha *ni*, Chocolate and *Pan*: Food and Homoerotic Fiction" observes that food items such as mango, chocolate, *chutney*, and *pan* have erotic implications and their use in fiction always suggest the inner sexual sentiments of the male and female characters. In Vanita's view, this symbolic practice enters literature from the ancient scriptures and sex manuals such as the *Upanishads* and *Kamasutra*. However, their suggestive use for the homoerotic purposes in the ancient texts did not cause any controversy unlike today. She then goes on to examine three not so old Indian texts which in their times supported or decried homosexuality without inviting the ire of the right wing activists. The interested readers simply enjoyed them without displaying their likes or dislikes on the street. For instance, in Pandey Bacchan Ugra's story *Chaklet*, the food item (chocolate) becomes a trope for the expression of two male lovers' emotional bonding in a homophobic society. With the image of chocolate Ugra denotes the foreign origin of this child-like fascination which needs to be outlawed. Similarly, in Ismat Chugtai's *Lihaf* food again acts as an insignia of the homoerotic bonding between two women of unequal status. The delicious delicacies overtly replace the under-cover (*lihaf*) sexual indulgence of a begum and her servant girl. The image of chutney and the rhythmic sound of eating suggest the mutual licking of the homoerotic delicacy. Also, Nirala in his novelette *Kullu Bhat* employs *pan* as trope for homoerotic infatuation between a grown up male and a young boy. Here, *pan* acts as an insignia of the blooming love between the two, which finally remains unfulfilled. Finally, Ruth concludes that the pleasure of eating certain food items in the Indian cultural context transcends the man made boundaries and reveals the pure emotions of love between the two humans.

Krishnan Unni's article looks at the narratives of the Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas and the Indian context, which is diametrically divided and yet seeks some similarities to the Latin

American gay lives. The aim of this paper is to bring the differences and deviances between Indian gay writing and the Latin American experience where the act of writing and representation are under severe surveillance. Though we find several prominent theoretical situations of Indian gay life in Reinaldo Arenas's narratives, there seems to be certain fundamental problems persisting in India to address them. Unni's paper addresses these issues and tries to offer an analysis of the problems in the narratives of the Third World gay writing. The language of Reinaldo Arenas and the politics of fantasy that he uses seem to be an act of liberation from the totalitarian system. Krishnan raises a pertinent question that though Indian gay lives are varied and heterogeneous, why we lack such a politics of fantasy to chart out our gay lives and experiences? The different systems of persecution, the resistance developed in the Indian context and the notion of the gay empowerment in the public space become topics of discussion in this paper while they are looked at from the possible ways of representation in the writing of Reinaldo Arenas. The examination of various Indian contexts reveals the fact that though theoretically we claim to have progressed to understand what alternative sexualities are all about, our writing still needs to carve out a politics of flesh, desire and resistance to claim what Indian gay life really is. The comparative framework provided by Unni intends to open a new discourse in this field.

Payel Ghosh in her paper says that Amruta Patil's *Kari* is the first graphic novel from India that deals with homosexuality. The eponymous protagonist is a twenty year old lesbian who works in an ad agency in Mumbai. Kari is both a *'rejection'* and a superhero and this dual identity is what makes her unique. As an ostracized character, she is posited at the margins of the hetero-normative society. It is because she is posited outside the normative field that she has the power to not only see through the grid of what the subject is otherwise compelled to believe as the standardized truth and the 'norm,' her position outside the categories created by the oppressive power structure enables her to become an active agent of resistance. The focus of Payel's paper is on the

duality that is present within the singular figure of Kari, who is both a sufferer as well as the locus of a personal revolt. She is unique as a character because in her we find an amalgamation of the Kristevan 'abject' and the Foucauldian agent of resistance.

SECTION III: GAY/LESBIAN: PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY

Raj Rao's essay deconstructs Foucault's ideas on homosexuality in ancient Greece and Rome and interprets them in an Indian context, especially in terms of cross-class and intergenerational gay sex. Adopting Lisa Duggan's term 'homonormativity,' it demonstrates how homosexuality can become hegemonic, and, in Foucault's formulation, can herald the return of monosexuality. This in turn can foster misogyny and 'heterophobia.' The paper ends with Foucault's views on medicine, law and lifestyle in relation to homosexuality.

Shonali Sud in her article throws light upon the psychological benefits of coping among LGB'S who experience a tremendous amount of stress. Stress spells catastrophe and therefore must be controlled since it causes dramatic changes in both cognition and behavior and more so in an LGB. Research citations reveal that homosexuality is by itself not a disorder; rather it is simply a normal and positive variation of human sexual orientation. It can be best countered by certain personal resource mechanisms such as self-efficacy coupled with social and emotional support.

Ankur Betagire's paper observes that the identity politics of the sexual rights movement, which necessitates the foregrounding of one's sexual identity, goes overboard when it treats human beings as essentially sexuated beings. This paper, while tracing the historical trajectory of the thought, which led to this idea of human beings, explores the notion of sex as it has come to mean in the liberal capitalist setup of early twenty-first century engaging with the thought of two of seminal thinkers, Foucault and Lacan. Juxtaposing Foucault's analysis of the historical shift that occurred in sex in the late 19th century with Lacan's concept of jouissance, the paper reaches a climactic point when it asks whether jouissance

as sex drive or life energy itself has become death drive or the "instinct of destruction?" The paper consistently engages with the nature of jouissance and the many confounding ways in which it expresses itself. It finally attempts to answer a simple question: What has happened to sex in our times?

SECTION IV: GAY/LESBIAN: SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Zaid Al Baset's essay attempts to understand the intimate relationship between space and sexuality. Using narratives of queer individuals, living in urban metropolitan areas, regarding their *use* of public places ranging from parks to metro compartments, the paper questions the easy assumption that spaces are compulsorily heterosexual and suggests that spaces are sexually polymorphous. Zaid argues that the 'sexuality' of a space is contingent on the actors who are using it as well as acts of looking. The essay further probes into the ways in which the assumed heterosexuality and masculinity of public spaces make possible same-sex sexual practices.

A.K. Rath's paper finds that after the period following the First War of Independence (1857), the colonial government sent many prisoners, who were convicted of "moral impurity," "sexual crimes" and multiple charges of "unnatural offences," to the Andamans. Along with the political prisoners, a set of other prisoners such as petty robbers, maniacs, people who were caught in repeated act of sodomy and other unnatural offences were sent to the Andamans—to serve a life-term. A sense of moral purification and detachment went hand in hand with the freedom struggle movement. Rath's article reports two issues simultaneously and argues that the Andaman Penal Settlement witnessed a strong queer culture. First, it highlights a king's trial against an act of sexual crime, which is termed as a murder case, and reports the king's subsequent transportation to the Penal Settlement of Andaman. Second, taking instances from colonial documents and 19th century representation of historical and legal narratives, he explores how within the framework of 'prison

transportation' and 'supervised correction' both male and female bodies in the Andaman Penal Settlement resisted a strong homophobic dispensation.

SECTION V: GAY/LESBIAN: LAW AND LEGISLATION

Mrinal Satish in his essay "Decriminalizing Homosexuality: A Review of the Naz Foundation Decision of the Delhi High Court" offers a critical assessment of the Naz Foundation decision concerning the constitutional validity of the Article 377 of the IPC. He first traces the origin and history of the Article 377 right from Macaulay till today. In his argument, Satish shows the colonial origin of the Article and speaks about its later discriminatory inflictions on an already deprived section of society. Following a brief but pertinent historical account, the author submits a detailed interpretive history of the Article with reference to some significant court cases in India. Satish thus perspectivises the Naz case within the context of the ongoing legal debate and discourse in the country. He then proceeds to juxtapose the Naz assertion and the Government defense against and in favor of the article respectively. The juxtaposition yields a clear account of the points and counter points from both sides, which bear effectively on the Court's decision against the contemporary constitutional validity of the Article. Following a terse account of the Court's observations, Satish concludes that the historic judgment, if ratified by the Supreme Court, will have a major impact on the fundamental rights of the citizens of the country and power of the state to employ coercion toward the curtailment of these rights.

The above papers individually comment on several acutely debatable aspects of queer sexualities and collectively reflect a multicolored spectrum of specialized critical explorations into them.

SUKHBIR SINGH

SECTION I

Gay/Lesbian: Serials and Cinema

Ambivalent Adaptation Techniques and the Mis(representation) of Gay Identity in Mainstream Hindi Cinema

KUHU SHARMA CHANANA

New Queer Cinema is a term first coined by the academic critic B. Rich in *Sight & Sound* magazine in 1992 to define a movement that catalogues exclusive queer themed films of the early 1990s. Rich has developed her theory in the *Village Voices* newspaper, describing films that are experimental in form and techniques and challenge the hetero-norm as a primary signifier through LGBTQ protagonists. In the West the 1991 documentary, *Paris is Burning (*directed by Jennie Livingston), which captures the realities of New York drag balls, marks the advent of the exposition of pansexuality in a very unique measure. The 1990s in the West can be remembered for the queer films such as Todd Haynes's *Poison* (1991), Issac Julien's *Young Soul Rebels (*1991), Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (1991), Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (1992) and Gregg Araki's *The Living End.* Using cinema as a medium to articulate gay concerns is a very interesting tool because theatre works as a 'heterotopias' in Foucaldian term.

According to Foucault, "There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do not exist and that are formed in every founding society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality, because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they

reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quiet other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience."[1] He further divides them into 'heterotopias of crisis' and 'heterotopias of deviation'. These places are in crisis with their atmosphere and, hence, it is difficult to jam them into a fixed spatial position and, thus, the fluid position of these spaces is a fertile ground for the exploration of dissident sexualities.

In the third principle of heterotopias, he considers cinema also a heterotopic site because of the emergence of the two dimensional screen on which one sees the projection of the three dimensional space and, thus, it creates an in- between liminal space which is suitable for the queer-articulation because deviation which cannot find exposition anywhere can be best expressed at these counter–utopias or no-where places. Also, cinema provides a break from traditional time as "heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time."[2] Naturally, the fluidity provided by the temporal closing and opening of cinematic spaces works as an ideal site for the projection of transgressive relationships. Naturally, on the one hand, the spatial dynamics of theatre is most suitable for the gay representations but on the other, the hyper visibility of the medium requires judicious coping strategies to make it acceptable to straight audience. Specially in India, where Section 377 has been recently repealed after a decade long battle. No wonder in India, other than few *hijra* representations (in *Tamanna*, *Sadak, Daayra, Darmiyaan, Shabnam Mausi* and a few art-house productions and documentary movies such as *BomGay, A Mermaid Called Aida, Performing the Goddess* and *Summer in My Veins* to name the few) and gay minor characters in specific professions like dress designers, prior to *Fire* no exclusive homosexual character has occupied the mainstream cinematic space of India.

However, the paper is primarily looking at the gay visibility in Indian cinema and, hence, movies depicting lesbian and *hijra* encounters will be mentioned only as a reference point because

the major thrust of the paper is on the depiction of male homosexuality in Indian mainstream movies in order to decolonize the heterosexual ultra masculine stereotype perpetuated by colonial hangover. Documentary movies have also been excluded from the major concern because, unlike the documentary movies, the ambivalent adaptation techniques used by the mainstream filmmakers in order to make Bollywood movies palatable to a larger heterosexual audience are very unique and ingenious and, hence, both problematic and progressive at the same time. Apropos of this Shohini Ghosh observes in "Bombay Cinema's Queer Vision": "Mainstream films register an acknowledgement of queer sexualities while simultaneously expressing anxieties that attend that awareness. The horror and fascination with which queer sexualities are being regarded in contemporary culture allow for both radical ruptures and reactionary closures."[3] Thus, queering mainstream Bollywood cinema requires coping strategies that have been excluded from the documentary filmmaking. This article tries to map the questions of spectatorship, specific queer gaze (that turns seemingly heterosexual matrix innocent of homoeroticism into a space loaded with gay insinuations) and the tools of queering the commercial mainstream Bollywood cinematic spaces.

In the last decade, especially in the last five years there is a significant spurt in cinematic representations of gay characters as in *I AM, DUNNO Y na janne kyon*, *My Brother Nikhil*, *Straight*, and *Memories in March*. In fact, both *I AM* and *Memories in March* have won national award in best feature film category and best film in English, respectively. However, despite these accolades and recognition by the state, the close scrutiny of these movies reveals that in order to showcase a gay film in mainstream Bollywood format directors have to employ the one step forward and two steps backward techniques wittingly or unwittingly. Suzanna Walters, in her book *All the Rage*, draws attention to the complicated, ambivalent and contradictory aspects of gay visibility in cinema. To quote her words: "Surely, times are better, but I believe there are ways in which this new visibility creates new

forms of homophobiaÖWe may be seen, now, but I am not sure we are known."[4] These dichotomic tools become all the more conspicuous in Indian gay films because of the conventional societal fabric of the Indian society. The paper aims to expose this double bind that is both problematic and progressive at the same time.

Despite the cross-dressing by male actors to hide their identity specially while meeting heroines in pressing situations that dates back to the era of black-and-white movies, the exclusive gay characters were excluded from the mainstream Bollywood cinema till very late. In fact, Shohini Ghosh has used classic queer gaze to re-read some conventional heterosexual tales to locate queer visibility by adopting various spectatorship techniques. According to Brett Farmer, due to the lack of obvious cultural codes and cinematic language the queer gaze has to probe deep to find the homoerotic presence. To quote his words: "This process of appropriating or "queering" film assumes various forms and uses multiple tactics. At a general level, GLBTQ spectators are acutely adept at appropriating film to their own frames of reference and imbuing it with specifically queer affect. Some critics suggest that GLBTQ spectators learn almost as habit to read film symptomatically, to scour texts for casual signs of queerness—a "colourful" supporting character; an ambiguous line of dialogue; a furtive glance between same-sex characters—that may seem insignificant to the film's immediate narrative function but that enable the production of coded queer subplots. Others claim that queer spectators prize film not so much for its stories, which are invariably hetero-normative, but for its moments of spectacular transcendence and bewitching glamourÖOther critics again highlight extra-textual elements such as star gossip and their use by queer spectators to subvert the heterosexual coding of a given star and his/her roles, thereby rendering the star available for specifically queer identification."[5] Shohini's work in this respect is exceptional, for she tries to use all these interpretive tools of spectatorship to evoke a unique queer gaze to re-imagine and re-invest mainstream Bollywood films in such a way that they

seem to accommodate and serve queer purposes. Through a queer friendly gaze she seeks to displace the heterosexual matrix within which homosexuality is forged. For instance, the whole trope of *dosti* among two male friends where one sacrifices his love to immortalize male bonding and, consequently, the blurring of the lines of homosocial spaces and homoeroticism has been brilliantly documented by Shohini Ghosh through the incisive analysis of movies like *Sangam, Doatana*, etc. She also provides a new reading of *Namak Haram, Aanand, Sholay, Anurodh, Tu Kiladi Mein Aanari* and *Dosti* through the lens of queer friendly spectator. According to her, these movies through the blurring of the lines of love and friendship provide significant sites for queer engagements. The spatial dynamics also adds another dimension because the space shared by these males (specially in *Namakharam* and *Anand*) is traditionally allocated to heterosexual couples. Shohini argues that in both these films Rajesh Khanna plays the role of the hyper-sensitive, effeminate man while Bachchan comes across as an intense, introspective man who is filled at the same time by love for the other man and exceptional anger at finally losing him. The bonding between two men are of such intense nature that the heterosexual lovers are at the periphery of the plot. To quote her words: "in these parables of love and eventual loss, the feminized man dies in the arms of his distraught partner."[6] Thus, through unique interpretive queer gaze one is able to perceive the significant fissures and disruptions that these movies offer within which the homosexual desire is refurbished. But, Muraleedharan T. observes that many critics believe that despite occasional expressions of queerness in these films they, by and large, do not disrupt the 'safe framework' and quickly re-establish the normative desire and these comic interludes of male bonding and cross dressing showcased through dance and music sequences remain at the margins. Thus, according to him, "many prefer to describe these films as 'homosocial' yet 'hetrosexual'"[7]. But in a very insightful intervention through gay-gaze, Muraleedharan produces counter strategies to combat this marginal status

ascribed to queer moments. According to him, Indian cinema rarely "preserves the narrative unities that designate classic realism. Temporal and spatial continuities are frequently disrupted by the song and dance sequences that constitute a crucial component of Indian cinema's technology of pleasure. The action or 'stunt' sequences, comic interludes and even the melodramatic episodes could be seen as having a similar, though not identical, narrative function—each of them signifying as seemingly independent narrative units or textsÖ all packed into the logic of a fragmented narrative which Ravi Vasuadevan prefers to describe as 'non-continuous' instead of 'discontinuous.'"[8]

He further elaborates on the autonomous independent identities of these comic interludes and dance-sequences because with the proliferation of the private channels these scenes and songs are telecast independent of films and "when telecast separately, its queerness is no more erased by the heterosexist narrative resolutions within which it was encased while within the film text. Many people, who never saw the original film, would end up seeing and 'enjoying' these sequences as they are telecast again and again for a long period of time."[9] A striking example is repeated telecast of scenes from *Masti* and *Dostana* to produce laughter at various popular TV programmes and song numbers at music channels. This fragmented structure of specific mainstream cinema and the subsequent reproduction on TV channels, which caters to audience who may have never seen those visuals (in the context of the entire film) with respect to the maintenance and consolidation of 'safe structure' of normative desire, indubitably produce a very potent spectator strategy which revolutionizes the diegetic space of cinema. In addition to this Shohini Ghosh (in "Queer Pleasure for Queer People") by quoting Mikhail Bakthin's concept of 'carnivalesque' talks about the song sequences adopting the form of festival site and recreating a symbolic 'second life' where hegemonic structures are dismantled because the spirit of festivities provides an entry into the symbolic space of utopian freedom. Therefore, the dance numbers specially depicting some festivals or marriage

celebrations are by and large imbued with non-normative desires and work as a fertile location for transgressive desire, specially when viewed independently of film.

Thus, through the manipulation of temporal and spatial dynamics of specific scenes, an interesting spectator strategy can be produced and the so–called peripheral articulation of the same–gender desire can be countered successfully. But at one level we must agree that at times, the re-reading and reimagining of the movies through queer perspective cannot compensate for the unapologetic depiction of gay character on screen and the emergence of the consequent oppositional gaze of the spectator that re-opens the new fissures to give impetus to further investigations and interventions. Furthermore, according to Shohini Ghosh, the economic liberalization through globalization has opened the floodgates for private channels which perpetuates uncontrolled visibility of deviant behaviour and transgressive sexuality. Thus, it is only in the late nineties, and specially in the last five years, that the mainstream cinematic spaces have been occupied by overt gay characters.

In fact, though Karan Johar has done a disservice to gay community in *Kal Ho Na Ho* in one way by trivializing the marginalization of homosexuals through homophobia as he has shown Shahrukh Khan and Saif Ali Khan in bed and wrongly misinterpreted as gay couple by Shanta Bai, yet it unwittingly raises the issue of gay existence though through a derogatory comic interlude. The homophobic Shanta Bai sees a gay pattern in their friendship and, thus, due to her homophobic anxiety, homosexuality in comic fashion is out of the closet. Although the tone is farcical, the visibility is at the cost of skewing seemingly gay character to the point of presenting him as a grotesque stereotype. Moreover, in a very slanted fashion Shahrukh Khan feeds Shanta Bai's homophobic fantasies and laughs at her anxiety and, thus, in one way the counter strategy of laughing at homophobia is subtly adopted by the director. No wonder, Shah Rukh Khan and Saif Ali Khan carry their reel life characters to further feed the nation's larger gay imagination by repeating the

act to produce laughter at *Film-Fare* function. Likewise in *Masti* the transsexual body is being visibilied through transphobia and farcical exposition.

Similarly bringing two gay portrayals (though by dint of fake identities) through Bollywood flick *Dostana* in the living rooms and bedrooms of middle-class homes, indeed, endorses the cause of at least visibility. Though to some extent it is a negative visibility because it blurs the binary opposition of erotic and phobic, yet in one way it dismantles the potent silencing technique. So the presence of Abhishek Bachchan and John Abraham in *Dostana* as false gay characters, in order to live in a home owned by Priyanka Chopra, is one of the first representations of gay identity in main lead in mainstream Bollywood cinema. Although the false queer existence of these characters have been laughed at and is only a ploy to give the comic twist to the entire tale yet the visibility has been accorded although through the negative kind of stereotype that perpetuates the myth of effeminate comic gay. To make it palatable to the majority of the straight audience, the employment of conventional technique to make these gay characters laughable and to model them upon a clown-like creature is, indeed, demeaning and a backlash at larger gay politics. In this case, the cost of visibility and acceptability is indeed quite high. Referring to this ironic adaptation of these techniques Michael Pollak observes: "By such behaviour he hopes to mitigate the aggression he anticipates from his heterosexual companions by making them laugh and by fulfilling all the expectations expressed in the heterosexual view of homosexuality."[10] The entire dream sequence of romance between Abhishek Bachchan and John Abraham where the aping of heterosexual romance takes place (in terms of candle light dinner- date accompanied by dancing and flower exchange) unwittingly evinces that so-called straightjacketing within homosexual culture is quite possible.

Apropos of this Sunita Pai in her perceptive article, "Talking Queer films" argues that "many people in the queer community consider movies like *Dostana* a director's gimmick to get the audience to the theatre for some quick bucks at our cost.

However, I argue that this is a beginning. By showing John to be macho and Abhishek as effeminate, the movie might give the audience an incorrect picture. But, it is still among the few gay-themed movies that are being watched in middle class living rooms where any talk of sexuality is still taboo."[11] Moreover, even the censor board, as Sunita Pai in the same interview states, considers a hug or a kiss between two same-sex lovers a reason enough to give 'A' certificate whereas such biases are not prevalent in heterosexual romancing. Thus, getting it passed from censor board and portraying romance although in humorous fashion also involves a larger gay politics though such representation is not devoid of problems.

Similarly, in one of the first institutionalized gay seminar on "Gay Subcultures and Indian Projections" held at IIAS, Shimla on April 3 and 4, 2012, Onir (film-maker of *My Brother Nikhil* and *I AM*) talks candidly about the deliberately chosen title of *My Brother Nikhil* which by no stretch of imagination exposes the gay identity of the protagonist and the fact that the character is gay has been revealed much later. Onir also talks about the difficulties in getting funding for such films and the immense stress to get it passed from the censor board. Hence, many a times the techniques that might appear regressive to a common viewer is a deliberate attempt to get the movie passed from the censor board and get it released at the main cinema halls. He states that at times, even watching gay movie creates paranoid in the hearts of male audience that they will be branded as gay. Little wonder Onir remembers that initially majority of his audience has been female.

Thus, in this light *Dostana* has broken some moulds but also uses certain tools that serves as a backlash at gay representation. The very song that states "*maa the munda bigad gaya*" ("the son has been spoilt") also indicates that being gay is equivalent to being spoilt. Further, the non-reproductive identity of gay copulation is indicated when Kiran Kher, the mother of one of the gay partners, unwillingly blesses them and says "*foolon fallo"* ("may you have children") and then corrects herself by sadly

sighing *kher choodo* (leave it) indicating that the so-called normal heterosexual family structure is not possible in the sphere of alternative sexuality. Hence, the heterosexual broader framework has been created for normalizing homosexual desire in terms of usual romancing and the mother finally blessing both the men, but the entire presentation of these scenes has been laced with such potent farcical interpretation that it undermines the position of familiarizing subaltern sexualities and the laughter produced out of these scenes subsumes the gay politics of normalizing romance and visibilising alternative family structure.

Therefore, at one level, even through the negative stereotyping, the cinema screen has been occupied by the gay lingo, sartorial preference but at the other, the laughter emanating by caricaturing them clearly indicates that being gay produces incongruity that is a necessary condition for laughter. In this manner caricaturing is indubitably counterproductive. Interestingly, the same tool of comedy has been used in order to laugh at the homophobic anxiety and coercive heterosexuality rather than on gay identity in Vinay Pathak directed *Straight* where the comedy is not arising out of the stereotypical gay character but due to the homophobic anxiety of the lead character known as Pino (played by Vinay Pathak). His own fear of being gay lurks in his soul so heavily that he forces himself to be physically close to women who cannot arouse him. Thus, here the director tries to take a dig at the internalized homophobia, confused sexual identity and coercive heterosexuality rather than showing stereotypical crazy queens and laughing at their expense. In this movie the comedy is arising out of homophobic anxiety of society and individual along with the falsified notion of 'masculinity.' Pino, a thirty-something restaurant owner of London, goes to India to get married but have been dumped by his would-be wife. He returns to London dejected and tries to find a mate. Meanwhile, in his suggestively entitled restaurant 'GAYlord', a young male stand–up comedian and a female Indian caricature artistes come to find jobs. After some arguments, he gives job to both of them. As the story progresses, the male bonding between

Pino and the stand-up comedian, Kamlesh, develops.

On the other hand, the subtle undertone of romance between Gul Panag (the female caricature artiste) and Pino also starts creeping up as well. Interestingly, one day in the sheer excitement of having won a lottery, Kamlesh kisses Pino on lips and the entire world changes for Pino. He just starts dreaming about Kamlesh and self-doubt and hatred regarding being gay starts mushrooming in his head. He tries various tricks from casual sex to a stylish date to counter his self-hatred but to no avail. In fact, the very sound of the word gay gives him jitters down the spine. Then he confesses obliquely to his cousin who counsels him and makes him understand that being gay is not abnormal nor is it only a lifestyle choice as many fallaciously believe. When Pino exclaims that he fears that he has become gay, his cousin admonishes him and states that no one becomes gay; in fact, one is born as gay and suggests that it is as instinctive and natural as being heterosexual. Thus, the homophobic anxiety is a fallacious notion. Obviously making fun of homophobia rather than of homosexual desire is, indeed, a brilliant use of comedy for progressive move. Further, the movie exhibits an all-gay bar and Pino is made to see the genuine love and affection between gay couples and goes to the extent of treating one such couple at his gay bar. But the market forces and straight audience again come in the picture because finally the heterosexual privileges trump over homosexual identity and Pino is shown falling madly in love with Renu. He is elated at clearing of this cobweb and assertion of his heterosexual identity. The movie ends with Pino's wedding bells and, consequently, reaffirms hetero-patriarchal structure.

Thus, keeping the largely straight audience in mind, the director exhibits that the conventional heterosexual marriage trumps over homoerotic desire and Pino seems to be out of confusion and absolutely comfortable with his hetero-normativity and his desire for the male companion is reduced to a mere passing phase. But this heterosexual resolution of Pino's gay leaning cannot be interpreted entirely as a regressive measure because as Alexander Doty argues: "The day someone can

establish without a doubt that images and other representations of men and women getting married, with their children, or having sex, undeniably depict 'straightness,' is the day someone can say no lesbian or gay has ever been married, had children from heterosexual intercourse, or had sex with someone of the other gender for any reason."[12]

Another interesting trope to visibilize gay identity is through the marriage of convenience as has been depicted in *Fashion* between a gay man under pressure from his mother to marry and a struggling model who wants stability. The marriage between straight woman and gay man in *Honeymoon Travels* ironically charts the map of patriarchal subjugation of women in heterosexual structure, as in this film a horribly pressurized gay man named Bunty (played by Chatwal) marries Sandhya Mridual who in a hurry to come out of broken relationship marries him and to her horror discovers the truth during her honeymoon. In the same movie, Sunny, the husband of Pinki (they were one of the six mismatched couples) feels attracted to Bunty but the internalized homophobia and confusion create horrible anxiety in his heart and consequently his marriage seems to be in shambles. Quite obviously, in these movies, the subjugation by hetero-patriarchal structure is evident from the fact that gay men are compelled to marry due to society and straight women get oppressed on account of this and thus both gay men and women become victims of patriarchy.

Thus, the message is clear that the coalition politics that works in favour of gay man and woman's joint struggle against hetero-patriarchy should be adopted as a weapon to counter it and this is what precisely Madhur Bhandarkar employs in *Fashion*. Mahesh Dattani's *Do the Needful* also catalogues 'lavender marriage' or 'marriage of convenience' by demonstrating how a gay man and a woman in love with a Muslim man marry in order to find a space that is devoid of patriarchal subjugation. Thus, by raising feminist concerns along with larger oppressive heterosexual marriages in *Honeymoon Travels* and *Fashion*, the directors are able to negotiate the gay identity because *Honeymoon Travels* deals with bursting of the myth of "marriages made in heaven" by

evincing various sort of mismatched couples and obviously the gay and straight couple also fits into the picture of incongruous marriages. It is, no doubt, an ingenious way to legitimize gay presence through mis-matched marriages but it occurs in movie as just one of the passing references and sub- themes that have been subtly portrayed and the overt exhibition of this tabooed subject still remains in wraps in these movies. Indubitably, the trope of depicting larger structure of patriarchal oppression and the farcical situation of arranged marriage have been used to make the audience identify with the much acceptable theme and then as an episode the gay characters have been introduced. However, the principal of identification does not work on simple monolithic dimension and involves complex amalgam of contradictory forces as has been suggested by Burston and Richardson when they talk (in *Introduction to A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*) about the promiscuous nature of the imagination and argues that identification does not operate on the simple principle of believing what one is viewing.

Hence, what appears as a subtext may turn out, by the virtue of *oppositional gaze*, to be the major thrust and appears much more dynamic through collective gaze. But, nevertheless, it is somewhat safe to argue that in one way in these movies, the exclusive gay identity has been compromised and from this perspective Onir's movies are major intervention in queer cinema. *My Brother Nikhil* sensitively portrays AIDS-related problems faced by MSM (men having sex with men) category. Though due to the conventional heterosexual audience the homosexual orientation of the main character is revealed much later, yet Onir is able to emerge as 'auteur,' a term given by cinema critics who wrote for *Cahiers du Cinema*. According to them, a director's film should reflect his personal vision as if they are primary' auteur' (author) and despite film-making being an act of industrial production and collective effort, the auteur's distinct creative voice shines through all kinds of market forces and studio interferences.

In that light, despite strategic postponements techniques of

identity revelation and highlighting AIDS issue more than the non-normative sexual orientation, Onir is able to counter the contradictory societal and production influences and is able to reveal his distinct point of view on the right of a gay man to live with dignity. The whole issue of presenting homosexual leaning under the garb of the disastrous effects of AIDS also caters to the serious issue of AIDS citizenship, the term given by Brown in *Re Placing Citizenship*. According to Brown, "AIDS citizenship considers the AIDS quilt as public enunciation (or memorialization) of grief and rage —a kind of subaltern counter-public—which is simultaneously a site for both consciousness-raising (and fund-raising) and for the public affirmation of kinship and collectivity: a time space event of citizenship in civil society, that is many-layered, polysemic, both personal and public."[13] Thus, in dubious and oblique fashion, AIDS trauma is being used to give visibility to gay citizens and provides a platform to assert citizenship rights which according to Steven Sideman, "makes it possible for individuals to protect themselves against social threat, to participate in public decision making, to make claims about national policy and culture, and so on. At stake is how the lesbian and gay movement approach the questions of citizenship. In short, we need a queer articulation of democratic theory."[14]

Thus, *My Brother Nikhil*, without using the demeaning tool of humour raises some pertinent questions regarding homosexual existence in India. Also, the movie is remarkable in the context of demonstrating a life-long bond between gay lovers in the toughest of the times when Nikhil, who has been suffering from AIDS, has been ostracized by every one and only his lover other than his sister gives him unconditional support which is not there many a times even in socially sanctioned heterosexual marriages. So the assumption that gay-lovers are promiscuous and life- long commitment is not a part of their scheme of things is indubitably dismantled here because even when Nikhil's parents have left him his gay partner provides him an unflinching strength in the wake of tremendous social subjugation. The autocracy and

rejection by the father haunts Nikhil throughout and can be compared with the similar sort of trauma suffered by William in *The Hanging Garden* after the parental rejection.

The whole idea of fatherhood and, consequently, 'masculinity in crisis' can be elaborated from the real life incident from the life of actor Yuvraaj who has acted in *DUNNO Y na janne kyon* and has been disowned by his family for playing a gay man. His father publicly announces his severe discomfort. To quote his words: "We are a respected family and I'm appalled that he is playing a gay man's role. We're finished. All the dreams and hopes we had built around him are over. For just a film role, he has lost out on his blood ties. We don't want to see his face ever... not even when we are dying."[15] One can safely assume that when playing a gay man can evoke such an extreme reaction then in real life 'coming out' can be hugely oppressive for an Indian man. Thus, the whole cluttered notion of masculinity projected on son by the father creates irrepressible homophobic anxiety in the heart of a gay son. In such a subversive traditional Indian society, the unconditional support of Nikhil's boyfriend is an attempt to break the stereotype that gay relations are all about temporary sexual satiation and cannot provide a long-term support.

However, the very title of the movie indicates the asexual nature of the movie which Onir announces (at a seminar in Shimla at IIAS) is a deliberate ploy to cater to homophobic Indian audience who might not even come to cinema hall if the title is suggestive of gay content. Another strategy to familiarize the gay character is to set him against a backdrop of easily identifiable heterosexual family set up so that he comes across as a perfectly easy and identifiable character and then slowly in oblique fashion introducing his gay leaning. This tool has been skillfully used by Onir in *My Brother Nikhil* where, till a very late half, the character is primarily shown surrounded by a so-called normal heterosexual family indulged in routine day-to-day activities without any reference to his homosexuality. This strategy, as Suzanna Danuta Walters asserts in her book, *All the Rage*,http://

www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/Print/alltherage.html "visually asserts the absolute ordinariness of the family life as a precursor to the introduction of the gay theme which functions to invite the 'sympathy' of the viewer before introducing their sexuality."[16]

But according to Sara Warns, this is again serving as a dubious contradictory measure because the idea is to make the homosexual character so normal and easy to identify with that the audience eventually forgets that the character is gay. Likewise Walters states how "the coming out episodes–like other 'first' broke down the barriers that may never again be firmly rebuilt. But it is also clearly true that double-standards and heterosexual unease are still firmly in place."[17] And one can perceive how Nikhil's 'accidental coming out' has alienated him from his parents. Moreover, in the Indian context, the sheer problem of visibility is so potent that at times one has to resort to ambivalent techniques to reach out to a largely heterosexual audience. In fact, the documentary style of making of *My Brother Nikhil*, where every character speaks directly to the camera also serves the purpose of exposing dissident sexuality in a very interesting fashion as has been pointed out by Shohini Ghosh: "Every character addresses the camera directly before entering into flash back. It is though a documentary was being made on the story of Nikhil after his death. By making this documentary trope central to the narrative, the film build a stylistic affinity to an entire tradition of subaltern narratives just as the documentary itself is a marginal province of the cinematic universe. *My Brother Nikhil* locates the marginal protagonist of Bombay cinema—the homosexual man—at the centre of the narrative."[18]

Another significant juncture came in Indian queer cinema when Onir's *I AM* won national award in 2012. The movie has four stories that reflect the ethinic cleansing and marginalization through Kashmir issue, the ambivalent positions of feminism on artificial insemination, child abuse and police atrocities against gay men. The clever juxtaposing of contemporary marginalized groups of urban India with gay issues works as an ingenious tool

to mainstream gay identity on the one hand through coalition politics (all the characters in the stories know one another) by making it a cause of human rights rather than sexual rights but on the other, to some extent, it takes away attention from the projection of exclusive gay oppression. The last two stories of *I AM* explicitly deal with the child abuse and gay honey-traps and the consequent blackmail by the police.

In both the cases, the abusive nature of the gay copulation is slightly problematic because in one way these are the hard realities of gay existence in India where the partners have to copulate at a public space due to the lack of acceptance by the family and this very private act at public place becomes cause of police atrocities (even in Naz judgment the decriminalization of same sex activity is spatial because it clearly states that it has to be performed at a private space and thus the public visibility of gay activity is still not accepted) but on the other, the lasting love, romance, friendship and bonding are very much part of gay ghetto and these healthy, happy and fruitful aspects of homosexual relationships need to be exposed as well for the positive acceptance of gay-bonding. Also, the film is remarkably shot while subtly and sensitively portraying child abuse without overtly sensationalizing it, which is the major danger while dealing with these issues. In fact, the entire sequence reminds the technique of camera-stylo or camera–pen (introduced first by Alexandre Astruc), where the directors use camera just like writers make use of pen and wield it constantly and rapidly to negate any obstacles of traditional story telling. The entire sequence is deliberately shot to counter any perverted pleasure emanating out of child abuse and at the same time potently portrays the trauma. Indeed, the realistic portrayal of child abuse is evident from the fact that the child is not the only victim in the entire situation but he learns to manipulate his abusive father to fulfil his needs. Instead of showing him as someone who has instinctive homosexual desire, he has been portrayed as one who has been initiated into gay encounters forcefully and gradually becomes homosexual due to the childhood abuse. Not only this but also

in all his dream sequences, he visualizes himself as a girl child. This is a typical pejorative model that needs to be counter attacked on the one hand but the realities of child abuse, a very tabooed subject for Indian audience needs to be explored as well. The movie brilliantly shows the ruthless selfishness that the protagonist adopts to counter gay rape by showing him living with an unnamed cat. Cat is a classic symbol of selfish pet who will come near its owner by and large only to eat its food. Also, it symbolizes that due to the lack of social sanction the finer intimacies between gay partners become a distant dream, as with cat it is a very need based relationship that the protagonist shares.

The use of animal imagery to produce analogical identification has been used by Ruth Vanita in her essay on Virginia Woolf's *Flush* which is about Barret Browning's pet dog and then in her essay, "'I'm an Excellent Animal': Cows at Play in the Writings of Bahinabai, Rukun Advani, Suniti Namjoshi and Others", she states that "non-human animals are less containable in categories of gender and nationality than are humans. Hence, they often function, in mythologies and literatures, to subvert or undo these categories, revealing the surprising commonality of apparently distinct traditions and groupings."[19] Quoting Ruth, Shohini argues that "the differences in species between dog and human functions as a metaphor for the social gap created between members of the same gender who are conditioned to downgrade their intimacy as not capable of primacyÖThe analogical identification could be over class, caste and other identities. In such a situation, the spectator would occupy a simultaneous awareness of being an outsider but also being complicit with sub textual implications of the film."[20]

Therefore, the un-named cat is not only symbolic of the deliberate non-recognition of gay existence, but also highlights the lack of social sanction that forces impersonal nature of gay–bonding. The cat imagery is all pervasive during the major incidents in the life of the protagonist. Natasha, one of Abhimanyu's friends, clearly tells him that he is just like this cat. When Natasha visits his home, she asks Abhi: "Are you a gay? If

you are what a waste." She further, after a pause, states, "Hey you cat without a name, you are just like your owner, traitor." The point of vintage is that what she actually means by the word 'traitor' because she obviously shows implicit interest in him but does not get reciprocation. Is she not trying to say that by being gay he is a traitor to the heterosexual cause? Likewise, in yet another scene when Abhimanyu is in a confessional mode, the narration of all his childhood abuse, trauma and gay encounters is marked by the perennial presence of cat. Furthermore, Abhimanyu narrates the loss of all his cats that he has lost either due to the killing by his rapist step-father or losing them in accidents. The present cat that he has is the fourth one. The symbol of the lost cat to interpret the constant cycle of love and loss is a clear-cut metaphorical representation of the volatile and insecure pattern of ephemeral gay relationship, which is primarily due to the lack of societal sanction and the gay couples are falsely charged of promiscuity whereas society leaves no other option for them. Thus the analogical identification through the cat imagery brilliantly exposes the grim realities of the gay- world.

Further, the movie in oblique fashion, for the first time, exhibits a romantic date between two supposedly gay men and the subtle brewing of romance that has till now been part of only heterosexual matrix. But somehow or the other, at last, the effect is somewhat marred by the fact that one of the partners turns out to be a blackmailer.

In this regard, *DUNNO Y na jaana kyon* is one of the first mainstream Bollywood films that showcases a full-blooded kiss between two gay partners. This re-sexualization of homosexual desire is an attempt to negate the notion that homoerotic desire is not actual sex as has been mentioned by Diana Richardson who has argued in favour of re-sexualization of gay identity though she has addressed the issue regarding lesbianism, but to a great measure it is applicable for male homosexuality as well. Also the 'liberal homophobia' has also been challenged through this overt expression of physical intimacy between two same-sex partners. 'Liberal homophobic' is the person who ideologically

accepts the same-sex union but when the overt physical intimacy between two same-gender partners is exhibited before them, they suffer from severe anxiety. At times, it is so latent that the so-called progressive people who perceive themselves as queer friendly are unable to recognize their own liberal homophobia because the explicit physical homoerotic passion is hard to encounter in day-to-day life in India due to social coercion of homoerotic desire. Thus, through the visual medium when explicit intimacies are expressed, it serves multiple purposes like exposing liberal homophobia (as many sexually liberal and gay friendly people are actually tested when the blatant expression of physical homosexuality is presented before them), the negation of the notion that the full-blooded passion is the exclusivity of heterosexual romance only and, consequently, it endorses the fact that the same-sex liaisons are equally fulfilling in all respects. Thus, *DUNNO Y na jaane kyon* is, indeed, a significant addition in this respect.

However, in lesbian representation it is slightly problematic because most of the time the lesbian double bonanza is presented in order to feed the ultimate male fantasy where he sees no rival in love-making scenes between two women and lesbian-encounters are portrayed to perpetuate the voyeuristic pleasures of male audience. Though lesbian invisibility in larger structure of gay activism is a major issue in queer studies and has been pertinently argued by Ashwini Sukthankar in *Facing the Mirror,* yet the overt sexual intimacies are part of lesbian cinema as opposed to gay movies. To quote Walters: "They are explicitly about boy's fantasy movies about girls who like girls."[21] Little wonder the depiction of lesbianism is replete with male invasion of all female social space. Apropos of this Giti Thadani observes: "The visual tradition often have very explicit lesbian descriptions of Radha's sakhis erotically playing together in water while Krishn(a), in the role of a voyeur, looks on."[22] No wonder, the love-making scenes between Isha Kopikar and Amrita Arora in Karan Razdan's *Girlfriend* are saturated with pornographic detailing and have been presented through the narration by one of the heroines to

the hero and in this fashion once again the male presence in lesbian encounter is being articulated. Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" famously calls it 'masculinization' of female gaze and terms it as 'to-be-looked-at-ness.'

Similarly, Suzanne Walters insists that "they are in the sense primarily to serve as nutritional supplements to the main course of maleÖ sexuality and life."[23] Obviously, this sort of hetero-patriarchal political in-correctness is not operational for male-homosexual intimacy and the re-sexualization of male homoeroticism on screen involves an active gay political agenda as has been argued above. It is a blatant attack on conditioned notion of hetero-patriarchal romance and passion and, thus, in this light *DUNNO Y na jaane kyon* is a path breaking film. The very poster of the film that is used for the publicity re(elaborates) and reconfigures blatant gay corporeality, because it exposes two perfectly chiselled naked and tattooed torso of gay partners in tight embrace and never before in Indian cinema this sort of evocation of the sensuality of male body without rioting through the 'desiring woman's gaze' has taken place. And, using it as a publicity material, which demonstrates the eroticism as the major thrust of the film and evinces what the director exactly wants the spectators to notice, is indeed a bold step. But at times, this has a danger of over sensationalizing and consequently trivializing a serious issue but at another level, if the director is able to pull the audience by exposing the detailed gay corporeality then it negates the notion of exclusive straight audience. No doubt, the publicity material is an important marker in the representation of queer cinema but somehow has not been given enough signification by queer cinema critics. Apropos of this Muraleedharan T. in "Crisis in Desire" writes that "the publicity material should be considered as an integral part of cinematic signification as it undertakes the task of doing the necessary 'ground work' to facilitate the pleasurable deployment of a film text in a particular context. Advertising campaigns invariably constitute a pre-text that configures the potential signification of

a film text and have to be seen as a crucial part of the construction and circulation of cinematic pleasures."[24] The bold publicity material of *DUNNO Y na jaane kyon* stands in stark contrast to promotional tools used by directors like Jonathan Demme, who despite having more liberal western audience as target spectator chooses to focus on exhibiting *Philadelphia* (1993) through its publicity material as a court-room drama and deliberately subsuming the gay content of the movie as has been mentioned by Jill Nelmes in *An Introduction to Film Studies.*

Another movie released this year that employs a clever tool to make it palatable for straight audience through the revered identity of motherhood is *Memories in March.* Sara Warn in her insightful essay "TV's Lesbian Baby Bloom" gives numerous examples of American TV serials such as "What Makes A Family," (2001), "Bobbie Girl" (2002) and "A Question of Love" that start with the character's struggle with their alternative sexual orientation but ultimately end with the issue of parenthood which is a more respected identity and under the garb of which less acceptable identity of homosexual characters can be acceptable to the straight audience. The movie starts with the grief-stricken mother, who has lost her only son and comes to Calcutta to receive the belongings of her dead son. The grief of a single mother, who has been divorced by her husband, becomes the focal and starting point of the connection between audience and the film-maker. The sympathies for the gay son is already evoked in the heart of the audience because of the clever juxtaposition of the mainstream revered identity of mother with the marginalized existence of gay son.

Therefore, later on, the revelation of the dead son's gay leaning through his lover may have come as a shock to Aarti (played by Deepti Naval) but to audience the acceptability is already evoked through the sympathy generated by the silent tears and understated potent poignancy of a wailing mother. Hence, motherhood as tool is successfully used to negotiate a gay theme and in a quite slanted way Ornib's affection for Sid has been substituted by implicit oedipal longings. To quote Amitava Nag:

"By making Sid physically muted, the director tried to dissociate the sexual connotation if any that would otherwise resonate in the screen cohabitation of Ornib and Sid. Rather, he replaced it with the slanted oedipal reference of Aarti and Ornib."[25] In addition, Ornib insists that he wants to keep Aarti's photograph because it has been a prized possession of Sid and by doing so he seems to replicate Sid's affection for his mother. Apropos of this, it is pertinent to note Brett Farmer's observation who, by analyzing films like *Suddenly Last Summer* and *Sunset Boulevard*, explores the intricate relationship between gay men and the depiction of maternal instincts. According to him, this kind of close-knit bond negotiates 'maternal identification' as the source for "a politically resonant refusal, or at least disruption, of patriarchal hegemony."[26]

Indeed, in a progressive move, both in *My Brother Nikhil* and *Memories in March*, though the gay son is dead but the lover's presence is perennial and negates the assumption propounded by Terry Castle regarding concept of 'ghosting of gay character' (although the idea is used for lesbian existence but it is quite applicable for gay characters as well), especially in *Memories in March* where the gay son is present only in the memories of mother and lover and no physical presence is indicated, not even in the form of a photograph. This observation is significant in the context of lesbian characters, but in conventional Indian society this tool is applicable even for a gay character. However, in *Memories in March*, the invisibility of gay son is compensated by the constant presence of his lover and even the face-book account which is a personalized cyberspace has been accessed by his lover in front of the mother. Hence, the invisibility, the presence through lover and the motherhood identity (all these techniques) have been ingeniously used to familiarize gay character in this movie without being regressive.

Not only this but also, in a very subtle fashion, the much-debated issue of psychiatric abuse surrounding homosexuality has been discussed. The mother in her loud thinking and rambling accuses herself for her son's homosexuality and expresses a

remorse that probably if she could have sent her son to a psychiatrist, he would have been cured to which Ornib (his lover) chides her and states that in that case she needs to be cured because of considering homosexuality a pathological disease. The psychiatric abuse surrounding homosexuality is a huge issue. The 'disease' model of homosexuality has been discarded by the American Psychiatric Association long back in 1973, when they rejected the notion of considering homosexuality as an illness and removed it from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-3). Unfortunately, as opposed to this the Indian Medical Establishment (that is Medical Council of India, The Indian Medical Association and The Indian Psychiatric Association) has followed the WHO system of classification of mental ailments known as ICD-10 (1992).

This system divides homosexuality into two groups—ego syntonic and ego dystonic homosexuality. This system catalogues ego dystonic homosexuality as psychiatric disorder. In ego syntonic disorder, they are at ease with their sexuality and, thus, no treatment is prescribed. Whereas in ego dystonic, they suffer from homophobic anxiety and hence treatment is warranted. This sort of division is obviously problematic and regressive because under the garb of this kind of distinction there is an endorsement of hetero-normativity because ego dystonic sexuality perpetuates the notion of considering homosexuality as a pathological disease which further gives impetus to abuse. Little wonder Freudian analysis of viewing same-sex desire as a product of having a domineering mother/absent father and considering it a pathological condition to be cured has been used by various therapists to justify the abusive use of drugs to cure same-sex desire. One of Freud's follower Sedor Rado has gone to the extent of inventing infamous reparative therapies, which are used to change the sexual orientation of the patient. Reparative therapies are designed to alter homoerotic passion of the patient which includes a variety of techniques such as the administration of 'nausea–inducing' drugs, 'shock therapy' and 'behavioural therapy'. Mahesh Dattani's *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* fully illustrates it.

In a recent still unpublished exclusive interview given to me by Manvendra Singh Gohil, (the first open gay prince), he has talked about how his parents tried to bribe a doctor to give him shock therapy to cure him of his homosexuality. Recently, in *Times of India* in the *Crest section*, (24 April 2012), in an exclusive article on homosexuality, the writer points out the debates surrounding the eugenics and homosexuality and also the activism adopted by medical doctors to burst the myth of considering it a disease. The question is that despite the sea change in medical conception of homosexuality why still treatment is being given for being homosexual? Apropos of this Anahita Mukerji, in her article, "I am not sick, So don't cure me", writes that "sexual discourse in India remains mired in notions of morality, with many in the mental health profession continuing to view homosexuality as a disease.

What's worse, many are still trying to cure it. Gurvinder Kalra, a psychiatrist with Sion Hospital in Mumbai, who also works with Humsafar, an NGO dealing with alternate sexuality, often finds himself striving to undo the damage others in his trade have inflicted upon the LGBT community. Take, for instance, the case of a man who was given anti-depressants and psychotropic drugs, both of which reduce sexual desire, in a bid to cure him of homosexuality. "The man says he was not suffering from depression or any other psychotic problem at the time. He had simply visited a psychiatrist and asked whether homosexuality was normal or a disease, to which the psychiatrist immediately promised a cure," said Kalra. "In addition, this man was also asked to see a second psychiatrist who, six months into the 'treatment', told him he was now ready to get involved with women. When the man said he did not have a girlfriend, the psychiatrist advised him to visit a commercial sex worker. The man was unsuccessful in his attempt to sleep with the sex worker. So the psychiatrist asked him to visit the brothel again. After three unsuccessful attempts, a friend suggested that he should visit a 'high-class' call girl instead. Finally, the man gave up on the treatment and searched for more information on the subject on the internet. This is where he found my contact details."[27]

The coercive heterosexuality is seen another measure to cure homoeroticism and naturally Deepti Naval desperately wishes that her son could have a relationship with Raima Sen and in a fit of her desperation, she goes to the extent of accusing her of not trying enough to win his love. To which Raima Sen told her that she was head over heals in love with him and tried enough to attract him but her son was genuinely gay. This scene bears close semblance with *The Hanging Garden* by Thom Fitzgerald (1997) where the gay protagonist William has to go through heterosexual imposition because his mother wants to cure him of his homosexuality and consequently arranges an older woman in need of money to help him loose his virginity and the next morning the mild trauma is written all over his face. The hazardous effects of this coercive heterosexuality is shown much later when a girl child, Rosie who is born out of this encounter asks his father to take care of her. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* also reveals this kind of oppression by coercive heterosexuality to cure gay leanings. Hence, the subjugation through psychiatric abuse which is the harsh reality of gay world and at times is perpetuated by one's own parents has been beautifully and subtly indicated in the movie as has been mentioned above. In a soul-stirring scene Ornib asks Aarti as what is more hard to accept, her son's death or his being gay? This kind of equating clearly manifests the prejudices surrounding parental acceptance. Quite obviously, Aarti seems to be greatly surprised to hear that Ornib's parents have accepted him wholeheartedly. Nonetheless, the movie ends not only with Deepti Naval's acceptance of her son's homosexuality, but also with the exposition of the beautiful bond that she establishes with Ornib based on her son's shared memories. Thus, from Nikhil's parents blatant rejection to Aarti's acceptance, indeed, the Indian gay cinema has come a long way.

From the homophobic farcical appearance to the sensitive portrayals of grim oppression occurring on account of societal disapproval, the Bollywood gay cinema indeed demonstrates a progressive graph. But the issues surrounding acceptability and palatability by the largely straight readers and market forces

compel the film maker to resort to one step forward and two steps backward coping tactics and create perennial paradox of affirmation/anxiety. Since the spectatorship does not operate on the monolithic principle and issues pertaining to difference in location, cultural history, etc., make it dynamic and malleable, therefore, the same cinematic text carries plurality of significance depending on these factors. In this regard, Shohini Ghosh's observation is pertinent who, by quoting Andrea Weiss, affirms that "queer spectatorship follows from a contradiction: the desire to see while being perpetually invisible. Like female spectatorship, the relationship between queer and cinema has been complex. In the words of Weiss 'it resembles a love-hate affair, which involves anticipation, seduction, pleasure, disappointment, rage and betrayal.'"[28]

Apart from the broader framework of the fluid position of general spectator, there is further ambivalence pertaining to gay movies because of the specific subjectivities of queer spectators that have been brilliantly argued by Brett Farmer in *Spectacular Passions*. He talks about the psychoanalytic concept of 'fantasmic spectatorship', where he uses fantasy to explore the uniqueness of gay men's social and psychic positioning that "functions not only structurally, in that it positions the subject within pre-existing paradigms of desire and meaning, but also contingently, in that the realization of fantasmic imperatives always depends on the determinate conditions of the subject's cultural and historical particularity."[29] Thus, this unique reception by gay men fractures normative masculinities. Farmer focuses on 'desire' in cinema by pointing out that the 'dazzling images, sounds and narratives' of movies not only expose desire but also teach desire that results in the formation of fluid psychocultural discourses of sexuality that further compel audience to introspect about their own libidinal utterances. Thus, it produces "a site of continuous interaction between the potential fantasmatic scenarios signalled by the text and the shifting psychosocial frames inhabited by the individual spectator."[30] Thus, with reference to the specific gay spectators the cinematic interpretations are bound to be

ambivalent and the internal act of counter-constructions on account of different diegetic space allows and creates much necessary fissures that prevent unilateral closure. Obviously, reading and re-reading of these films with the spatial and temporal variations will produce multiple contradictory interpretations and coping strategies—through auteur theory, audience reception, publicity material, queer gaze, camera wielding techniques, AIDS blanket, dead gay character and mourning mother, homosexuality as a product of child abuse, subsuming gay identity under the larger human rights issue through coalition politics as in *I AM*—will also be reviewed and re-imagined time and again in this light. Moreover, the big question is that despite the emergence of positive gay images in cinema, still the issue of exclusive 'queer aesthetic' is being subsumed under the act of mainstreaming and one can envisage (as has been mentioned by Jill Nelmes in *An Introduction to Film Studies*) that when in Hollywood movies like *A Beautiful Mind*, the gay episodes of Nash's life have been deliberately erased in order to mainstream it, an Indian Bollywood gay movie replete with unique 'queer aesthetics' is still a tantalizing dream.

NOTES

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"This is how we are:" *Maryada* and the Representation of Homosexuality

NILADRI R. CHATTERJEE

When Star Plus began its soap opera *Maryada...Lekin Kab Tak*[1] on 18 October 2010, the drama series had all the appearances of a Hindi soap. The soap opened with the events of the day after the wedding of Gaurav Jakhar (Dakssh Ajit Singh) and Vidya. Gaurav is the eldest child and elder son of Rohtak DIG Brahmanand Jakhar and his wife Devyani. But, Gaurav does not appear to be happy with the wedding. He does not make any effort at establishing any kind of relationship with his new bride. On 10 June 2011, Indian television viewers discover that Gaurav is in love with a man, Karan (Karaan Singh). Never before had Indian television viewers seen such a sustained and responsible treatment of homosexuality on the small screen. The Gaurav-Karan love story ends on 31 January 2012 when Karan's initially-homophobic and later-sympathetic politician mother Roshni Devi (Mona Ambegaonkar) informs Devyani that she has sent the two young men abroad, to a country where they can live their lives without any social difficulty. While this closure of the queer track may have a potentially deleterious effect on Indian society at large, the present paper seeks to gauge the socio-cultural ramifications of a Hindi soap opera showing two gay men in a committed relationship with each other. The complex politics of the apparently homophiliac closure will be addressed towards the end of the paper. The fact that neither character is shown to embody the stereotype of the limp-wristed, lisping caricature of a gay man will also be analysed and the soap opera will be contextualised with respect to the Delhi High Court verdict of 2 July 2009.

Our notion of popular culture has come a long way since Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the "culture industry" in 1947. Adorno and Horkheimer had laid all blame for the predicted demise of high culture at the doorsteps of Hollywood. Their reactionary resistance to cinema looks naīve now. They weren't to know about the semantic and articulatory complexity that the narrativized moving image would rapidly acquire within the decades of their theorization. Interestingly enough, as they were theorising cinema as a tool of mass deception, another form of electronically-disseminated narrative was gaining popularity, which seems to have escaped their notice. This is particularly intriguing because this second narrative form had come into being essentially to influence the detergent-buying choices of the 1930s capitalist housewife. So, the capitalist hand behind this other narrative form was much easier to discern. Soap operas began on the radio and a few decades later made a very successful transition to television. In India, the television soap opera started with *Hum Log*, which ran on pre-liberalisation, non-commercial television from 1984 to 1985.

Satellite television entered India in early 1990s and, initially, all the content was Western. But that changed quickly with the native production of the Indian soap operas. The Star TV began beaming in 1992 and remained the market-leader for long. Soon the field was crowded with ZEE TV, Sony Entertainment, ETV, Colors, Imagine and others. Every channel had its own set of soap operas targeted at the middle-class Indian housewife. Soon it became easy to adumbrate a typical Hindi television soap opera. The "nodal" location would be a large house with a vast living area, enormous and brightly furnished rooms, and a sprawling garden. The cast would comprise of a matriarch—the mother-in-law—who would rule the household with loaded gestures and loud orders. She would have several sons and would strike terror into the hearts of her daughters-in-law.

I shall use narrative theory, cultural studies and queer theory to show how popular culture in India, or indeed popular culture anywhere ever, should not be read as simple entertainment.

Instead, it should be analysed as a conjuncture (to use Stuart Hall's term), which articulates issues and concerns that are in excess of the purview of ordinary entertainment. I shall also take this opportunity to coin a term which perhaps would help us communicate the phallocentricity, which is discernible in the visual culture of the late capitalism. My term "phallimagocentricity" hopes to draw critical attention to the way in which images produced, circulated and consumed in mainstream popular culture keep intact their phallocentric objective. I would, in the process, show how I have arrived at this term.

The first step of my submission[2] is that since patriarchy is the ideology which structures society, structuralism may be read as a tool with which to identify the way patriarchy is structured. Structuralism reveals the skeleton of patriarchy, as it were. Therefore, narrative theories, such as the ones proposed by Todorov, Barthes and Propp, insofar as they are structuralist, also reveal, even in spite of themselves, the patriarchal base of all narratives. So, any narrative is under the suspicion of being patriarchal by deliberation or default. When Jean-Francois Lyotard speaks of the grand narrative, his grand narratives are all consolidatory of patriarchy, if one examines them carefully.

The second step of my submission is that a narrative tends to depend on images. These images are either evoked through words, as on the printed page, or through words and sounds, as on the radio, or are present, as in a graphic novel, cinema or television. Needless to say, there can be a narrative even without words, as in a performance of mime or in a graphic novel or in the Kamal Hasan film *Pushpak*. However, it is difficult to imagine a narrative without images.

Therefore, my submission is that if narrative depends on language, and if language is mostly deployed to evoke images, and if language is the site of patriarchy as theorised by some feminists and by Derrida, and if logocentricity is by default phallogocentricity, then a term is required to identify the presence of phallocentricity in images too. Hence, my proposal of the

term "phallimagocentricity," because it lays bare the phallocentricity, which structures images; especially those in mass circulation.

I have chosen to designate the presence of the "image" in the word "phallimagocentricity" by using the term "imago" because of its Jungian and Lacanian associations. According to Jung, "imago" is the idealized image of a person, usually a parent, formed in childhood and carried on in one's psyche consciously or unconsciously into adulthood. This imago has no link with reality as such, but it shapes the subject's perception of others. The imago functions as an archetype and it structures one's psychological engagements with others. In Lacan, the Imaginary stage is that in which the identity is formed along the visual misrecognitions. I wish to accept the content of the Jungian "imago" and the Lacanian Imaginary in my formulation of "phallimagocentricity." It is because I think of the images in mass circulation as idealizations and misrecognitions of reality. These idealizations and misrecognitions of reality are phallocentric. Our perception of reality, our proclamation and attribution of identity also tends to be imagocentric. The maxim "seeing is believing" is hegemonic. This is more so the case with postmodernity where surface is valorised over the depth, appearance is hailed as the essence. Appearance is of the essence in the sense that it is meant to reflect one's essential, or inner core, or natural self. So, the imago, in the sense of a visual fact, acquires the authority of truth. Nowhere is this combination of idealization and misrecognition of reality in visual terms more prevalent than in popular culture. Popular cinema and commercial television, therefore, become rich sites of phallimagocentric image-production and circulation. When Laura Mulvey theorised "the male gaze" in 1975, she was aiming her feminist eye exclusively on cinema. My suggestion is that her insight into the way the female body is represented in cinema can be extrapolated to make a wider observation about the way in which the patriarchal gaze is catered to and continually reinforced by the visual culture where the late capitalism thrives.

Not only cinema, but also television, and even the image-dependent advertisements are implicated in the business of ensuring the imagocentricity and phallocentricity of popular culture. The term "phallimagocentric", therefore, may express the political structure of all visual representations in mass circulation.

Theorisations of television soap operas began in 1972 with Natan Katzman's paper analyzing the significance of language in soap operas.[3] But, it is Tania Modelski who, in 1979, first identified the feminist potential in soap operas and theorized it as a feminine narrative form.[4] Other contributors to this project of theorising and analysing soap operas include Charlotte Brunsdon and Jeremy Butler, in 1981 and 1986, respectively.[5] All these scholars have focussed on the way in which meaning is produced in a soap opera—whether that meaning is produced through words, or through images, or whether the meaning is patriarchal or feminist. What I further wish to do in this paper is to show how words and images can work against their own semantic baggage and can, therefore, destabilise the semantics of one another.

When Star Plus began its soap opera *Maryada...Lekin Kab Tak6* on 18 October 2010, it had all the appearances of a Hindi soap. The first episode looked comfortingly familiar. The imago of a North-Indian wedding is evoked. Swathes of shimmering fabric, flower installations, and heavy jewellery are on show. The wedding has taken place the previous day. Gaurav (Dakssh Ajit Singh), the elder son of Bramhanand and Devyani Jakhar (Indrani Halder), has got married. The father of the groom and the patriarch of the family, Brahmanand, works as the SSP of Rohtak, Haryana. Vidya is still dressed in her bridal finery and the main characters are making their appearance one by one. The first glimpse we have of Gaurav is in the private gym at the palatial Jakhar residence. He is taking boxing lessons. The camera makes sure that we are struck by his muscular physique. We are shown his worked-out bare back minutes later when he gets dressed to meet his paternal grandfather and seek his blessings with the

new bride. This is the imago, the Imaginary of hegemonic masculinity, even the North-Indian hegemonic masculinity. What could be more hetero-normative than a heavily-muscled man taking boxing lessons? This is what Tzvetan Todorov would call the "equilibrium" stage of the narrative. This is when things seem to be in a state of balance—the "once upon a time" moment in any narrative and the potentially opposing forces are still held in check. According to Todorov, this balance would be disrupted by some event and eventually the narrative would close with a second equilibrium. In the case of *Maryada*, we soon learn that the disruptive event is the wedding that has just happened. For some reason, the grandfather is upset about the wedding and only blesses the young married couple after much persuasion by his daughter-in-law. Gaurav does not appear happy with the wedding either. He does not make any effort at establishing any kind of relationship with his new bride. This is what Roland Barthes would call an action code—one of five codes that he thinks a narrative works with in order to tease the reader/viewer to make sense of the unfolding story. An action code consists of the way a character looks, the words they speak, the things they do. All we know at the beginning is that Gaurav is not happy with the marriage and he does not wish to have anything to do with his bride. From 18 October 2010 to 10 June 2011, the viewers of the soap opera wonder why Vidya regards her husband's indifference towards her with growing sadness. She begins to suspect that Gaurav is having an affair with his secretary at work, a young lady named Aarti.

Thereafter, in episode after episode—episode 23 being one example—we see Gaurav speaking to his off-screen love interest on the mobile phone. We also learn that his mother, Devyani, is aware of the identity of his love interest and is thoroughly disapproving of the relationship. In episode 78, Gaurav asks his mother, "Why can't I be with the one I love?"[7] Devyani replies, "Because it would bring disgrace to the Jakhar family." By this time Gaurav's hegemonic masculinity has been destabilised by one important scene. In episode 39, there is a rare moment of

rapprochement between Gaurav and Vidya as they have a late-night conversation sitting on the bed. Gaurav tells her, "All my life I have wanted to win the approval of my father, but have failed. It is to please him that I took up boxing. Otherwise my hands would rise only to make idols." Vidya is delighted to learn about Gaurav's gentle, creative side. He continues, "He wanted me to quarrel and fight like other boys of my age, whereas I wanted the peace of my mother's company"[8]. Brahmanand Jakhar believes that quarrelling and fighting would make a man out of his gentle, idol-making, first-born son. This belief speaks adequately about the conception of masculinity that Brahmanand approves of and is determined to replicate in his male children. So, the patriarchal Mr Jakhar believes that capacity for perpetrating physical violence on others is what makes one masculine. Gaurav's boxing lessons can now be read not as an expression of his character but as the repression of it. The audience needs to make such a reading because this revelation is a part of what Barthes calls an "action code." We are meant to regard Gaurav as being not so hegemonically masculine as all that. In the meantime, Gaurav presents his wife with flowers on one occasion and gold jewellery on another (episode 32, 29 Nov 2010), and feeds her when she has her *mehandi* applied (episode 47, 19 Dec 2010). The audience can read these actions as his gradual warming towards her. But by episode 106 (11 March 2011), the viewer is given to know that Gaurav definitely loves someone else. In episode 129, telecast on 12 April 2011, Gaurav tells Vidya that he is in love with Aarti. However, this declaration becomes doubtful when in episode 151 (12 May 2011) Gaurav tells Aarti that Vidya should be acquainted with the truth. So, Aarti is not the person he is in love with. The identity of Gaurav's beloved is revealed a month later when, on 10 June, Indian television-viewers discover that Gaurav is in love with a man, Karan (Karaan Singh).

A media report of this turn in the serial's narrative dramatises the overdetermination that is at work here[9]. Titled "Pink letter day for TV," the report gives voice to a variety of concerns ranging

from identitarian, political and representational to economic, capitalist and ostensibly moral.[10] Suzana Ghai, the creative director (fiction) of the Star TV is quoted as saying, "It's time to push the envelope and explore new stories, no matter how edgy they may be." The serial's director, Imtiaz Punjabi, seems to be in agreement when he says, "We can't keep getting scared to show bold topics." (Choksi. Full reference in endnotes) But, he does not wish to alienate homophobic readers of this news report either. So, he also says, "*Haan, gay hona unnatural hai, hum audiences ko nahin bol rahe hein ke gay track pakdo* (Being gay is unnatural, we are not telling people to turn gay.") The obvious homophobia of this statement is palliated by two of his other remarks: "But we are keeping it very emotional" and "...if there is love, people should let them be" (Choksi. Full reference in endnotes). These two statements may also be read as homophobic. If sexuality is an important component of the way heterosexual relationships are visually produced, circulated and consumed in popular culture, why should sexuality be excised from a representation of homosexuality? If a relationship between two men is represented only as one that is emotional, then how is that relationship different from a deep, asexual friendship between two men? But, this calls for a more complex reading. I would suggest that love is a Trojan horse that is smuggling homosexuality into the living rooms of Hindi soap opera viewers across the country. The construct of "love" is working as a palliative to the disgust that is being assumed that the audience would experience once Karan is revealed as Gaurav's love interest. "Love" is being deployed to blur the binarizing line that patriarchy has drawn between hetero and homosexuality. The other blurring, or even erasing, of the line that this serial effect lies in the representation of homosexuality. The patriarchal, hetero-normative representation of homosexuality has tended to depend on the essentialist notion that homosexuality feminizes men and masculinizes women. Through the repeated circulation of such representations, this notion has hardened into a truth and has been incorporated into the phallocentric grid of gendered

representations. *Maryada* destabilises the essentialism of all homosexual men being effeminate.

Karan Singh, the actor who plays the role of Gaurav's lover, makes an extraordinary remark that in preparing for the role he closed his eyes and thought about all the 'gay people' he had met, and then he watched *Brokeback Mountain*. It would be interesting to find out if Karan Singh was able to identify some features that all the gay people he met had in common. But, even without the answer to that question, it is interesting to note that what lay behind his decision to remember all the gay men he had met is the assumption that he would be able to sift through his memory and arrive at an essential gayness. As if there is something like an essential straightness, apart from the sexual act! His watching *Brokeback Mountain* is interesting because that 2004 film shows two men in love, which is a common enough theme in popular culture. The only difference here is that the two men are in love with each other. While Karan Singh's watching *Brokeback Mountain* may apparently strengthen the Indian nationalist fundamentalist discourse of homosexuality as a Western phenomenon, it must also be remembered that any creative work does not exist in a vacuum devoid of any influence, any representational precedent. *Brokeback Mountain* is relevant in the context of *Maryada* because that film had a popular acceptance even more than *Philadelphia* (1993) had not known. So, the 2004 American film may well have suggested to Karan Singh how an actor may portray homosexuality so as to minimize the knee-jerk homophobia in the audience. However, Karan Singh lives and works in India. His socio-cultural position leads him to tell the interviewer, "But remember to mention that I am straight in real life" (Choksi, full ref. in endnotes). This last remark betrays not only the actor's homophobia but also concerns about how his role may affect his career. Had he been given the role of a left-handed man, would he have been at pains to clarify that in real life he is right-handed?

The phallimagocentricity that the representation of the Gaurav-Karan relationship engages with may be better understood if

one looks at some stills of the serial. The imago of masculinity is firmly in place. Both the men are intelligibly masculine in their speech and hexis[11], or behaviour and physical gestures. No limp wrists here, no lisp, no mincing walk. Effeminacy as a marker of male homosexuality is being overthrown here, by effecting, what Lee Edelman would call "strategic, oppositional homographesis".[12] The fact that Gaurav and Karan do not bear on their bodies markers of their sexual orientation defeats the patriarchal desire to visually distinguish between the heterosexual and homosexual males. This erasure of visual markers of sexual orientation is a subversion of phallimagocentricity. It counters the majority of homophobic representations in India so far. It is subversive because it is apparently playing the rules laid down by phallocentricity, on the one hand, and imagocentricity on the other. Phallocentricity seeks to uphold, among other constructs, of recognisably heterosexual masculinity and femininity, and imagocentricity seeks to make us believe the truth of what we see. In the case of Gaurav and Karan, they are consistently read by other members of the family as very good friends. Only Gaurav's mother and his grandfather are in possession of the counter-intuitive truth about the nature of the bond the two men share. That Gaurav and Karan can pass as just good friends is possible because neither is effeminate. Their lack of behavioural effeminacy aids their subterfuge. The perception that Gaurav and Karan are seen as just good friends is overtly encouraged by Gaurav, for a while, by presenting Aarti as his love interest (episode 129, 12 April 2011). But the June 10 episode reveals the hidden truth, as it were, of the love between the two men. Even as late as episode 221, where Karan's mother, the local MP, Roshni Devi, is trying to ascertain if reports of Gaurav's homosexuality were true, she is inclined to dismiss the reports because she looks at Gaurav sitting on a bar stool far away and remarks, "See what a well-built, masculine guy Gaurav is! How can he be gay?" (episode 221, 17 August 2011)

I submit that *Maryada* should be read as a conjuncture wherein several socio-economic forces collide because the imago of

masculinity, as embodied by the actors Dakssh Ajit Singh and Karaan Singh, is easy to regard as connotative of uncomplicated heterosexuality. The fact that their characters are homosexual is something which I would regard as subversive. In the episode telecast on 28 June 2011, not only do we see Gaurav weep whereby he breaks a cardinal rule of hegemonic masculinity. But when Karan says, "I love you," he replies, "I love you too" (episode 184, 28 June 2011). This is the first time in Indian television history that two men have spoken those words to each other. (They declare their love for each other again on the 25 August 2011 episode when Gaurav informs Karan that Devyani, Gaurav's mother, is determined to see her son happy and has, therefore, decided to send him away to a place where he can live his life according to his own wishes.) Earlier, in lines that are hard to read as homophobic, Karan asks Gaurav not to chastise himself for what his life has become. Karan says, this time in English, "This is not something that we choose. This is how we are" (episode 184, 28 June 2011).

As stated above, the characters of Gaurav and Karan disappear from the soap opera after 31 January 2012. They were supposedly sent off to an unspecified country where they can live together happily and legally. While this happily-ever-after ending to the queer sub-plot may seem progressive, there is a more troubling implication of such a closure. It also implies that homosexuality will never have a happy future in India. By not letting Gaurav and Karan live in India, is the narrative reclaiming India as a country where only heterosexuality will be allowed? Does this frustrate attempts to see India as a state where hetero-normativity does not function as an ideological state apparatus? In other words, is India kept safely hetero-normative, with the Indian queer being expelled to foreign shores?

Since capitalism works closely with the consumer and is acutely aware of the consumer's patterns of consumption, and since patriarchal societies demand regular production, circulation and consumption of heterosexuality, showing two men romantically and sexually involved with each other in a soap opera telecast on

a commercial channel, may be seen as anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal. But, as Stuart Hall tells us, culture should not be read as the vehicle of any one ideology[13]. If there is aporia in language, there is aporia in images too. By presenting two apparently hegemonically masculine men as each other's lover, *Maryada*, like *Brokeback Mountain*, pollutes the hygienic construction of masculinity. Stuart Hall believes in this kind of pollution and I would like to submit that such pollution is necessary so that purity and stability of identity does not become hegemonic. The more identity-containing boundaries are broken, the less will be the power of the phallus in the imagocentric society of our formation. What this will in turn effect is the weakening of the power of the imago. Identities will, therefore, not be under constant surveillance to be stable and queerness or instability will be as valorised as stability. But till that day one needs to be aware that we live in a phallimagocentric society and that this mode of organising our visual perceptions is preventing us from acquiring identities of our choice.

NOTES

1. *Maryada...Lekin Kab Tak?* Dir. Imtiaz Punjabi. Perf. Indrani Halder, Dakssh Ajit Singh, Karaan Singh and others. 396 episodes. Star Plus. 18 Oct 2010 – 13 April 2012.
2. For this I am grateful to Zaid Al Baset.
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references will be parenthetically inserted by episode number and date of first telecast. All the episodes are available on youtube and can be accessed by episode number and date of first telecast.

9. I use the term 'overdetermination' in line with Althusser's resignification of Freud's term. Through my usage of 'overdetermination' I hope to state that various identitarian, political, representational, economic, capitalist and ostensibly moral forces are active at once in the queer relationship shown in the soap opera, and also in the report on that representation.
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11. I use the term 'hexis' in the Aristotelian sense of 'having' or 'possessing' an identity. In this case the identity being that of a notionally heterosexual—and therefore non-effeminate—man.
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"We all know she's a lesbian": Stereotypes of Lesbians in Popular Culture in India

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All representations are coded: they do not merely reflect a world outside the bounds of the text, but mediate external discourses, while constantly rewriting and reconstructing them. In the area of sexuality, representations are created and recreated in a variety of ways across different media, genres and forms and produced through diverse codes and conventions. This essay will take a close look at Shobha Dé's book *Strange Obsession* and Karan Razdan's film *Girlfriend*, which narrate the story of homicidal lesbians Minx and Tanya, respectively, and use some of these codes and conventions to create and recreate stereotypes of lesbians. Both these texts belong to the realm of popular culture and are, therefore, accessible to a large audience. They are concerned with making the 'deviants' visible by using recognizable stereotypes. This essay will begin by locating some of these stereotypes and will then go on to deconstruct them. A part of the essay will also look at the stereotypes that recreate gay and bisexual men as comic or ridiculous. The aim will be to prove that in spite of the normalizing and stabilizing deployment of these stereotypes, their effect is often unpredictable and creates moments of anxiety.

Homi Bhabha argues in the context of racial stereotyping that the fixity and stability of stereotypes are only apparent1. Stereotypes of gays and lesbians reproduce norms of gendered heterosexuality because they indicate that the homosexual man or woman falls short of the heterosexual norm: they can never be a 'real' man or 'woman'. The repetition and multiplication

of stereotypes, however, does not confirm and unify the identity of the figures. It in fact takes on a duplicitous function and reveals the split and doubled nature or decenteredness of stereotypes.

In contemporary India, stereotypes of the threatening yet alluring other exist in all realms of discourse. The realist conventions of popular cinema and literature veil the ideological sign 'homosexual', (re) presenting the constructed images, the stereotypes as natural and realistic. Yet, the stereotypicality of the stereotype, the endless need to repeat it, betrays, suggests Bhabha, the underlying knowledge that in actuality no social group is fixed or really under the grasp of knowledge. The relations of power, particularly, are not static. They have to be endlessly remade and reasserted. This is necessary because the solidified, forever, already known quality of the peripheral groups is a mask for realities that are disturbingly fluid and never really known.

The female body is often portrayed as fluid, unstable and chameleon-like. Mikhail Bakhtin argued that the essentially grotesque body was that of the pregnant birth-giving woman[2]. The female body is often portrayed as the other. But the lesbian body is so threatening that the most extreme forms of stereotypes are associated with it. The most common stereotype is that of the masculinized lesbian body—a pseudo man whose body is an inferior male body.[3] The deviant sexuality and the truth of their desire are written on their bodies for all to see. In *Strange Obsession*, Minx not only looks like a man but also carries a man's hanky and uses cologne[4]. She is always dressed in black turtlenecks and jeans and has short cropped hair. It is the mannish-lesbian who takes on the role of a 'man' and protects the defenseless feminine 'victim'. Minx saves Amrita from a scrape in Bombay and from thereon becomes her benefactor in the big, bad city. The adjectives that are used most often to describe her demeanour, walk and tone of voice are "determined" and "brusque"[5]. She uses the characteristically misogynistic language of the street: "*Abbey saaalon*... come here" she says[6]. In *Girlfriend*, the character of Tanya is physically active and the first shot of the

film firmly places her as a 'masculine woman' by showing her running on the beach. The camera focuses on her aggressive posture and, at the same time, highlights her obviously female body. Similarly, in spite of her masculine cross-dressing, Minx cannot escape her 'real' gender. We are told that she had a "supple, well-proportioned body and an exaggerated bustline."[7] Minx is obviously not happy about her feminine body and, therefore, says, "I can't stand the damn things. They get in the way all the time."[8]

Fig. 1 Razdan. *Girlfriend* The unnatural homosexual 'antibody' and the natural 'heterosexual body.'[9]

The sanitized body of the heterosexual is often placed next to the 'anti-body' in order to distinguish the 'natural' from the 'unnatural' (Fig. 1). Narratives are often structured through oppositions and stereotypes contribute to this process. The mannish, sadistic homosexual is often contrasted with the ultra-feminine, victimized heterosexual woman. It is the ideological function of the 'lesbian' to warn the 'normal' woman about the dangers of rejecting her own socialization. To function as ideological litmus paper, the lesbian must be instantly recognizable. In both *Strange Obsession* and *Girlfriend*, a crisis of identification occurs when the psychotic 'lesbians' deceive everyone into believing that they are 'normal'. Minx is accepted

by Amrita's family as a good friend and so is Tanya. It is at this point that they are most dangerous: Minx and Amrita consummate their relationship while Tanya manages to displace the male suitor Rahul from Sapna's life. As concealed lesbians, they are extremely threatening to the heterosexual status quo but the descriptions of their physicality give them away. Minx has "flaky, mottled skin", "close-set" eyes, "lank, cropped hair that looked listless and dull" and a "mouth set in a severe line, like a gash carved by a blunt knife", she is a woman who is "ghastly" and a "demoness"[10]. In contrast, Amrita is the beautiful model who has a "magnificently structured body"[11]. Tanya is conventionally attractive but also physically strong. Short hairstyles become a marker of the butch nature of the lesbians, and so Tanya cuts her own hair in a fit of rage and from thereon becomes the menacing serial killer, distinguishing herself from Sapna who is also a professional model.[12]

Apart from the difference in physicality, there is also a disparity in the roles played by the women. Neither Sapna nor Amrita is capable of taking care of their own finances. Amrita needs to be rescued constantly and is often "flustered" and "flushed crimson"[13]. She says, "I don't understand politics...and frankly, I'm not terribly interested either," whereas Minx deals with politicians in Delhi and rides a rugged open jeep.[14] Tanya straddles a traditionally manly bike, makes extra money as a street fighter and rescues Sapna from lecherous men twice in the film.[15] But, a demure Sapna is afraid of going to a party alone! In popular culture, heterosexual femininity is associated with being powerless and vulnerable, traits which also make the heterosexual women susceptible to the advances of the lesbians.

The reluctant or 'innocent' women are 'tricked' or 'coerced' into homosexual relationships. Amrita rejects Minx's advances because she thinks it is "weird" and "abnormal"[16]. She often defends her 'straightness' vehemently—"'I am straight!' Amrita cried out angrily, 'I can't help it if that weirdo has latched on to me.'"[17] Minx herself wants to avoid these labels and retorts, "You think I am bloody lesbian, don't you? Well, guess what? You are

wrong. And so are all of them who've been telling you that. I am not a dyke. I'm not kinky."[18] Sapna similarly rejects Tanya.[19] In spite of these denials, the 'normal' women have conflicting feelings about the women in their lives. Amrita herself thinks "But, let alone a woman, no woman had ever looked at her the way Minx just had. And no previous compliment had affected her in the same manner."[20] She derives pleasure from Minx's lovemaking just like Sapna responds to Tanya. Desire and pleasure, especially female desire, is the disorderly element, which becomes impossible to pin down within the heterosexist hegemony of the text.

Nevertheless, the lesbians do not fare better in comparison to the heterosexual men. Karan's house is full of phallic symbols like swords and weapons which are appreciated by Minx.[21] Although they are both rivals, Minx wants him as an ally: "We even share a passion. You love her. I love her. Let's face it. It seems silly not to collaborate," she says.[22] She considers herself to be a part of patriarchal dominion. However, she is a counterfeit man, an interloper. Consequently, Karan succeeds in duping her. With Partha, the old yet attractive editor, Minx shares a more complicated relationship. Both Minx and Partha help Amrita to get up after she trips and they both partake of her beauty together.[23] Nevertheless, later in the text it is Minx who is threatened by Partha's 'knowledge' about her and she has to ask her father, her alleged abuser for help. The trickiest man is Rakesh who eventually marries and impregnates Amrita. As the alpha male of the text, he can replace Minx without resorting to deception. As the benevolent hero, he even rescues Minx from the fire after she has tortured him. But, Rakesh is also the man who has been selected by Amrita's mother as a suitable groom for her. He is not a free agent but a convenient instrument introduced by Mrs. Aggarwal and manipulated by Amrita to escape her abusive relationship. In Razdan's film, Rahul has to resort to trickery to trounce Tanya, who continues to be the physically stronger character till the time she plunges into her own death. The men seem to have an upper hand in these obviously

misogynistic texts but the power relations are not as static as they are made out to be.

The lesbian is often associated with violence and seen as the predatory, sadistic, castrating butch-bitch. Hollywood films like *Basic Instinct* and *Single White Female* have perfected the stereotype of the homicidal, psychotic lesbian and popular Indian media seems to be following in their footsteps. Minx stalks and tortures Amrita; sends her animal organs as gifts and assaults anyone who stands between her and Amrita.[24] Her vocabulary is full of aggressive words and she frequently uses brutal analogies to express her feelings for Amrita "...I knew what she reminded me of-a delicate, perfectly formed, saffron flower-valued for the fragrance it releases when its stamin is crushed."[25] She plots to kill Partha and Rakesh using elaborate schemes and expresses her love through animal sacrifices.[26] Tanya attacks Rahul and torments Sapna.[27] But often the texts slip-up and the virile women use violence for 'good'. Minx and Tanya obliterate men who threaten the seemingly defenseless women, at which point the reader/spectator identifies with the hero-function of the lesbians. The offending masculinized lesbian is a stereotype but her inherent doubleness challenges gender boundaries in terms of the active/passive dualism, a dichotomy, which is crucial to the definition of gender in patriarchal culture.[28]

Another stereotype is the animalistic lesbian body which associates lesbianism with bestiality and pushes representation to its limits.[29] Minx's ugliness is highlighted by using animal adjectives to describe her: "was it the flaky, mottled skin that gave Minx a reptilian appearance".[30] Her real name is Meenakshi, but it is shortened to Minx to connect her to the animal world. Tanya often wears animal prints, especially tiger stripes, to highlight her predatory side.[31] In the popular imagination, the woman is the embodiment of Mother Nature, the fertile womb, the hearth of domestic bliss. A very disturbing incident in DÈ's book occurs when Minx disfigures Amrita's rival who stole her modelling assignment[32]. Minx not only destroys her face with acid, but also mutilates her genitals. The doctor's main concern

is "who will marry her now? Her chances are permanently destroyed"[33]. He then goes on to add, "Sad to think a woman could do such a thing to another woman, isn't it?"[34] The horror of a woman destroying another woman's reproductive organs is supposed to highlight the sterility of lesbians and same-sex relationships. The lesbian who refuses to change her sexual preference is the one who is most closely related to the animal woman and has an insatiable sexual appetite. Minx is depicted as predatory, but her encounters with Amrita are ambiguously described. Sexual contact between the two is often triggered by Minx's anger and described as sexual assaults. But, quite unexpectedly, Amrita feels that "Minx had not forced her and Amrita could not-did not-want to fool herself into believing that she had."[35] It is only the reproductive imperative that makes Minx repulsive to Amrita. The reproductive imperative dictates that the woman's function is to reproduce and replicate the natural world while the man's function is to control and cultivate that world for his own use. Women who accept their socialized roles as natural are deemed to be the happiest. DÈ tells us that Sheila, Amrita's friend, was not "bitchy or competitive" because "she had given herself two years to make a success of her career after which she planned to marry her steady boyfriend in New York."[36] The novel ends with an idyllic vision of a pregnant Amrita whose fertile abundance will produce not one child but two.[37] The animal woman creates a crisis because she is necessary for the reproductive decree yet her animal nature threatens to turn her into a wild, uncontrollable entity.

The lesbian couple is often portrayed as mirror images of each other, whereby the lesbian bodies are reflections of each other. The narcissistic lesbian body builds the image of the self-absorbed woman. Men are shut out from this world; therefore, making the lesbian couple a threat to heterosexist order. The images that exploit the notion of feminine/lesbian narcissism use the popular convention whereby two women are posed in such a way as to suggest that one is a mirror-image of the other (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Razdan's *Girlfriend*: The lesbian double invites the spectator into their world with the 'come-on' look38.

As a female narcissist the lesbian is conventionally feminine. Both Amrita and Sapna are models who offer themselves up for the scopophilic gaze of the camera's lens. More importantly their images are used to sell commodities. At an important photo shoot for jewellery, Amrita is painstakingly transformed to match her colour to that of the jewels.[39] She becomes the product, to be desired by the viewer. This is a key area in which popular fantasies about the nature of lesbianism do not draw on the cliché of the lesbian as a thwarted man. Passivity and propriety are essential preconditions for the transition from active, virile femininity to passive feminine conformity. However, the pose of passivity is used by Tanya strategically in *Girlfriend* to seduce her male rival. She pretends to be the defenceless woman who needs Rahul while she supposedly waits for a client. The situation escalates when Rahul gets drunk. This marks the beginning of the song-fantasy sequence shot entirely through a red filter. The overwhelming presence of the colour red alerts the audience to both the sensuality and spectacular nature of the seduction. Tanya ties up Rahul and performs an elaborate bondage exercise, but the camera focuses on her body. Camera angles are often directed in such a way that a particular body part is greatly emphasized. When the part fills up the entire frame, the body is cut up by the frame. The tendency to isolate bits of bodies may be read as a gesture of dehumanization. The lesbian, even when she is the one in a dominant role, is the object of investigation. The spectator

is manipulated to identify with the tied-up male character. This doubles the spectatorial pleasure offered to the male heterosexual spectator. As the viewer of the film, he gets to explore the unknowable lesbian body and through identification with Rahul he also gets to situate himself in a passive, masochist role without the fear of recrimination. Tanya is, thus, transformed into the phallic woman who represents the male desire for an active, virile woman. The desire is not extended beyond the song which is revealed to be Tanya's flight of imagination, thus making it reassuringly non-threatening.

The narcissistic femme lesbian, however, almost always adopts an ambiguous position in relation to the gaze of the camera/spectator. She is on display, her pose actively designed to lure the gaze; the crucial difference is, however, that the spectator is shut out from her world. He may look but not enter. Images of the lesbian double are designed to appeal to the voyeuristic desires of the male spectator, but they also draw attention on to the nature of the image itself, its association with the feminine, and the technologies that enable duplication and repetition. The lesbian double threatens because it suggests a perfectly sealed world of female desire from which man is excluded. He is excluded not simply because he is a man but also because of the power of the technology—to exclude the voyeuristic spectator, Karan. The photographer yearns for Amrita but is excluded from her world not because of Minx but Amrita herself. Rahul also spies on Tanya and Sapna through their bedroom window but is barred from entering.[40] But exclusion is also part of the nature of voyeuristic pleasure which demands that a distance between the object and subject who is looking should be preserved. The distance has a twofold effect of increasing the scopophilic gratification offered by the object, at the same time such an image is dangerous because it suggests that there is no way forward: only regression and circularity are possible.

The texts try to contain the unruly body which threatens to confuse gender boundaries. The legal solution is often incarceration and confinement. In *Strange Obsession*, Minx's father

is the inspector general. She often uses her paternal connections to intimidate the weaker and poorer sections of Bombay. However, this tactic does not seem to work with the male protagonists of the novel. As the 'true' possessors of phallic authority, their position is more secure in the power structure of the novel. Her father stands at the apex of the power structure, the highest authority, the only one who can control and subdue the disruptive Minx. His network of surveillance exceeds the one controlled by Minx, which allows him to not only locate her, but also to destroy all evidence of her liaison with Amrita.[41] He promises Amrita and the readers that "I intend to take charge of my daughter henceforth. Full-time. I won't take any chances...never again."[42] Therefore, the dangerous lesbian will no longer be a perilous entity roaming the streets of the city, looking for the next victim to contaminate. But, both Tanya and Minx manage to fool and even control the authorities. Consequently, the law is displaced from its position of meta-discourse and is made part of the Foucauldian network of power that can be used instrumentally to manoeuver all discourses.

These texts often deploy pornographic conventions to make the 'lesbian experience' open to investigation. Annette Kuhn notes that one of the staple images in pornography is that of the woman "caught unawares"[43]. In *Girlfriend*, the shots depicting

sexual contact between women belonging to this category. Facing away from the camera, often with eyes closed, the shot pretends to be a candid one where the women are unaware that the camera is there (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Razdan's *Girlfriend*. The women "caught unawares" by the camera in a moment of passion[44].

The spectator sneaks a look at their enjoyment of an apparent moment of pleasure. Images of lesbians together are meant not so much to celebrate women's pleasure as to place it on display for a masculine spectator. Minx records her encounters with Amrita and later uses them to torture and humiliate Rakesh.[45] She wants him to learn about the intimacy she shared with Amrita. Women's pleasure is set up as an object of curiosity, which demands investigation simply because it is the 'other'. In *Girlfriend*, the first scene depicting sexual contact starts as a flashback of a single encounter between Tanya and Sapna.[46] A visibly guilty Sapna reassures her fiancÈ Rahul that she was inebriated. She, thereby, reduces the intensity of the encounter. The spectators are further distanced from the encounter because they are looking at a film not life. When the artifice of representation is added then, ironically, more pleasure is added. The spectators feel safe because they know that it's only a film and the women will never discern their presence. This kind of engagement depends upon the spectators seeing the lesbian as other, as a fit object of "investigation-by-scrutiny"[47]. It implies a masculine subject position, which can be occupied by both men and women. There is another possibility, however. The spectator (male or female) has the option of identifying with, rather than objectifying the women in the picture. In this case, the pleasure of looking is not always voyeuristic.

Kuhn also describes the convention of the "come-on", where the spectator is acknowledged by a direct look at the camera signifying sexual invitation or teasing.[48] In *Girlfriend*, the defeat of intruding men is followed by a song-sequence—"*Tumhe Ishq Hai Sikhana"*, which can be literally translated into "We will teach you how to love". The lesbians' display develops into a how-to

manual for women's sexual gratification. The exhibitionism on the part of the object of the look permits the spectator a twofold pleasure. The spectator becomes privy to the exotic world of lesbians doing so with the invitation of the fantastic 'other'.

The lesbian is sexualized within representation by a preoccupation with body parts that are regarded as signifiers of sexual difference and sexuality—the genitals, breasts and buttocks. In *Strange Obsessions*, we are first introduced to Amrita with a description that tells us that of all her features, it is her "breasts that stood out-proud, high, firm"[49]. Minx considers her breasts to be the reason for Amrita's rebuff and her own sexual abuse and decides to "slice them off."[50] Popular theories position male anatomy as the defining norm.[51] Minx has internalized the suggestion that the female body is flawed. At the same time, the lesbian as constructed by state of the art cosmetic technology breaks with the homo-hetero sexual binary and remakes gender not simply as performance but also as fiction. As Minx informs Amrita, "Well...most women go to this plastic surgeon for cosmetic surgery to enhance their breasts...but I actually asked him to reduce mine."[52] Cosmetic surgery can sometimes, in a contradictory way, both bolster dominant ideologies of beauty and power, and it can undermine completely the fixedness of gender by making it surgically or sartorially reproducible.[53] Minx informs a horrified Amrita that she intends to get a sex-change operation.[54] For Minx changing her gender simply involves getting a penis: "I'll become a man just to satisfy you".[55] It's just a question of monetary consideration: "Money can buy you anything. I've always said. Even a bloody dick."[56] However, for Amrita, the issue is that of reproduction, "You may be able to get some quack to stitch on a plastic dick. But will that make me pregnant? Will you be able to fill my womb with a child?"[57] For Amrita, it is a fully functional penis that is important and not just a cosmetic reconstruction. But the question is, if it were possible for doctors to create a 'real' penis, then would they cater only to psychopath lesbians like Minx or would there be a more heterogenous market for the product? The surgically constructed penis is very significant

in the masquerade of sex and gender. The effect of surgically produced penises on notions like 'penis envy' and 'castration complex' and the power relations of gender will be huge. The potential of medical technology to alter bodies makes natural gender and biological sex merely antiquated categories that highlight the fact that sex is a socially constructed concept.[58]

A significant part of the lesbian fantasy/myth is the origin of the lesbian. Freud attributes lesbianism to the woman's desire to be a man. The lesbian is the woman who either has never relinquished, or seeks to recover, her repressed phallic sexuality[59]. Tanya informs Rahul in *Girlfriend,* "I'm a lesbian. *Ek ladki ke jism mein qaid ek ladka.*" ("A girl trapped in a boy's body.") According to Freud girls must switch the gender of their love objects from the mother to the father.[60] A failure to do so because of rejection by the father or because of abandonment results in "inversion" in women.[61] Minx tells Amrita and the reader, her reason for becoming "like- this"[62]. Here, "this" becomes the only sympathetic semantic articulation of her sexual preference in DÈ's text because it is followed by a tale of childhood loneliness and abuse at the hands of the father.[63] Later in the text, the story is debunked by Minx's father as the fiction of a deranged mind. So Minx is finally dismissed as a delusional, psychotic, sick deviant. Tanya also recounts a story of childhood abuse as a justification for her rejection of men. Sapna tells Rahul that her encounter with Tanya was a result of her inebriated state. In all these cases, lesbianism is explained as an unfortunate effect of the childhood trauma, abuse, alcoholism and unhappy marital situations. Such an argument establishes normative sexuality and dismisses lesbianism as a pathological deviation.

However, the final method of containment is always lethal. The psychotic lesbian must die to remove all traces of her. In both *Strange Obsession* and *Girlfriend*, her body is mutilated before the final elimination. Minx burns beyond recognition in a fire that she is responsible for, while Tanya is gashed and scarred in the final showdown before she flings herself out of a glass window in an attempt to kill Rahul. The dissenters go through a self-

inflicted ritual of purification where their bodies are subjected to physical defacement to match their psychic disintegration. The need to kill the lesbian makes visible the aroused fear and hatred when the image of normality is exposed. If the lesbians are not annihilated, there is the danger that the heterosexual women might choose to continue to live with their 'tormentors'. Michel Foucault highlights the way in which culturally the sanctioned signifiers of the homosexual experience are the casual encounter, the anonymous sexual act, and the immediate albeit illicit pleasure.[64] Therefore, in the framework of popular culture, it is acceptable for Minx and Amrita; Tanya and Sapna to have secretive one-night stand to reinforce stereotypes of the promiscuous lesbian. However, when the liaisons threaten to turn into fulfilling, committed relationships and endanger the integrity of the heterosexual connection, then the lesbian menace is eradicated. Foucault argues that the more disturbing aspects of the homosexual experience are the new alliances that may be invented and forged: the camaraderie, affection, friendship, passion, solidarity, companionship and tenderness.[65]

The texts do not limit themselves to propagating stereotypes of lesbians. Dominant stereotypes of gay men range from the sissy to the sad young man to the ageing queen. They are characteristically a source of comedy because they fail the norm of masculinity. These stereotypes are often introduced through visual, aural and descriptive iconography which can be used to typify homosexuality immediately. Codes in dressing, certain gestures, stylistic décor, or extended looks can evoke the homosexuality of a character. Freddie, the make-up artist in *Strange Obsessions*, is instantly recognizable as gay character with his constant "flapping" and giggling[66]. The gay friend in the film is a caricature of the typically limp-wristed effeminate man[67]. To mark out his 'otherness' Freddie's reactions are always contrasted with those of the heterosexual male photographer, Karan. Freddie tells Amrita "'Darling, this is too, too exciting. No falsies for you. Ooh! I just hate them,' he giggled. Karan's face was impassive, almost stony."[68] Freddie's use of exaggerated adjectives

and the repetition of the word "too" clearly mark him out as a character who revels in excess, eccentricity and is exotically 'different' from the stable, silent Karan. As an object of ridicule he is often 'accidentally' sexual and plays the part of the gay queen: "'Music?' Freddie demanded imperiously. 'Let's have something hot and throbbing.' Pinky giggled."[69]

The image of the male body as an object of a look is fraught with ambivalences, repressions and denials. Like the masquerade, the notion of spectacle has such strong feminine connotation that for a male performer to be put on display or to don a mask threatens his very masculinity. Because the phallus is a symbol and signifier, no man can fully symbolize it. Although the patriarchal male subject has a privileged relation to the phallus, he will always fall short of the phallic ideal. Jacques Lacan notices this effect in his essay on the meaning of the phallus: "the curious consequence of making virile display in the human being itself seems feminine."[70] The male spectacle, therefore, can seem feminine, because it is on display. The bisexual character in DÈ's novel is 'Rover the Rogue', who is the "property of a sprightly divorcee, Sangita Singh"[71]. He is narcissistic, arrogant and considers himself to be "God's gift to womankind". Amrita describes her first sexual encounter with him as "disappointing"[72]. Since Rover does not comply with heterosexual hegemony, he is easily destroyed by Minx and the police, and he is revealed to be an "animal" who is not "manly" enough to protect Amrita.[73] Ironically, it is Minx who mouths heterosexist prejudices to demean him.

The immanent feminization of male spectacle then brings about two possible dangers for the performing male. While functioning as an object of desire he can easily become the object of ridicule, and within heterosexist culture accusations of homosexuality can be launched against him. Rover's physicality actually becomes a turn-off for Amrita because "Rover's face, above hers, had looked almost grotesque. Yes, she had admired his body with and without clothes, but 'the act' itself was almost comic."[74]. He puts on a "macho act", lives only to "indulge his body and its needs", proving

that he is sensual and therefore more feminine than masculine.[75] On the other hand, Amrita's heterosexual male partners Rakesh and Karan distinguish themselves from all the lesbian, gay and bisexual characters in resisting the temptations of the flesh, at least till they are "properly" married.

Nevertheless, male spectacle can be read as a camp reading of masculinity.[76] In *Girlfriend*, Sapna feels 'safe' with her gay friend and agrees to go out with Rahul only when he pretends to be a falsetto-voiced gay man.[77] Although this deception caricatures gay men, yet the ease with which Rahul, the manly heterosexual man, slips into the role demonstrates the performative, fluid, variable nature of gender and sexuality.

Sexual acts become linked to the truth of one's being or destiny with particular acts and choices functioning as markers of pathology, of the deviant character type. Sexuality, thus, becomes a chain of associated concepts that isolates particular groups of people as other, expressing degenerate constitutions.[78] Their sexuality is governed by the concepts of risk, danger, illness and, above all, violence. These groups are taken to be marginal yet their marginality functions to confirm reproductive sexual relations as being normative and natural. Identity thus is relational. Both the Hindu-Right and lesbian-feminist groups protested against the film *Girlfriend* for this very reason. Jai Bhagwan Goel, the head of the Delhi branch of the Shiv Sena, reacted: "'This film is evil and it will be stopped,' adding that 'it pollutes our society and moral culture.'"[79] Tejal Shah of *Forum Against Oppression of Women* wrote in an open letter to Karan Razdan, "It will make lives for homosexuals even more difficult"[80]. The right wing believes that any film about lesbians has the power to contaminate the audience by 'advertising' alternatives that defy binary oppositions, while the women's groups believe that stereotypes actually work only to reinforce bigotry. Both these conclusions deny the complex ways in which representations work to effect perception. The effect is erratic and often undermines what it seeks to establish, because stereotypes are based on the idea of knowing and complete understanding. But, they still fail

because uncertainty makes the project of absolute comprehension unfeasible.

NOTES

1. Stereotypes are a function of the desire to control through knowledge; the stereotype, its fixed contours and endless repetition, constantly reassures 'us' that such and such group is known—this is what 'they' are likened to every time you look, 'they' are still the same as we always knew they were. Stereotyping also facilitates the creation of the fixed 'self' in opposition to the known 'other'. See Homi K. Bhabha, "The other question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of Colonialism", in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 66-84.
2. Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky. Indiana: Indiana U Press. p. 339.
3. For further reading about the masculinized lesbian see Barbara Creed, "Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts", *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader,* eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 114.
4. Dé. Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p. 4.
5. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
6. Ibid., p. 6.
7. Ibid., p. 22.
8. Ibid.
9. "Girlfriend (2004)" in *Chakpak.com,* online : http://www.chakpak.com/se_images/20337_215_190_true/girlfriend-poster- 20337-190215.jpg, site accessed on 1 December 2007.
10. Dé. Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. pp. 30; 51; 69.
11. Ibid., p. 2.
12. Razdan, Karan. 2004. *Girlfriend.* Per. Isha Koppikar, Amrita Arora.
13. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession,* p. 4; 5; 78; 79.
14. Ibid., p. 79.
15. Razdan, Karan. 2004. *Girlfriend.*
16. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p.79.
17. Ibid., p. 51.
18. Ibid., p. 22.
19. Razdan, Karan. 2004. *Girlfriend.*
20. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p.6.
21. Ibid., p. 17.
22. Ibid., p. 70.
23. Ibid., pp. 89-91.
24. Ibid., p. 21.

25. Ibid., p. 91.
26. Ibid., p. 106.
27. Razdan, Karan. 2004. *Girlfriend.*
28. Creed, "Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts", p. 115.
29. Ibid., pp. 118-120.
30. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p. 30.
31. Razdan, *Girlfriend.*
32. DÈ, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. pp. 60-63.
33. Ibid., p. 68.
34. Ibid.,
35. Ibid., p. 106.
36. Ibid., p. 49.
37. Ibid., p. 207.
38. "Boxoffice", in *Rediff.Com* (June 30 2004), online: http://im.rediff.com/entertai/2004/jun/15girl.jpg, site accessed on 1 December 2007.
39. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p. 8.
40. Razdan, Karan. 2004. *Girlfriend.*
41. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p. 205.
42. Ibid.
43. Kuhn, Annette. 1994. *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality.* London and New York: Routledge. p. 29.
44. Doval, Nikita. "A girlfriend *zara hatke*" in *The Times Of India.Com*, 13 March 2004, online http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/photo.cms?msid=558287, site accessed on 1 December 2007.
45. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p. 129.
46. Razdan, Karan. 2004. *Girlfriend.*
47. Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*, p. 29
48. Ibid., pp. 41-42.
49. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p. 2.
50. Ibid., p. 93.
51. According to Sigmund Freud, homosexual women suffer from penis and, therefore, the lesbian, as visualized in the dominant discourse, tries to overcome its castration by assuming a masculine role in life and/or masculine appearance through clothing, gesture or substitution. In Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality", 1905, in *Sigmund Freud: On Sexuality, Book 7* (Delhi: Shrijee, 2003), pp. 387-90.
52. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p.93.
53. For further readings on the role of cosmetic surgery see Judith Halberstam, "F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity" in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader,* eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999). p. 138.
54. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession.* Delhi: Penguin. p. 110.

55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Halberstam, "F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity". p. 128.
59. Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality". pp. 385-395.
60. Ibid., p. 388.
61. Ibid.
62. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession*. Delhi: Penguin. p. 43.
63. Ibid., pp. 43-46.
64. Quoted in Lisa Blackman, and Valerie Walkerdine, *Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 168.
65. Ibid., p. 168.
66. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession*. Delhi: Penguin. p. 9.
67. Razdan, Karan. 2004. *Girlfriend*.
68. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession*. Delhi: Penguin. p. 9.
69. Ibid.
70. Lacan, Jacques. 1977. "The Significance of the Phallus", *Ìcrits: A Selection*. New York: W. W. Norton. p. 198.
71. Dé, Shobha. 1982. *Strange Obsession*. Delhi: Penguin. p. 32.
72. Ibid., p. 35.
73. Ibid., p. 41.
74. Ibid., p. 35.
75. Ibid., pp. 39; 37.
76. Camp readings combine the twin antithetical qualities of authenticity and theatricality. It can be seen as an oppositional reading of popular culture which offers identifications and pleasures that dominant culture denies to homosexuals. Camp emphasizes the performativity of gender and therefore shows that gender enacts a set of discontinuous, if not parodic performances. See Judith Butler. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge. pp. 163-180.
77. Razdan, Karan. 2004. *Girlfriend*.
78. Foucault, Michel . 1962. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 3 vols. 1976, trans. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books. pp. 38-79.
79. Quoted in Ashwini Sukthankar, "Lez-ploitation in Bollywood: A Review of Karan Razdan's *Girlfriend"* in *Samar.Com,* online: http://www.samarmagazine.org/archive/article.php?id=169, site accessed on 1 December 2007.
80. Shah, Tejal. "Dear Mr. Razdan, Homosexuals are not Freaks" in *Timesofindia.indiatimes.Com,* online: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Dear_Mr_Razdan_homosexuals_are_not_freaks/articleshow/msid-740641,curpg-4.cms, site accessed on 1 December 2007.

Fear of the Politics of Noah's Ark: Technologies of Heterosexual Coercion and LGBTQIA Packaging in Bollywood Films

ANITA SINGH

POLITICS OF NOAH'S ARK

The book of *Genesis* tells us that God saw great wickedness on earth and decided to wipe mankind from the face of the earth. He chose one righteous man, Noah. God told Noah to build an ark for him in preparation for a catastrophic flood that would destroy every living thing on earth. God also instructed Noah to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female. After they entered the ark, rain fell on the earth for a period of forty days and nights. Finally, after an entire year, God invited Noah to come out of the ark. Noah built an altar and worshiped the Lord. God was pleased with the offerings and established a covenant with Noah: "Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Fairchild). As a sign of this eternal covenant, God set a rainbow in the clouds.

This heterosexual happy sea of couples described in the book of *Genesis* has been constructed historically and culturally to be the only way of existence. We receive such messages every day that promote hetero-normativity in the form of myths and norms perpetuated by society. There is a proliferation of idealization of heterosexual romance in art, literature, media and advertising. The ideology of heterosexual romance is beamed at us from childhood out of fairy tales, television, films, advertising, popular songs, wedding pageantry and so forth. It is imposed, managed, controlled, propagandized and sustained by society. All other relationships are somehow perceived as being deviant. When we

live in Noah's ark, it is difficult to find a partner outside the heterosexual norm and such a choice can even threaten our very survival. Feminist/LBGTQIA theorists/activists have to combat not only homophobia, but also the rule of the couple, the politics of Noah's ark in the age of "family values".

The paper will look at 'sexing' and 'queering' and include discussions of sexualities, compulsory heterosexuality, and heterosexism. I will begin by way of examples, briefly discussing Bollywood films that have appeared in the last few years, written from different viewpoints and political orientations.

SOCIAL TECHNOLOGIES

The word technology has been used in Foucauldian sense of the metaphor 'technology of power' (Dino). Technology is a set of structured forms of action by which we also inevitably exercise power over ourselves. 'Social technologies' structure our world and mediate our relation to it and its meanings, construct and reproduce practices, experiences and meaning of our personal and social world.

Technologies of the self (also called care of the self or practices of the self) are what Michel Foucault calls the methods and techniques ("tools") through which human beings constitute themselves. According to Foucault, technologies of the self are the forms of knowledge and strategies that "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality." ("Technologies of the Self" 16–49). Foucault argued that technologies of the self must be understood as inextricably linked to his notion of governmentality: the guiding rationalities whereby individuals and social structures regulate and police norms of thought and behaviour. Burchell states, "Government is a 'contact point' where techniques of domination and technologies of the self 'interact' (19-37). According to Foucault, this "contact point" is where "technologies of domination

of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself and, conversely, where techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion" ("On Governmentality" 87-105).

Foucault says discipline regulates human life, imposing particular forms of behaviour and it produces subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies. Foucault's point is that you can be coerced or forced to do something by being observed constantly. Sandra Lee Barkley in a feminist foucauldian analysis of femininity has argued "a woman who checks her make-upÖhas just as surely as the innate of the panopticon, a self policing subject, and self committed to a relentless self surveillance. In patriarchal culture, Barkley suggested a panoptical male connoisseur resides waiting the consciousness of most women. They comply with the normative heterosexual narrative scripts (61-86).

Social constructions of gender

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir states, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature" (295). Remarking on Beauvoir's statement towards the end of the first chapter of *Gender Trouble,* Butler writes "if there is something right in Beauvoir's claims that one is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a construct that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification, even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the congealing is itself an insistent and insidious practice sustained and regulated by various social means (33). Both Butler and Beauvoir assert that gender is a process which has neither origin nor the end, so that it is something that we 'do' rather than 'are'. Gender construction 'congeal' into forms which appear to be natural and permanent. The body is not a 'mute facticity'—that is a fact of nature, but like gender it is produced by discourse. Gender is

a verb rather than a noun. Something one does, an act or more precisely, a sequence of acts. It is a repeated stylization of the body. Gender is a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame. Gender is performatively constituted in the same way that one's choices of clothes are curtailed, perhaps even predetermined by that society , context, economy, etc., within which it is situated.

Categories of gender, sex and sexuality now come under the scrutiny of theorists such as Butler, Wittig, Rubin and Eve Sedgwick. In coining the phrase 'queer theory', de Lauretis called for the principal paradigms of homosexuality to be questioned and rethought, including clinical and other institutional discourses that frame it in an unnatural deviation that suggest that gay and lesbian sexualities are just another, optional 'life style' in this context 'queer' was intended to displace old labels, including 'homosexual and the phase 'lesbian and gay which although implies differences by coupling the two term, in common usage glosses over them (Chaudhuri 76).

Queer is an umbrella term for the diverse range of Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) behaviours, identities and culture. Institutional discourses frame it as an unnatural deviation from reproductive heterosexuality. Queer theory interrogation of essentialist, universal or trans-historical notions of sexual identity is inspired by poststructuralist ideas.

It is now widely accepted that what we think of sexuality is not a natural and pre-existent entity, but rather a social construction. Thus, sex is not a seething mass of natural drives and urges that our society has repressed, but rather sexual practices, desires, subjectivities, forms of identity and so on that have been produced and continue to be produced through the deployment of sexuality. According to Foucault, sexuality has been deployed in relatively recent times as a domain of regulation and social control. This theorization of sexuality allows an understanding of how the positions available to women (and men) in dominant discourses on sexuality are not natural and fixed and nor are they neutral. Sexuality is deployed in a way that is directly related to relations

of power (qtd. in Wilkinson et al. 95).

We can see the social construction of gender and sexuality in what Althusser called "Ideological State Apparatuses"—the media, schools, family and law courts (127-188). All these institutions produce the discourses that have the power to produce and promote representations of gender and sexuality, which are then accepted and internalized by the subjects. Not least among these technologies of gender and sexuality is cinema. The representation of gender and sexualities, by powerful social technologies such as mainstream cinema undoubtedly affects the way our individual self-representations of gender and sexuality impact the broader social construction of gender and discourses on sexuality.

HETEROSEXUAL IDEOLOGY AS A COERCIVE FORCE

The phrase "compulsory heterosexuality" refers to the assertion by male-dominated society that the only normal sexual relationship is between a man and a woman. Compulsory heterosexuality is the assumption that women and men are innately attracted to each other emotionally and sexually and that heterosexuality is normal and universal. Adrienne Rich defined the concept of compulsory heterosexuality in her writings, most notably in her 1980 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." Rich challenged the idea of heterosexuality as the natural expression of human sexuality and the assertion that other forms of sexuality are deviant. Rich holds that compulsory heterosexuality denies women of their own sexuality. She claims that compulsory heterosexuality produces such myths as that of the vaginal orgasm. That serves to imply that only a man can sexually satisfy a woman (by delivering a vaginal orgasm), and hence that serves to prevent women from having relationships with other women (631-60).

This institutionalization of heterosexuality in our society leads to a crystallization of an inequality of power not only between heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals, but also between men and women resulting in critical consequences.

Under a regime of compulsory heterosexuality, men control all aspects of women's lives, including their sexuality, childbirth and rearing activities, safety, physical movement, labour and access to knowledge. Compulsory heterosexuality leads to discrimination against homosexuals and the intolerance and/or invisibility of gay men and lesbians in society. Moreover, compulsory heterosexuality customarily penalizes those who do not conform to heterosexuality. Thus, same-sex relationships are made taboo and, often, criminalized, while pressure is placed on people to form heterosexual relationships and bonds. The need to enforce male-female relationships as a social norm suggests that heterosexuality may be less of an innate response and more of a social conditioning.

LGBTQIA VISIBILITY IN BOLLYWOOD FILMS

The Indian film industry is the largest in the world as it produces around 900 movies every year. Besides Asia, Bollywood movies are released in east Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Britain, Canada, Australia, the United States and other countries. Bollywood is generally known for its song and dance sequences, however many Bollywood movies have explored various social issues such as child marriage, polygamy, dowry system, casteism and terrorism. Homosexuality, a tabooed subject in Indian society, has yet not been fully explored in Bollywood. Initially, many movies portrayed homosexual characters predominantly for comic relief; the gay or lesbian character was most probably the protagonist's friend or a dress designer (Bollywood Film *3*). But with the time and acceptance of the viewers, Bollywood is opening up and making efforts to deal with such sensitive issues. Some filmmakers have taken a bold step of making movies fully based on homosexuals, but these movies find difficulty in passing through the censor board. The objective of this paper is to investigate the type of homosexuality, personal, family and social relationship of homosexuals/lesbians/eunuchs as depicted in Bollywood movies[1]. And, it will also observe the factors that prevent Bollywood from engaging with this complex issue.

Kal Ho Naa Ho (*Tomorrow May Come or Not*), *Kalyug* (*Twenty First Century*), *My Brother Nikhil, Honeymoon Travels, Fashion, Dostana* (*Friendship*), *Dulhan Hum Le Jayenge* (*We Will Take Away The Bride*), *Na Tum Jano Naa Hum* (Neither You Know Nor I), *Fire, Page 3, Girlfriend, Life in a Metro* and *The Pink Mirror* are some of the movies that tackle these complex issues. *Kal Ho Naa Ho, Na Tum Jano Naa Hum, Dulhan Hum Le Jayenge* and *Dostana* are examples of movies which showed same-sex relationship in a comical way. There are some daring film-makers like Deepa Mehta, Sridhar Rangayan and Madhur Bhandarkar, who have engaged with this subject in the main plot. Deepa Mehta's *Fire* represented lesbian relationship. But its release was rife with criticism and offences. *Fire* was lucky to be released in theatres though many years later after completion. But, movies such as *Yours Emotionally* and *The Pink Mirror* never reached the theatre. These movies were released in DVDs only.

Viewers assume that heterosexual relation is the only human relationship. However, with the progress and widening mentality of people, the number of movies that are being produced focusing on sexuality is increasing every day. Popular actors these days are candid to play queer character roles in movies. Bollywood at present is ready to explore LGBTQIA regardless of the various obstacles it has to undertake.

This paper will be an attempt to look at recent representations of same-sex desire in mainstream Indian films. It will connect these films to the discourses surrounding identity and sexuality in a post-colonial environment. It will look at how these representations intersect with class, domestic family dynamics and hegemonic notions of nationalist identity. In doing so, it will also analyze how LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender questioning, intersex and asexual) characters are positioned within the main narrative. If we look at the globalization phenomenon in India, it is ironic how certain "western" discourses dealing with development and progress, are unhesitatingly adopted by a country which views the West as a defiling agent otherwise. This contradiction comes through very strongly when

dealing with homosexuality which is erroneously and conveniently attributed to "western" culture. This picking and choosing of "modernity" is a fascinating phenomenon that is also brought out in queer visibility in Indian cinema today.

These films, thus, offer a lot to be examined in terms of content, as well as packaging of same-sex desire. I will analyze these films to see how these characters are portrayed as gay/lesbian/transgender, their placement in the main narrative and their class identity. Some questions that I will attempt to answer in my analysis: How do these films offer positive spaces of visibility for these characters? Are the films with "positive" representations of gay/lesbian/transgender characters really successful in breaking away from the homophobic/stereotype portrayals of queer characters as seen in other films?

QUEERING BOLLYWOOD: EUNUCHS IN INDIAN CINEMA

In Indian society, the term eunuch is broadened to include homosexuals, sexually abused men, hermaphrodites (intersexed), men who are sexually impotent and emasculated men. The term eunuch in India refers as much to a societal role as it does to one's anatomy. This is because men who are different, whether they are homosexuals, impotent or hermaphrodites, do not feel comfortable to express sexual identity in the normal society because they will not be accepted by the society as it is not considered the 'norm'. The only place eunuchs can freely express themselves and be normal in their own way is if they join the *hijra* community.

There are different types of portrayals of eunuchs[2] in Indian cinema, such as transsexuals, homosexuals and *hijras.* They are usually 'objects of derisive comedy or disgust' ("Homosexuality Rising in Bollywood." n. pag.). Popular Hindi cinema, constructs the *hijra* identity through abjection, ridicule and erasure. The transgender is a shadow on the margins of hetero-patriarchal narratives of Bollywood films, it is a source of comic relief or more often lumped along with all sexual 'deviants' such as the gay, the effeminate or the cross-dresser (Pattnaik. n. pag.). Many

of them have been the brunt of crude jokes, especially in the song sequences. Many actors cross-dressed with deliberate crudity so that they are not mistaken for a woman but a eunuch in an attempt to evoke laughter. However, this type of humour did not go down well and the mimicking of eunuchs is hardly to be seen on screen now.

The film *Tamanna* (1998, Director: Mahesh Bhatt) attempts to reorient some of the stereotypical portrayals of the *hijra* culture. *Tamanna* is based on a true story and inspired by a true incident, in 1975 in the town of Mahim, Bombay; the theme of the film is about an abandoned girl, Tamanna, who is raised by a *hijra*. The film focuses on a *hijra* named Tiku (played by Paresh Rawal) and explores various issues that many *hijras* face in society.

Bhatt has used a non-stereotypical Muslim *hijra* in Tamanna. The first time we see Tiku is next to his mother's dead body, dressed in a shirt and *lungi* (a sarong). *Hijras* generally do not dress like males, because they enjoy dressing in women's clothing, and their female dress is typically accompanied by jewellery. Tiku's hair is slightly above his shoulder, which is considered short in the *hijra* context and again it is not accepted in the *hijra* community, long hair is a must for a *hijra*. If a *hijra* has short hair, it is suggested that he has been punished for something they have done. In the film, Tiku lives in a community full of men, which is also another uncommon aspect because, as they are socially not accepted in Indian society and because of this, they normally live in their own community. Through this aspect, Bhatt has highlighted the point that *hijras* can live with men and women as a community. Tiku lives with his best friend Salim, he refers to him as *bhai* (brother). The fact that *Tamanna* did not show any kind of sexual relations between Salim and Tiku justifies that it is a stereotypical view that society has of *hijras*. Society thinks it is impossible for a *hijra* to befriend a male because they would either want a sexual relationship with them or want to keep them as their husbands. (Hindocha. n. pag.). Despite the fact that Salim is not Tiku's husband in the film, they are clearly depicted as a couple in all dramatic sequences of the film. Both

of them live together; make decisions together and face consequences together, all of these are qualities of a couple.

Tiku is emotional and on many occasions we see his femininity come out. For example, whilst Tamanna is growing up we see him care for her in a different manner. Almost like a mother would care for her daughter. For example, in one song scene we see Tiku dance for little Tamanna in a feminine manner. Salim is more like a father figure to her and Tiku is more of a mother figure to her, even though she calls him Abu (father). Unlike other *hijras,* Tiku does not cross-dress, nor is he socially part of the *hijras* who live in groups and dance for a living. He is a make-up artist for actresses. In reality, it is quite difficult for *hijras* to get a normal job, because of how they are perceived in society. *Hijras'* traditional role in society is blessing at auspicious occasions, generally on the birth of a son or at marriages. Another way they make a living is by prostitution. However, Tiku does not play a part of his traditional role, until near to the end of the film. He takes on the traditional role when he is in need of some money. This is the first time we see him dress in female clothing. He dresses up in a black and yellow sari, with typical jewellery to go with his outfit, his face is full of make-up and he is dancing around, swaying his hands side to side.

Bhatt has included a group of conventional *hijras* in his film to portray the *hijras* in the Indian society and their traditional role. We first see a group of several *hijras* outside a house, dressed in colourful saris and flashing their colourful jewellery, and clapping their hands wildly in the special manner of *hijras*, with hollow palms. Tiku does not associate with the group of *hijras* and tries to avoid them. They often ridicule him because he thinks that by living with ordinary people he can forget the gender deviation of his existence.

One of the important scenes in *Tamanna* is when Tamanna learns that Tiku is a *hijra*. Her reaction to this is like what many people in Indian society have of them. In Indian society, *hijras* have become something to be feared. Despite the fact that *hijras* have an auspicious presence, they also have an inauspicious potential. The sexual ambiguity of the *hijras* as impotent men, eunuchs, represents loss of virility, and this undoubtedly is the major cause of the fear that they inspire. Tamanna is immediately sickened by the fact that Tiku has raised her up. She forgets all the love and care he has given her and how he has revolved his

life around her to give her the best. She too, nurtures a stereotypical view of what *hijras* are like in Indian society.

Bhatt asserts a positive message that *hijras* are successful parents and can bring up a child, because they too have the ability to offer love even though they cannot conceive themselves. Bhatt celebrates the solidarity and loving hearts of the *hijras* through the character of Tiku.

The film looks at the power relations that operate in the construction of the very materiality of the sexed body and elaborate on how such an understanding can help in re-orienting theorization about sex and gender in the light of an unstable, dynamic and fluid Body (Butler 2–12.). The film compels us to rethink the materiality of the body itself as a process of becoming and a matter of cultural and historical production and reproduction, open to re-inscription.

CULTURE, SEXUALITY AND POLITICS

Umbartha (1982, Director: Jabbar Patel) adapted to screen by noted playwright Vijay Tendulkar from Shanta Nisal's Marathi novel *Beghar* (*Homeless*). *Umbartha* (*The Threshold*) was released at a time when words like homosexual or lesbian were not part of the average Indian's vocabulary. Smitha Patil portrays the character of Sulabha , an intense and fiery social worker. She takes up a job as a caretaker in a desitute women's home. A lesbian relationship between two of the inmates turns into a scandal that is lapped up by the press and discussed in the legislative assembly. They are caught as culprits and the dialogue that ensues was that these "issues" can be solved with psychiatric help. Finally, when two inmates commit suicide in the institution's lock-up, Sulabha is put in the dock and a one-man inquiry commission is appointed to evaluate the charges against her. After all, these responses can be attributed to the fact that they were living in India in the early 1980s. Jonathan Katz's in *Gay American History* (1992) corroborates this view. He tells us that as early as 1656 the New Haven Colony prescribed the death penalty for lesbians. Katz provides many suggestive and informative

documents on the "treatment" (or torture) of lesbians by the medical profession in the nineteenth and twentieth century (5).

Girlfriend (2004, Director: Karan Razdan), though about a lesbian affair, the lead female character is presented as a butch, kick-boxing and man-hating murderer who doubles as a plumber in her spare time. The film proposed the unfailing panacea of a good man's love to straighten her out. The film is about two women in a relationship; one of who becomes interested in a man, the other who gets possessive over her partner and turns psychopathic. Activists belonging to Sangh Parivar, Shiv Sena and its students' wing, Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Sena, staged violent protests in various Indian cities, demanding that the movie be banned. Film critics have trashed the movie. Women's groups have described the movie as "highly regressive" and "pornographic", aimed at drawing audiences through its titillating scenes. Lesbians have criticized the movie as homophobic for its very negative portrayal of same-sex relationships. Indeed, Girlfriend portrays lesbians as psychopathic, sexually abused, man-hating murderers. But the Hindu right wing's quarrel with the movie is quite different. The crux of their argument was that homosexuality is "immoral" and not a part of Indian culture. Lesbian acts are unacceptable to them as it is subversive of the patriarchal order and institutions like marriage, which they defend in the name of tradition. They believe that the movie is an affront to Hindu values. Shiv Sena has criticized the movie claiming that it goes "against the grain of Indian culture by portraying scenes of lovemaking between two women". (Ramachandran. n.pag.).

Fire (1996, Director: Deepa Mehta) is about two middle-class Delhi housewives who find love in each other. The film reinforced prejudices by representing homosexuality as an option forced by conjugal neglect. The film's release was rife with controversy. Fire was passed uncut by India's censor board (the Central Board of Film Certification) in May 1998 with a rating of Adult, the only condition being that the character Sita's name be changed to Nita (Jain. n.pag.). The film was first screened on 13

November 1998 and ran to full houses in most metropolitan cities throughout India for almost three weeks. On 2 December more than 200 Shiv Sanaiks stormed Cinemax theatre in suburban Goregaon in Mumbai, smashing glass panes, burning posters and shouting slogans. They compelled managers to refund tickets to moviegoers. On 3 December, Regal theatre in Delhi was similarly stormed. Bajrang Dal workers with *lathis* invaded Raj Palace and Rajmahal in Surat, breaking up everything in sight and driving away frightened audiences. Theatres in Surat and Pune stopped the screening of the film on the same day. When attackers attempted to shut down a screening in Calcutta, however, ushers and audience fought back and the movie stayed open. Twenty-nine people were arrested in Mumbai in connection with these incidents. (Bearak. n. page). Chief Minister Manohar Joshi supported the actions to shut down screenings of *Fire*, saying, "I congratulate them for what they have done. The film's theme is alien to our culture" (Jain). The film's showing at an Indian film festival ignited full fireworks. The reaction of some male members of the audience was so violent that the police had to be called. "I'm going to shoot you, madam!" was one response. According to Mehta, the men who objected couldn't articulate the word "lesbian" — "*this* is not in our Indian culture!" was as much as they could bring themselves to say. The film was re-released in February 1999, though, and screenings continued without any incident.

Fire was also read as having an oblique reference to Sita. Linda Hess in an article titled "Rejecting Sita: Indian responses to the ideal man's cruel treatment of his ideal wife" in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, appearing in March 1999, sees the film as a modern metaphor for the *agnipariksha* in the Ramayana.

The film opens with an image of a family—father, mother, and daughter—sitting in a vast, bright field of yellow flowers. The mother recounts a parable to her daughter about a group of people living in the mountains. "They had never seen the sea," she says, "though they wanted to see it. They were sad because

of this. 'Don't be sad,' an old woman says, 'what you can't see, you *can* see—you just have to see without looking...' This idealized image, which recurs throughout the narrative, is the director's poetic tableau of the seductiveness of "seeing"—that is, discovering one's true nature and choosing to live authentically, no matter what the cost. The daughter in the image is a very young Radha (Shabana Azmi), who grows up to become a traditional wife. Her husband is Ashok (Kulbushan Kharbanda), a middle-aged celibate who spends most of his money and time on a guru who teaches that sexual desire is evil, a belief he puts into practice by engaging in cruel bedroom rituals with Radha, lying next to her without touching in order to resist temptation. Ashok's brother is Jatin (Jaaved Jaaferi), married by arrangement to the beautiful, frustrated Sita (Nandita Das) but indifferent to her, preferring the company of his Chinese girlfriend. A treacherous servant, Mundu (Ranjit Chowdhry), and Ashok's mute, paralyzed old mother Biji (Kushal Rekhi) complete this grim portrait of an extended family in deep dysfunction.

Sita's arrival brings a modern sensibility into this moribund group and pushes it toward a long-overdue collapse. She refuses to go along with the family's unspoken plan—that she produces children to occupy her time in a loveless marriage. "This duty thing is overrated," she tells a shocked Radha. Eventually, she draws Radha out of her shell and the two of them find in each other what their husbands refuse to give. Their relationship progresses while their uncomprehending husbands watch; the men, in fact, unwittingly feed the affair by keeping the women in the domestic sphere and in each other's company. During a picnic, Sita slyly offers to massage Radha's feet. The kitchen, normally a major zone of oppression, becomes a cozy space for their love, and one in which tradition is turned on its head. While they're cooking, Radha explains that men eat black pepper on their wedding night "for better performance." Sita asks, "What about brides?" Radha says they eat green cardamom "for fragrance" and pops one of them in Sita's mouth. Sita moves close to her and asks if it's working. Meanwhile, the household is falling apart

in every possible way. Sita and Jatin have a slapping contest; Radha starts refusing to automatically acquiesce to her husband's perverse demands; and she catches the servant Mundu masturbating in front of a porn video called *The Joy Suck Club,* with the mute Biji watching in horror in the background. Radha draws her strength from the image of the flower field that opened the film and continually reasserts it as a symbol of her hope. And they draw strength from each other, with Radha clinging to their relationship despite Mundu's betrayal of it to her husband (Morris n.pag.).

The film offers a powerful, sometimes hypnotic critique of the rigid norms of a patriarchal society. "Lesbian baiting" is also a mechanism by which women may be controlled through their fear of being labelled as a lesbian. Homosexuals are perceived as a threat to the established essence of society specifically, family, male dominance and control, and the very heart of sexism. The entire controversy framed around the film clearly reveals that we live in a heterocentric society, where normative heterosexuality is the measure by which individuals determine gender. To assume one's gender as a woman or a man automatically "means to have entered already into a heterosexual relationship of subordination" (Butler, Preface 1999 xiii). Consequently, compulsory heterosexuality orders the genders and creates a homophobic attitude, "maintaining that men who are men will be straight [and] women who are women will be straight" (MacKinnon cited in Butler, Preface 1999 xiii). What continues to come into question is the definition of these terms. In the rhetoric of the heterosexist society, a male and female are those individuals who possess the biological apparatus to qualify as male or female. Further evidence of gender, however, comes from behaviour, what Judith Butler refers to as both anticipatory and performative (Preface 1999 xiv, xv). If one anticipates an object to have a certain meaning, to have an "internal essence" (Preface 1999 xv), then that object becomes what the viewer expects. That object then maintains its essence or identity based on a "sustained set of acts"; for gender that means, the acts are

"posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Preface 1999 xv). Thus, for us to see an individual whose external characteristics signify masculinity, we, who are shaped by normative heterosexuality, expect the individual to act in certain masculine-associated ways. Hence heterosexual identity is established and maintained.

HUM GAY HAIN! YEH MERA BOYFRIEND HAI!: OUT OF THE BOLLYWOOD CLOSET

For long, homosexuals have largely been perceived as out of the orbit of the various formulas and permutations that control the Bollywood box office. Years ago, Sanjeev Kumar played an effeminate character in A. Bhim Singh's *Naya Din Nayee Raat*, Anupam Kher in Rahul Rawail's *Mast Kalander* and David Dhawan's *Dulhan Hum Le Jayenge*. But these were essentially comic characters meant to lampoon men who, in every day jargon, aren't "normal". Indian film-makers have unsurprisingly been hesitant to address homosexuality sensitively. Instead, they have consistently used stereotypical gay characters and subplots to evoke contemptible laughs. India's first bona fide homosexual film was Riyad Wadia's *Bomgays* in 1996. A 12-minute film adapting four of litterateur R. Raja Rao's poems to screen, it featured Rahul Bose. Mahesh Dattani's *Mango Souffle* was an effort to look at the gay community without prejudice. It made a valiant effort to de-marginalize homosexuality in our cinema. But the film hardly got itself an audience worth mentioning.

Karan Johar's *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003) featured a running gag in which the leading men were incorrectly assumed to be gay. *Kal Ho Na Ho* had slight references to gay culture throughout the film with the hilarious "Kantaben" set-ups: these were a coincidental chain of events (between Shah Rukh Khan's and Saif Ali Khan's characters) which appeared to look like homosexual acts only to suddenly have the homophobic maid, "Kantaben" coincidently appear and witness it all. In *Page 3* (2005, Director: Madhur Bhandarkar), a gay character is looked at without prejudice. Rehaan Engineer plays a gay costume designer

who has a clandestine affair with the man whom the protagonist (Konkona Sen Sharma) loves. In one sequence, after the gay character is beaten up by some gay-bashers, Rehaan asks Konkona: "Is it my fault if nature made me this way?" On a lighter note, Konkona finds her gay friend ogling at a girl in a restaurant. "If she's so pretty can you imagine how good-looking her brother must be?" guffaws Rehaan. *Page 3* comes closest in Indian cinema to depicting a gay character with some semblance of sensitivity. Its director Madhur Bhandarkar states:

> All the characters you see in *Page 3* are based on people I know. In our films, gay characters are used as props and gimmicks. In my film, Rehaan plays an identifiable character. We cannot reduce any community of people to tokens and emblems. We've to treat them as real. "Hindi cinema is a long way off from pulling homosexuality out of the rut of 'minorityism' (Jha.n.pag.).

My Brother Nikhil (2005, Director: Onir) presents an honest portrayal of a family coming to terms with their son being gay and HIV positive. Film features a champion swimmer from Goa who catches the disease, gets ostracized from his community (including his parents), but finds loving support from his long-time male companion. For the first hour, the film takes a nudge-nudge wink-wink attitude towards homosexuality. But then it gives the couples' back story, and it's portrayed in a totally positive way. Even the main character's parents come around in the end. Considering India's laws against homosexuality, the movie is definitely ahead of its time. However, this was a small film with no major stars and without a mass audience. In *Fashion* (2008, Director: Madhur Bhandarkar) there are two types of queer characters — the gay friends and the bitchy, backstabbing queens. Everyone in the movie is a walking stereotype, including the heterosexuals, and they all fall prey to the modelling industry's favourite vices, from hard drugs to drunk driving to casual sex.

The teaser trailer of *Dostana* (2008, Director: Tarun Mansukhani) included a one-line dialogue by John with Abhishek standing beside him: "*Hum Gay Hain! Yeh Mera Boyfriend Hai!*" The clip then cut to John and Abhishek dancing to the tango,

with a red rose between Abhishek's teeth. In *Dostana*, the two heroes only pretend to be gay to get closer to the object of their affection, Priyanka Chopra. Karan Johar (producer of the film) hopes that a big film such as *Dostana* can raise support for the repeal of Section 377. Johar says that the timing is right for *Dostana* and that *Dostana* is an approach to pave the way eventually for a Bollywood *Brokeback Mountain-type* film" (Roy. n. page). Section 377 has been scraped by the Indian courts, negative attitudes are gradually changing. Critics may argue that Johar's film does not go far enough, but he is a pragmatist and realizes that such barriers have to be removed slowly, rather than torn away at one go (Roy).

DEGENDERING GENDER

A reading of some of the films from Bollywood clearly shows how films can be deployed as strategies aimed to make societies less homo/lesbo phobic. However, film-makers need appropriate legal and moral support from the government in order to hand out correct and accurate messages to the masses. Excess interference from the government and its laws is a major factor that is preventing film-makers and actors to research and show the true lifestyles of the queer. With some encouragement and appreciation from the masses, Bollywood can go a long way ahead and contribute to change the inhuman behaviour towards the queers in general. Responses to the films where same- sex relations are portrayed have been violent and controversial; pandering to religious fundamentalists who are hell bent on keeping marriage the sole domain of one man and one woman. There is a need to restructure the institution of marriage to be more inclusive, progressive and representative of the realities of our relationships, which is not a threat to the institution, but rather an opportunity to preserve it. To round up from where I began, we need to radically alter the institutions of heterosexual monogamy as it is not only gay, lesbian people for whom matrimony remains an unequal playing field. Marriage places monogamy at its core

and this is supported by both religious fundamentalists who are against same-sex marriage and those campaigning for gay and lesbian people to have the right to marry. An egalitarian option is to allow individuals to get married whatever their sex or gender, including those who identify as having no sex or gender or whose sex may be indeterminate. Communities in India have practiced polygamy and polyandry, which is now outlawed. There are too many abuses within heterosexual monogamy. If monogamy is absolute then divorce and re-marriages are wrong. We need to raise these questions not merely as theoretical exercises, we have to snap the covenant of the Noah's ark and envision a society structured for equality where no gender, no ethnic group or social class group is allowed to monopolize economic, educational and cultural resources or the positions of power.

I argue that gender divisions still deeply bifurcate the structure of modern society and we live in fear of complexity, fear of thinking, fear of ideas—we live, after all, in a profoundly anti-intellectual culture. Allying across differences is a difficult work. Feminists want women and men to be equal, but few talk about doing away with gender divisions altogether. From a social structural gender perspective, it is the general division of people into two unequally valued categories that undergirds the continually reappearing instances of gender inequality. Using Judith Lorber's new paradigm we see gender as an institution comparable to the economy, the family, and religion in its significance and consequences. Judith Lorber (*Paradoxes of Gender*1994*)* views gender as wholly a product of socialization subject to human agency, organization, and interpretation. To explore different paradoxes of gender: why we speak of only two "opposite sexes" when there is such a variety of sexual behaviours and relationships; why transvestites, transsexuals, and hermaphrodites do not affect the conceptualization of two genders and two sexes. This paper attempted to argue that it is this gendering that needs to be challenged, with the long-term goal of doing away with binary gender divisions altogether. To this end, this paper argued for a degendering movement.

NOTES

1. See Vito Russo's The *Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (Harper & Row. 1981) for details of how homophobic stereotypes have both reflected and perpetrated the oppression of gay people. Russo's book examines the images of homosexuality and gender variance in Hollywood films from the 1920s to the present. Russo traces a history not only of how gay men and lesbians had been erased or demonized in movies but in all of American culture as well. Chronicling the depictions of gay people such as the "sissy" roles of Edward Everett Horton and Franklin Pangborn in 1930s comedies or predatory lesbians in 1950s dramas (see also Lauren Bacall in *Young Man with a Horn* and Barbara Stanwyck in *Walk on the Wild Side*). In Bollywood films LGBT characters are not just demonized but are often enmeshed in murkier issues of politics and religion.
2. *Bombay* (dir. Mani Ratnam, 1995); *Hum Apke Hain Kaun* (dir. Sooraj Barjatya, 1994); *Kunwara Baap* (dir. Mehmood 1974); *Lawaaris* (dir. Prakash Mehra 1981); *Sadak* (dir. Mahesh Bhatt, 1991); T*amanna*, (dir. Mahesh Bhatt 1997); *The Bollywood Story: Indian Cinema* (dir. Shashi Kapoor)

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Ārekti Premer Gôlpo: The Yesteryear Female Impersonator, the Post-liberalization Transvestite and a 'Queer' Stereotype

KAUSTAV BAKSHI

The Prologue

Kaushik Ganguly's *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* effortlessly grabbed headlines the very day it was announced. The shooting began on 17 August 2009, after the original title *Chhāyā Chhobi* was changed. It was not only the first feature film on alternative sexualities after the reading down of Section 377 of the IPC in a momentous verdict given by the Delhi High Court, but it also marked the acting debut of Rituparno Ghosh, speculations about whose personal life concerning the film were rife among the Bengali upper/middle class. The grapevine buzzed with rumours of how Ghosh was preparing himself to play the transvestite protagonist of the film. The elaborate cosmetic regime Ghosh undertook often filled pages of newspaper supplementaries and gossip columns. Ghosh's sexuality, till then much cogitated upon, was eventually confirmed as it were. Ghosh and his inadvertent cross-dressing gave the film a pre-release mileage that was quite unforeseen. Simultaneously, the cast and crew publicized it in the media, rather callously and loosely, as the first "gay" Bengali film, thereby breeding a "queer" confusion, which, as I would argue, would be hard to purge.

The pre-release hoopla was further sensationalized when the Nandan CEO, Nilanjan Chatterjee, demanded a preview of the film on the grounds that "homosexuality is a new subject in films and I need to go through it thoroughly to see how it has been dealt with"[1]. The unexpected moral policing that Chatterjee undertook came as a surprise to many, for the then ruling

government, the Left-Front, was the only political group to raise its voice in favour of the reading down of Section 377. It was despite what many pointed out that no film was ever previewed before it was screened at Nandan, and no such rules existed. However, Chatterjee was unrelenting:

> I'm not bothered about what the Central government has acknowledged. The censor board checks for scenes that show frontal sex or violence, while we preview films for their aesthetic value. Why just a Silver Peacock, even if it had won a Golden Bear, we would have asked for a preview. That's the rule at Nandan.[2]

The stance Nandan took was contradictory because a retrospective of Pedro Almodovar, whose films dealt with alternative sexualities, was screened at this very theatre in 2005 during an international film festival. By the time *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* was ready for release on 24 December 2010, the government had significantly lost the support of the civil society and several cultural icons in Bengal had articulated their distrust in the government. The opposition *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* invited had an intense and disquieting political implication: the State was unambiguously taking recourse to repressive apparatuses. By objecting to the screening of a film based on the issue of sexual minorities, the Leftist government was also callously contradicting its own ideologies, much to the astonishment of the Bengali intellectuals. The coercive power exhibited by the State reminded many of the *Fire* controversy in 1998 when the Right-wing fundamentalist Shiv Sena tried to stop its screening. Eventually, despite strident protests from the film fraternity, *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* was not allowed to be released at Nandan. The makers refused to yield to the State demand for a preview. On the day of its release, a flamboyantly cross-dressed Rituparno Ghosh broke into a furious tirade against Nilanjan Chatterjee on a popular Bengali news channel.

The Film: In Focus

I

Ārekti Premer Gôlpo is a reworking of Ganguly's telefilm *Ushnotar Jonyo*, primarily a dramatization of Chapal Bhaduri's life. A

female impersonator in Bengali folk theatre, Bhaduri was little known to the urban bourgeois intellectuals until Naveen Kishore's documentary *Performing the Goddess* (1999) had Bhaduri candidly talking about his homosexual relationships and the changes he detected in his body at around 18, changes he aligned with the female menstrual cycle. Queer theory had by that time entered the field of cultural studies as a useful tool for analyzing sexual minorities. Consequently, the attention Bhaduri attracted henceforth was unanticipated. Niladri R. Chatterjee observes:

> With the advent of queer theory he acquires a new usability. Now it is his permanent gender non-fixity which acquires a valorisation and is celebrated precisely because of his body's ability to hover, as it were, in mid-gender while resisting the label of transgender or transsexual.[3]

This is precisely how Bhaduri became a subject of interest to Ganguly, and also to Abhiroop Sen (Rituparno Ghosh) who came all the way from Delhi to shoot a documentary on the actor hitherto absent from public memory. The widespread applicability of queer theory has produced, as it were, the self-confessed homosexual female impersonator as a knowable subject, and the unprecedented attention Bhaduri has fetched currently is a remarkable real life example of:

> ... the constitution of the individual as a describable, analyzable object... in order to maintain him in his individual features, in his particular evolution, in his own aptitudes and abilities, under the gaze of a permanent corpus of knowledge.[4]

The very subject of female impersonation has now become a new domain of knowledge, although a male actor performing female roles has been a widespread practice across the globe for ages. The boy actors of the Elizabethan stage, for instance, have emerged as a new analyzable subject category:

> ...the sexual ambivalence, androgyny, and muted eroticism linking actors, dramatists, and playgoers in a sexually charged subculture of transgression... Not surprisingly, they open avenues to politicized discourse about sexuality, self-representation, and gender that has become increasingly fashionable in our own contested culture within the last dozen years.[5]

Ārekti Premer Gôlpo, however, is not concerned with all this. The female impersonator's sexuality and private life become the

modern transvestite film-maker's domain of investigation. When a journalist asks him whether he is making a film on the actor's career or his sexuality, he cuttingly replies that he is not making any ad-film on Viagra. The journalist then questions back, if he has been making a film on Amitabh Bachchan, would the actor's sexuality be of equal interest. The journalist who is prejudiced and, to a certain extent, insensitive towards alternative sexual identities, replies: "Obviously not". He is further confounded when Abhiroop retorts, "What is so obvious about it?" For the journalist, Bhaduri's sexuality is not 'normal'; Abhiroop is infuriated and sarcastically castigates him for his callousness. But, what Abhiroop himself does not realize is that, despite his empathy for Bhaduri, he sees in the latter the potentiality of a good project: Bhaduri's sexuality and sexual life become objects of inquiry for him too. In other words, Bhaduri's self-confessed homosexuality brings him under the surveillance of the modern day queer film-maker. In *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I*, Foucault affirms:

> We have become a singularly confessing society...[The confession] plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in most solemn rites: one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell...One confesses ´ or is forced to confess.[6]

The documentary Abhiroop Sen conceptualizes demands a further act of confession from the actor. He subtly exercises his power over the actor by cajoling him into sharing his private life; but later, when Bhaduri refuses to talk about certain very personal details, Abhiroop gets infuriated. A project which was presumably undertaken out of a sense of identification (Momo, the character played by Raima Sen, observes at one point in the film that Abhiroop is using Chapal Bhaduri as a peg to hang his own story) ends up generating a covertly violent power-relationship between the modern transvestite film-maker and the retired female impersonator: Abhiroop is well-informed of the contemporary sexual identity politics discourses which have spread globally, but Bhaduri is not. Abhiroop's class and

education by default puts him in a position to dominate Bhaduri who has neither money nor any formal education.

The current historical moment of queer liberalism[7] in India, so to speak, is marked by a convergence of political and economic spheres: the reading down of Section 377 of the IPC and an increasingly visible and mass-mediated queer consumer lifestyle following the liberalization of the Indian economy. In other words, the 'queer' man or woman is being increasingly recognized as a potential consumer by the market. As Altman contends:

> There is a clear connection between the expansion of consumer society and the growth of overt lesbian or gay world; the expansion of the free market has also opened up possibilities for a rapid spread of the idea that (homo) sexuality is the basis for a social, political and commercial identity...change in America influences the world in dramatic way...American books, films, magazines and fashions continue to define contemporary gay and lesbian meanings for most of the world...[8]

Although his thesis assumes the hegemony of the American homosexual, the point Altman is trying to make is significant. It is undeniable that sexual minorities have gained greater visibility after the liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, and the political activism that led to the repeal of Section 377 has gathered momentum in the last two decades. However, the issue which is at stake here is that everybody has not benefited equally from the revolution wrought by the emergence of the free market. It is precisely the Indian middle class that has reaped most benefits, and has subsequently expanded in size:

> While 'western' presence maintained itself in India throughout India's post-independence era, it was characterized by the desires of a small middle class (6 per cent of the population) which experienced a time lag in products, fashions, and cultural trends arriving from the west. With liberalization, the pace of transactions and western-style production and consumerism accelerated in the 1980s, and by the 1990s the time lag was replaced by dramatic simultaneity. The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) estimates that the 'middle class', or more appropriately the 'consuming class', doubled in size to 12 per cent in the 1980s and to 18 per cent by the end of the 1990s.[9]

Consequently, this new consumerist class, or the neo-colonial class, has established its cultural hegemony. Queer activism in India, by default, is largely dominated by this English-educated urban middle class. Abhiroop Sen, the film-maker from Delhi, is a representative of this class; his access to the global politics of sexual identities has sufficiently empowered him to celebrate his sexuality by ostentatiously cross-dressing. The consumerist power he wields is unabashedly paraded in the assembly of cosmetics on his dresser, the expensive clothes he wears, the accessories he uses and the haircut he sports. Not only does he have full access to the knowledge-domain of sexual politics, but also to queerness as "mass-mediated commodity, a culture of beautiful objects (bodies, fashions, food, and furniture) to be consumed."[10]

By contrast, the retired female impersonator of folk-theatre is remarkably dispossessed. He can barely sign his name, shares a small scruffy flat with his brother-in-law (grey-scaled shots of which are shown at the beginning of the film), is dressed poorly and does not have the power of knowledge which Abhiroop has. Inevitably, a repressive hierarchy is established whereby the apparently sexually liberated film-maker exercises his will on the uninitiated homosexual actor, and aggressively takes upon himself the responsibility of representing him, for the sexual subaltern, conspicuously lacking in both economic and cultural capital, cannot speak. In this, Chapal Bhaduri barely outgrows the derogatory term *beneputul* by which female impersonators of Bengali folk-theatre were generally known earlier. Although the lexical meaning of the term *beneputul* is doll or puppet, the word *bene*, meaning trader, signals a different connotation. Could *beneputul* also mean "marketable puppet?"

In Abhiroop's project, Chapal Bhaduri is increasingly commodified, highly saleable in the prospective market of queer narratives. By "allowing" him to speak and, thereby, in venturing to liberate him, Abhiroop ends up incarcerating him by taking him as a case study. *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo*, therefore, tellingly ties up the issue of sexual politics with that of class. The sense of identification (overtly signalled by Abhiroop playing Chapal in

the film-within-the-film) the two men share with each other is deeply undercut by their highly unequal access to the means of consumption.

II

Besides delving into the class-gender nexus, the film quite realistically engages with the flip side of increasing queer visibility. Abhiroop Sen's unit is faced with an unanticipated obstacle as soon as the shooting takes off. The local people intervene, demanding immediate withdrawal of the unit on charges of immorality. The new forms of knowledge about alternative sexualities that have now become commonplace would inevitably presuppose new kinds of constraints was not unexpected. Previously, the female impersonator did not arouse social anxiety and was never rigorously policed. Chapal Bhaduri as Chapal Rani had indeed commanded tremendous respect, and female impersonation was a widespread cultural practice. In fact, it is still in vogue in various parts of India. However, *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* is not so much about exploring the anarchic potential of the on-stage female impersonator; the film does not at all probe into that. The mob fury is directed more towards the female impersonator's off-stage sexual orientation and his candid admittance of it.

Niladri R. Chatterjee, exploring the transgressive potential of Bhaduri's on-stage and off-stage performativity, writes:

> Bhaduri's on-stage lines are spoken by a male body, under a woman's garb. The aural and visual fact is the clearest possible exemplification of the constructedness of gender in general and of the feminine gender in particular. Bhaduri's male body can be seen to stand for patriarchy itself and the saree, jewellery and make-up that embellishes and hides the body may be seen to reveal the production of femininity by that patriarchy.[11]

As long as it is an act of mimesis, Bhaduri's donning female raiment is not found threatening, though it sufficiently "endangers medicojuridical sex-gender correlation"[12] and produces an erotic pleasure in the spectator. By cross-dressing he "stages a moment of rupture, when knowledge and visibility are at odds, when

difference cannot be defined solely by recourse to the visual."13 But, the moment he expresses his homosexual leanings, he is found dangerous, for that interferes with the received notions of compulsory heterosexuality. The female impersonator, an old resident of the locality, had presumably not aroused such anxiety as long as he kept his sexuality private. When he chooses to go public about it, he faces resistance hitherto unseen. The local people blatantly dub the project immoral and the shooting is suspended. Decriminalization of homosexuality does not ensure elimination of homophobia; conversely, it seems that by legitimizing homosexuality the Delhi High Court decentralizes and disperses, as it were, the disciplinary mechanism hitherto exercised by the State to control the sexual non-conformist. Ironically, however, the makers of *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* did not foresee that the film itself would fall a victim to the moral policing of the State, even before its release.

The film, thus, begins on a frustrating note, but ends up drawing sympathy for homoerotic relationships. There is certainly a universalizing tendency in juxtaposing the stories of the two queer people—Chapal Bhaduri and Abhiroop Sen—but the film progresses to unravel the differences despite the apparent similarities between the two men. The nature of homoerotic relationships the two men find themselves in is remarkably at odds with each other, notwithstanding the fact that both suffer the same kind of predicament: while Chapal ends up as a slave-mistress at Kumarbabu's house and keeps the household running, compensating for the "dysfunctional" wife who is perpetually bed-ridden, Abhiroop's relationship with Basu, does not eventually go anywhere as the bisexual Basu cannot abandon his wife. The two stories are spatio-temporally separated which explains the varying degree of subservience of the two queer protagonists in same-sex liaisons. For instance, Chapal's sense of victimization is not shared by Abhiroop, although both remain the Other to the socially sanctioned hetero-normative family (Whether the family, at all, is desirable, would open up other avenues of debate, but that is beyond the scope of this paper).

A younger Chapal has no access to a political community of people like him; he must have known other boys who played female roles, but there was certainly no sense of community.[14] Chapal goes on playing the role of the other "woman" in Kumarbabu's life, without demur, almost taking for granted the hetero-normative family as a legitimate institute to which he is a natural outsider. Therefore, he does not protest when he is eventually abandoned. Even for that matter, he lets himself be completely dominated by Tushar as well when they start living together; and when he decides to leave, Tushar almost nonchalantly becomes violent and slaps him, clearly signalling the hierarchy of the relationship they share. Whatever happens to Chapal would have been unexceptional had it happened to a woman; but:

> [t]he reason why these events are remarkable in Bhaduri's case is because they were visited on a body and a being biologically and nominally fixed as male and endowed with the masculine gender.[15]

Chapal, as he claims later in the film, feels like a woman trapped in a male body. While he quite readily identifies himself with a woman (although elsewhere he claims that he is *ardhnāriśwar*[16]), the modern day transvestite film-maker does not.

Abhiroop Sen presumably conversant with the current discourse of sexual identity politics feels different from either a man or a woman. For Chapal, cross-dressing on stage is a compulsion and, therefore, certainly not a political statement; for Abhiroop, it is a conscious choice and a signifier of his identity. What he represents is a "thirdness," which is more often than not overlooked as there is an overwhelming tendency to appropriate the "transvestite *as* one of the sexes". The film equates this thirdness with androgyny rather palpably by employing the subtext of the legend of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his love for Krishna, as underscored by the refrain *Banamālī tumi ār janame hoyeo Rādhā* (O Gardener Divine![17] May you be reborn as Rādhā), and the setting of an important scene (Abhiroop in conversation with Uday, right after he shaves his head) on the precincts of the Gauranga Temple after the *sandhyārti*. Noticeably, as he talks,

Abhiroop casually plays with a peacock feather, a popular synecdoche for the eternal lover.

Although the head-shaving sequence was introduced as Rituparno Ghosh was presumably uncomfortable in his wig, the very event is commendably appropriated by the narrative, for it, inadvertently, reinforces the subtext. While Chapal sports long hair in the film-within-the-film, Abhiroop's decision to shave his head becomes agential in concretizing the thirdness he feels. In this he emblematizes a category crisis. To quote Marjorie Garber in this context:

> By "category crisis", I mean, a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct category) to another: black/white, Jew/Christian, noble/bourgeois, master/servant, master/slave. The binarism male/female, one apparent ground of distinction (in contemporary eyes, at least) between "this" and "that", "him" and "me", is itself put in question, under erasure in transvestism, and a transvestite figure, or a transvestite mode, will always, as a sign of overdetermination—a mechanism of displacement from one blurred category to another.[18]

Chapal by conforming to the role of a woman breeds much less discomfort than Abhiroop who, not just by cross-dressing, but also by not allowing himself to be completely dominated by Basu, disrupts received notions of binarism. Interestingly, this disruptive element "intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself."[19]

Despite addressing such intricacies, perhaps unwittingly, the film does fall quite a few notches short of becoming revolutionary. Ironically, the word "transvestite" or for that matter "transgender" is never once used in the film. Although Abhiroop contends assertively that he feels different from either a man or a woman, his self-identification as a 'gay' man is problematic because sexual identity politics has developed a taxonomy sophisticated enough to differentiate between gayness and transvestism. Troublingly enough, such confusion has travelled beyond the film to significantly affect a dilettante public (read the Bengali upper/middle class) as regards to the intricacies of queer politics and the dynamics of the same-sex desires.

The Epilogue

Rituparno Ghosh's cross-dressing took off almost meteorically parallel to the pre-release hoopla surrounding *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo*. The film gave him the excuse to "come out" and celebrate his sexuality. In an article in *Robbar*, referring to the cosmetic regime (abdominoplasty and laser treatment), he undertook to get into the "skin" of the character, Ghosh wrote:

> My friends used to make fun of me: he is using the film as an excuse to satisfy his personal vanity of decking himself up. I failed to explain to them that I do not need the pretext of a film to gratify my personal vanity; my wish itself is sufficient.[20] (translation mine)

However, although Ghosh has never been mendacious about his sexuality; that is, he has not made any conscious attempt to hide it, and he has never been very outspoken about it either. Perhaps, in one episode of *Ghosh & Company*, a chat-show, he hosted on a popular Bengali channel, he became the most vocal about it, while castigating Mir, a Bengali stand-up comic, who had presumably gone a bit too far in mimicking Ghosh's mannerisms. *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* gave him the license to shed all his inhibitions, and he entered into a no-holds-barred discussion of his sexuality in the media:

> There's always been a lot of speculation about me on approaching femininity...whether I am going in for a sex change or breast augmentation. All kinds of speculation. But I was never embarrassed. If I want to change my identity by changing my sex, I would be the first person to let the world know about my new identity. I consider myself privileged because of my gender fluidity, the fact that I am in-between.[21]

The clothes he has always sported are never strictly masculine. In fact, he had made fashionable the *uttariya* as a desirable accessory to be worn with long *kurta*s amongst Bengali men. The feminine edge he brought to men's clothing was passed off as a mere fashion statement initially, but the political implication of this negligible transgression was felt by many. Initially, however, Ghosh claimed that he was merely reviving an ancient tradition in which jewellery and the *uttariya* were integral to the male attire. His danglers, trimmed eyebrows, kohl-lined eyes, lipstick

and over-the-top make-up drew many a frown from the conservative Bengalis. The cultural icon that Ghosh had already become by then, his appearing in feminine attire disconcerted many. The educated upper/middle class Bengali who had long back abandoned the theatre and could never stop being nostalgic about the last matinee idol of Tollywood Uttam Kumar and the internationally acclaimed Satyajit Ray, had found in Rituparno Ghosh a messiah who, if not revolutionized, at least brought back to Bengali cinema its lost glory. Therefore, the visible transgression in his dress-code shocked the hetero-normative Bengalis, many of whom found it outrageous and embarrassing. In fact, he appeared "unreal" to them. In this connection, one cannot help recall Butler: 'Those who are deemed "unreal" nevertheless lay hold of the real, a laying hold that happens in concert, and a vital instability is produced by that performative surprise.'[22]

But, Ghosh does not yield to populist sentiments. Contrarily, he sticks to it despite being aware of the disapproval his feminine raiment draws, almost revelling in it, long after the *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* controversy has subsided. Actually, his cross-dressing in public is not merely a publicity stunt, but an articulation of his sexuality in unambiguous terms. Ghosh is not particularly favourite in the LGBTQ community of Kolkata; in fact, he was bombarded with several hate-mails from the members of the community after the release of *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo*. But, Ghosh's cross-dressing in public is undeniably an important cultural sign that exposes the conservative Bengali to the sites of sexual fluidity. In other words, Ghosh, in a way, has brought discussions about queerness out of the closet of seminars and conferences to the Bengali upper/middle class living room. On the other hand, the very name Rituparno Ghosh has acquired the dimension of a brand epithet for men often humiliated in public for their effeminacy. A queer activist of Kolkata writes:

> I feel like asking whether that name apart from becoming a cultural icon of the feminine man is also standing-in for something else for the Bengalis. Is this name (which among many other things is also a brand of sorts for gendered performativity), unwittingly, carving out a comfort zone for the

middle/upper class Bengalis? Is this name nothing but a sanitized version of such offensive terms as "ladies", *boudi*, *sakhi* (and more recently and increasingly "homo")...by which the Bengali *bhadrolok* has always abused his effeminate classmate mauling the latter's self-confidence, his self-respect?[23] (translation mine)

While it is true that Ghosh's articulation of his sexuality has worked in favour of bringing into mainstream the queer subculture, it is problematic that he has come to represent the quintessential "gay" man in the Bengali upper/middle class consciousness. As stated above, queer politics has now a sophisticated taxonomy which seeks to address the immense complexities associated with sexual identities, and any term-sensitive person would certainly object to Ghosh being called a "gay". It is not only difficult to categorize a person in terms of his/her sexuality but also perplexing to recognize how each identity exceeds a category. Therefore, the initially satisfying acronym LGBT is eternally extended with new terms being inserted into it; and not only diverse sexual identities, these terms are saddled with local cultural histories of sexuality and justifiably so.[24] As it is often said, "There is no monolithic homosexuality; there are only homosexualities."[25]

Therefore, the image of the "gay" man that Rituparno Ghosh has etched out in the layman's psyche is essentialist and, therefore, erroneous. Ghosh can do nothing about it of course, for he has complete freedom to express his sexuality his way. Although Ghosh time and again emphasizes his androgyny, rather than homosexuality, in the popular imagination "gayness" is instinctively associated with Ghosh's disposition. An equally powerful cultural icon is now necessary to debunk the myth that all homosexual men are effeminate and all homosexual men cross-dress. Besides, transvestism and homosexuality *cannot* be rendered synonymous:

The conflation of "transvestite" with "gay and lesbian" is itself a matter of historical contingency, a matter of the moment in which we–or some of us–now find ourselves. There have been historical moments in the West, as well as the Far East, the Near East, Africa, and elsewhere, in which the matter of sexual orientation has had little or nothing to do with transvestite

representation, and vice versa. Indeed, as Foucault and others have argued, the very concept of "sexual orientation" as a self-definition is relatively recent and local vintage. Nevertheless, the history of transvestism and the history of homosexuality constantly intersect and intertwine...They cannot simply be disentangled. But what is also clear is that neither can simply be transhistorically "decoded" a sign of the other.[26]

Like most of India, Bengal too has suddenly awakened to the awareness of sexual ambivalence with a jolt. Their life-long understanding of a man-woman relationship has suffered a serious blow. *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* and Rituparno Ghosh are, at this moment, the most popular cultural references that have introduced them to the hitherto hidden world of alternative sexualities. In fact, the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2009 did not create as much stir in the Bengali social scene as did *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* and its lead actor. (*Memories in March*, released in April 2011, dealing with a same-sex relationship again had Ghosh in the lead.) It is, therefore, quite natural that the average Bengali's appreciation (or deprecation) of alternative sexualities would be largely contingent upon the film and by default the Rituparno Ghosh phenomenon, so to speak. The "queer" stereotype that the film has generated is essentialist. It is high time that this *Ārekti Premer Gôlpo* syndrome, as I choose to call it, is dismantled before the image of the "gay" man that it has floated, becomes indelibly impressed upon the collective imagination of India.

NOTES

1. 'Nandan frowns on gay love story', *The Telegraph*, accessed 20 December 2010, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1101220/jsp/calcutta/story_13323403.jsp. 30 August 2011.
2. Ibid.
3. Chatterjee, Niladri R. '"Now I'm Chapal Rani:" Chapal Bhaduri's Hyperformative Female Impersonation', *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 22 (October 2009), accessed on 1 September 2011, http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue22/chatterjee.html. 19 August 2011.
4. Foucault, Michel. 1975. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, second edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1995),

p. 190.

5. Cressy, David. 'Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England', *The Journal of British Studies* 35.2 (October 1996), p. 440.
6. Foucault, Michel. 1976. *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 59.
7. I have borrowed the term "queer liberalism" from David L. Eng's essay 'Freedom and the Racialization of Intimancy: *Lawrence v. Texas* and the Emergence of Queer Liberalism'. Eng studies the remarkable impact of the June 2003 Supreme Court decision *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down Texas' statute that had labeled same-sex sodomy unconstitutional. Eng identifies political and economic spheres that formed the basis for 'liberal inclusion' of the queer, post *Lawrence v. Texas*: '...the merging of an increasingly visible and mass-mediated queer consumer lifestyle (emerging post-Stonewall and ascendant during the 1980s and 1990s) with recent juridical protections for gay and lesbian rights to privacy and intimacy established by the *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling as well as Massachusetts' legalizing of same-sex marriage in the same year' (40). Although Eng is examining a specific American context, his idea of queer liberalism may be applied to India as well. The reading down of Article 377, the emergence of the open market that identifies the queer as a potential consumer and the increasing visibility of queer people conscious of their rights, particularly in the metropolis´ all mark a historical moment of queer liberalism.
8. Altman, Dennis. 'On Global Queering', *Australian Humanities Review* (July 1996), accessed on 12 September 2011, http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-1996/altman.html. 24 August 2011.
9. Virdi, Jyotika. 2007. *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black. p. 201.
10. Eng, David L. 2007. 'Freedom and the Racialization of Intimacy: *Lawrence v. Texas* and the Emergence of Queer Liberalism', *A Companion to LGBTQ Studies*, eds. G. E. Haggerty and M. McGarry (Malden: Blackwell. p. 43.
11. Chatterjee, '"Now I'm Chapal Rani": Chapal Bhaduri's Hyperformative Female Impersonation'.
12. Ibid.
13. Sedinger, Tracy. '"If Sight and Shape be True": The Epistemology of Cross-dressing on the London Stage'. *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.1 (Spring 1997), p. 69.
14. The formation of queer communities is but a recent social phenomenon. The revolution in information technology and the proliferation of countless social-networking sites have worked in its favour. Both real and virtual queer communities have emerged across

the globe. Although Bhaduri might have felt a sense of 'togetherness' with his fellow female impersonators, queer communities with clear political agendas were non-existent, at least in Bhaduri's immediate surroundings, at that time.

15. Ibid.
16. See Bhaduri's interview with Niladri R Chatterjee, '*I somehow think I'm Ardhnarishwar*: An Interview with Chapal Bhaduri', RADIX 2011 (46th Annual Reunion) Dept. of English, University of Kalyani, pp. 17-23. In a very candid conversation, Bhaduri not only talks about his sexuality and acting career, but also recalls interesting anecdotes that are unwitting insightful commentaries on the behind-the-scenes politics of Bengali folk-theatre.
17. Please note, although the official subtitle of the film has *Banamùlù* translated as 'Gardener Divine', the lexical meaning of *Banamùlù* is 'someone who wears a garland of wild flowers'.
18. Garber, Marjorie. 1992. *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety.* New York and London: Routledge. p. 16.
19. Ibid., p. 17.
20. Ghosh, Rituparno. 2010. 'Putulkhelar Itikatha', *Robbar*, December 19. p. 8.
21. Ghosh, Rituparno. 2010. 'Interview with Reshmi Sengupta', *T2, The Telegraph*, December 22. p. 8.
21. Butler, Judith. 1990. 'Preface' (1999) to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge. p. xxvi.
22. Hazra, Anindya. 2011. 'Amra Rituparnora', *Prakashye: Prosongo Jounota.* p. 6.
23. Local terms such as *kothi*, *hijra*, *panthi*, *chapati*, *do-paratha*, etc have been inserted in the global acronym LGBT in order to challenge universalizing tropes of sexual identities. The political reclaiming of such local terms (which are also used as terms of abuse) has problematized the very concept of identity.
24. Merchant, Hoshang. 2009. *Forbidden Sex, Forbidden Texts: New India's Gay Poets.* Abingdon: Routledge. p. xx.
25. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, p. 131.

Crossing Temporal Space for Disclosing One's Sexual Identity: A Psychoanalytical Study of *Memories in March*

HIMADRI ROY

ÖWhat did Ravi Humbe get by becoming my father's *chamcha*? To make me forget Siddharth, my father took me to a *tantrik* who gave me electric shocks. They were so painful. How my own people be so cruel? Even my beloved mother and sister did not stop them. (Rao, 2010, 204)

The pangs of a gay in this country, where legality of their existence doesn't matter to anyone, neither to the family nor to the society, is explicitly established in these lines from R. Raj Rao's novel, *Hostel Room 131* (2010). Probably that's why the gays have been living a life in a closet where at least they have a space and freedom for what they seek for. That is far from the world of harsh realities, despite the Delhi High Court's decision on Section 377[*] was delivered in their favour. They constantly confront the traditional heteronormative psychoanalytic notion of definition and opposition from all spheres of life. The stereotypical conceptions, sexual orthodoxy and the banal criticism are disdainfully pervasive in the heterosexual set-up of this country.

It is often observed that a hierarchy of sexual values and sexual power is categorized in terms of sexual hegemony and the understanding of this phenomenon of sexual space. In this categorization, discretion and discrimination are often compulsively forced upon the gay people. It is not only that

[1]Section 377. Unnatural Offences—"Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine."

differences are on the basis of sexual space, but also in terms of psychological one. Unfortunately, in such a discrepant world, coming thus out for a gay in this country becomes a traumatic affair of pressures from family to relatives, friends to colleagues and from all other spheres of society. A gay always lives a terrorized life under such hostile circumstances.

In some cases, if the gay child comes out to his/her parents, they promptly drag him/her to a psychiatrist for medical help, where some extreme cases are given electric shocks. This is amply evident from the articles that featured in English daily newspapers. In a national English newspaper, Shara Ashraf, a reporter from the *Hindustan Times*, carried out an article on the front page about the homophobic attitude of the Indian parents. This article quantifies the trauma of a gay who has come out to his family. At the very outset, the family calls out, *"Give him electric shock or cut open his brain but make my son straight."* This article also carried the psychiatrist's report: Dr Pulkit Sharma, a clinical psychiatrist with VIMHANS (Vidyasagar institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences) of New Delhi, said to the media that a chartered accountant got her son along hoping to cure him through shocks or surgery. They were upset when I explained that nothing could be done about one's sexual orientation.

Supporting Dr Sharma's view, Sandeep Vohra, from Apollo Hospital in New Delhi, commented: *"The richer and more educated the parents, the more difficult it is for them to accept a gay child. They experience guilt and shame that often turns into hatred for the child."*

Some of the cases, as reported in media, signify the fact that if the child has come out as a gay man, he has to face the turbulence for his sexual orientation. Just imagine the gravity of the situation as these cases are reported after the historical Delhi High Court Judgment on 2 July 2009.

Conversely, in case the child does not come out and remains rather a closeted gay, he prefers the "protective sanctity of the closet" (Sedgwick, 2008, 56) because he is pretty aware of the banal fact of marginalization and stigmatization by the intolerant homophobic society. In some cases, the family even without knowing the truth sets up a hetero-normative marriage for him.

He helplessly succumbs to such orthodoxies but restructures his existence with conscious tact for a dual identity of pretensions—apparently he acts straight but under the veil enjoys the freedom of his gay sexual orientation. For instance, to pick gays from cruising areas, like specific public parks or restrooms is shocking, especially after the judgment. But today after facebook.com and other social networking sites were created, a neo-liberal characteristic is germinated. The cruising world has become virtual through special social networking sites that catered to only gays and bisexuals. Cyberspace took over the physical space and the restrictions of specificity and precision became more flexible for cruising. The cyberspace could not perish the boundaries of closeted world of the gays.

Although, the gays who have accounts on the cyber world could not reveal their real, physical identity as the sense of fear of disclosure still enveloped their minds while cruising in the cyberspace. For him, the compartmentalization of his dual existence is so rigid that he consciously puts effort to never abdicate his dual responsibility (Rasmussen, 2004, 146). But, in some cases, if this married gay fails to balance his dual existence, a divorce becomes an inevitable consequence, and consequently he remains tarnished in a recluse or ostracized existence. He psychologically keeps cursing his sexual orientation as it degraded not only him, but also his family. Such stigmatization can be fatal sometimes. According to psychiatrist, Dr Aadesh Srivastava, Apollo Hospital, says, *"LGBT people are living in fear, and most vulnerable of them have become suicidal"* (Ashraf, 2012, 6).

In such a terrorized world of gays, they indulge in all essential liberty they want to enjoy within the compartmentalized structure of their individual space. They have sexual fantasies and desires like any human being. One such desire is to get intimate with the male heroes of the Bollywood in all possible ways—from a passionate lip-locking to love-making in all postures. They relish these unrealities with such emotions as at certain times they fall in love with them. Such clandestine unrealistic affairs exist in almost every closeted gay's life and they begin to convert this unreality to a reality, from the Bollywood hero to a hero in the

immediate society. The gay world in this country exists in such enclosed space where no other enters unless the person possesses the same sexual attributes. Henceforth, one can understand why the depiction of gays on the silver screen could not have been possible so overtly.

The mainstream Bollywood filmdom has, for ages, portrayed all sorts of emotions one can think about in utter perfection. From a regal mother to a poor destitute mother, from a harsh mother-in-law to a caring sister-in-law, from a treacherous betrayer to a horrendous villain, from a loving step-brother to a loathing brother, everything is done with perfection par excellence. Amidst all this emotional exuberance, the innate hidden emotions of a gay's life didn't become the main plot of any films until lately. Such reality of emotions and feelings get lost somewhere in the heterosexist expectation of an expected hetero-life that everybody is compelled to live in this country. The existence of the hetero-normative psychology is as much a truth as the psychology of the gay world. Regretting *about not having enough space in* such a big commercial world where the gays were never be portrayed with seriousness is what gays can only demand to be portrayed in the true colours. One can say that the history of portrayal of male gays developed after the liberalization and globalization came to this country and when NGOs mushroomed in the country dealing with sexual health and MSM (Male-having-Sex-with-Male). With the boost in political economy, films dedicated to such gays came into existence. The first ever break in the film history of Bollywood came in the period of liberalization when *BomGay,* directed by Riyad Vinci Wadia, was released in 1996. He strongly realized that he *"had a story that needed to be told cinematically"* (Wadia, 2000, 316) and made the movie. But, he decided not to submit it to the Censor Board at all, because he was aware the film might be banned. The queer film theorist, Thomas Waugh, points out that the expository captions claims to a certain model of the same-sex identification. The filmpads, both literally and symbolically, states the dubious facticity about the Indian gay men as socio-psychic personae (Waugh, 2000, 1-4). Wadia decided wisely to screen his film only in queer festivals and special

screenings. The film is a collection of cinematic adaptations and embellishments of six-short poems by R. Raj Rao. Later in 1998, a mainstream Bollywood film *Bombay Boys* depicting gay protagonists was released by the censor board with an A certificate. Kaizad Gustad, the director, portrays the best shot to show the closeted world and its clichÈd surrounding of inhibitions in a heterosexual set-up. Several films gradually picked up the issue of gays both sensibly and sensitively. They came from Onir, Madhur Bhandarkar, and some others. However, none of them dealt with "coming out" of a gay in the Bollywood mainstream cinema.

Recently released in 2011, *Memories in March,* depicts this psychological battle of coming out to a mother after death. The accidental death of a 28-year-old son, Siddharth Mishra alias Babu, compels the mother, Aarti Mishra, played by Deepti Naval, to come across such incidental memories as unveil the real sexual identity of her son. On the very onset, she depicts a sense of denial of the blatant fact of the gay status of her son, but gradually, as the movie moves ahead frame after frame, she accepts the harsh fact of her son's sexual identity. *Memories in March* tries to portray this conquering of togetherness through emotional bondage and sentimental affinity between the characters of the movie in search of the sexual identity. In fact, the film considers lots of issues related to coming out, that is when is the right time for a gay to come out to his family? What can be the repercussions of an acceptance or denial? This paper will deal with these themes with respect to the film where the usage of three languages is pivotal, that is Bangla, English and Hindi.

The film begins with the unveiling of the news of Siddharth's death in a car accident on 18 March after the award ceremony of his organization. A single child of a divorcee, economically independent mother, who is an art curator based in Delhi, he was a copywriter in an ad agency in Kolkata. Very thoughtfully, Siddharth is not portrayed throughout the film, not even his photograph, except few glances of his body while taking him to the hospital after the accident. But, the director, Sanjoy Nag, very aesthetically lets him be the narrator, voice-over done by

Dhruv Mukherjee, talking to his mother, who with love calls him Babu. This form of interaction between Babu and Aarti depicts the pure emotional bondage of a typical Indian mother and son. Like the Freudian philosophy of bondage, this affinity of sharing every feeling of a son is very relevant in any Indian family. Although staying in two different cities, far apart from each other, there seems to occur an everyday conversation between Babu and his mother, either through emails or sms-es and phone calls. The strength of the emotional bondage seems so strong that even the distance fails to keep the two beings apart. In fact, in one of the frames, Aarti opens the door of the refrigerator for the first time and notices one egg on the tray. The message, *"Caution* (capitalized and underlined) *Last Piece"* written upon the shell significantly suggests that Siddharth is the only son she has now and however hard she tried, she can never have another child. The semiotic of the white colour of the egg signifies the purity of the sentimental attachment of the two souls. The hard shell (the mother) keeps protecting the embryo (the son) from all kinds of calamities. In the other reality, any mother, when the child is in the womb, does her level best to protect her child. Even after the child is out of the womb, the mother creates an aura of protection; this germinates a sense of security in the child. At the beginning the bondage remains mere physical one, but as time unfolds this mere physical bondage becomes so much of emotional and psychological that any child feels always secure in her presence. This maternal affection for the child is exactly like the albumen which keeps the yolk or the embryo secured. The bondage between Siddharth and his mother has been very well portrayed through this representation of an egg.

The purity of the bondage of the mother and son is further elaborated and depicted with finesse in several scenes. For instance, Aarti imagining about how cold death could be, as she opens the freezer and notices the ice, and his absence was felt by her through the resonance of the descriptions of the place via the emails that her son sent him regularly, or even the scene where she comes to know that her Babu was wearing blue suit and caresses the railings of the divider of the road to feel the last

touch of her son. These small but significant bits of reminiscence make one more vulnerable and the memories attached to the person become more excruciatingly painful, symbolising the pain of loss and separation and reflecting the affectionate love.

In such a delicate relationship, where vulnerability of psycho-emotional space is so strong despite distance, son's coming out of the closet to his mother has to be done very carefully in a cinematic medium. Rituporno Ghosh crafted the script in such a way that the revelation of Babu's sexual orientation doesn't unfold for a long duration until the intermission of the film. Instead it gets revealed in an indirect manner through few artefacts, like the framed painting of a male torso with a towel wrapped below the nave. The painting was hanging at the back inside the backroom, hidden behind a house-coat. The other is the Picasso painting (1952) of War and Peace in the bedroom showing the turbulence and tranquillity of the Babu or narrator's psyche, and the last one is the quotation—*Ekoda ek kak kokil shajilo* (Once a crow decked as the cuckoo)—pinned upon the soft board at his desk in the advertising agency where he worked depicting the projections of a fake identity and pretensions reflecting that a closeted gay had to always hide his truth from the whole world. But, such semiotic representations of the significant signifiers of sexuality might remain unnoticeable from the spectator's gaze, which is adapted to vehement and explicit conversations. And, probably this might be the reason that the movie couldn't be appreciated by the popular mass. Despite the unsuccessful commercial venture, the film deals with the intrinsic and emotional theme and uses tropes and few frames to establish the point more intelligently.

The scene of coming out to the mother remains pivotal in the movie. As Aarti goes to collect Babu's belongings from his office, the conversation between her and the creative director of the company, Ornob (played by Rituporno Ghosh) turns out in such a way that the mother feels insulted because she considers that it is her *basic right* to take her own son's personal belongings. She leaves the office, and Shahana Choudhury, the art director of Babu's team (played by Raima Sen) follows her. The mother

bursts with her anger due to the insult she confronts in her son's professional space and she feels a sense of denial for not being able to acquire some material objects of her son's. Sahana tries to apologize on Ornob's behalf but the hurt mother refuses to accept it. At this juncture, Shahana is compelled to reveal that Sid (Siddharth) and Ornob shared a special relationship, which Aarti questions through her painful delivery of dialogue, *"Can't be more special than a mother and son's?"* Right here Sahana reveals the truth of the love between Siddharth and Ornob. The mother gets shocked and sits down on the staircase. The cinematographer, Soumik Haldar, does a skilful work here, focusing the camera over a long shot; the designers, Ananda Addhya and Sabarni Das, make it perfect by giving the subtle tinge of travails with the complexity of wooden art of feudal outlook to the staircase and the light falling from the window at the mezzanine of the stairs. All this gives it the desired meaning of the entrapment of pains and a sense of devastation. But, it also simultaneously unveils the ray of hope through the symbolic light of the window whereby these troubles and travails might subside. Divyajoti Misra provides the perfect score of an elevator moving upwards that narrates the temporal space of existence crossing the thin lines of life and death in its movement up the different floors. The director very craftily uses an intermission break here. The incidents that follow show the "fear of rejection" and dilute the sense of integrity and dissolute family ties (Morrow, 2008, 54).

Few frames and the narratology of the film are creatively done in sequences. Here, descriptions of few sequences deal with the disclosure of one's sexuality. In one frame, we see Ornob and Aarti conversing about several things, that is why Ornob seduced her son, the dispersal of material possessions and the psychiatric treatment to change one's sexuality. Aarti charges Ornob of picking up her son amidst so many people, her son is no hunk, or muscle-builder. The hetero-normative society always perceives that amongst gays there is one penetrator and another penetrated, and the penetrator has to be muscular and 'hunk' proving the depiction of masculinity as more of physical power and strength. David Gauntlett adds to this saying that representations of

machismo men are more "attractive" and "epitome of perfection" (2008, 87-88).

About the scene of the dispersal of material possessions, Babu has an aquarium at his residence. Aarti wants to give it to Ornob as it will be cumbersome to take it back to Delhi. Ornob at once refuses, and says that he hates "*life being caged, caging everyone*," and suggestively resolves that everyone should be set free, "*let them be what they are,"* although later he accepts it as Siddharth loved the fishes. Here the film tries to provide every living being the personal spaces of their natural existence, like fish should be in water and not caged. Similarly, a gay should be like a gay and why live pretentiously and carry double identities. More subtly, the director adds that one should not keep oneself closeted and always live a terrorized life of pretensions. Instead, Sanjoy Nag canonizes the liberty and freedom of providing spatial existence amidst the orthodoxy and staunch traditions through the symbol of fishes in an aquarium (Hanson, 1999, 6-7).

In another frame, Aarti suggests that if Babu was alive, he could have been taken for psychiatric treatment; it echoes the words of Rao in *Hostel Room 131* (2010). In response, Ornob asks her, *"What is more unacceptable to you that he is no more or he is gay?"* Ornob doesn't feel satisfied with the answer and suggests that Aarti should herself go for psychiatric counselling. Here the director tries to communicate that one should be more tolerant and try to understand and provide psychological spaces in relationships so that every individual can breathe freely and doesn't feel claustrophobic in emotional bondages, especially in that of a mother or parents per se and their child. Similarly, before these, after the intermission of the film, when Sahana and Aarti are discussing Sahana's crush on Siddharth at one point, Aarti calls her and says she has found a packet of condoms and she is not accepting her Babu to be what they claim. There, too, Sahana suggests her to mature and grow with the flow of the society, and not to live with clichÈd norms and prejudices. One should come out of such conventional structures and accommodate the spatial structure into more psychological and emotional spaces. The hetero-normative society has always

forgone such spaces and presumed that medical aid of psychiatry could change the sexuality of a person. Such pre-conceived notion is already defined in the beginning of the paper.

But, the scene where the ashes of the dead son's pot breaks into pieces and the ashes are shown being washed away by the rainwater can be considered as the climax of the central theme. It implies two aspects—the sense of acceptance of the mother about her son's sexuality and the disclosure of a gay son being accepted by mother Nature who encloses him in the conglomeration of death, which is merely a phenomenon of describing mortality. Human beings die but memories of them do remain in the epitaph of inter-relationship that one individual shares with others. Death probably brings one closer to the people who cared for him despite what gender and sexuality one belonged to.

Now, at last, the question arises: Is there any time for disclosing one's sexuality? In *Memories in March*, it is after the death that the mother becomes aware of her only son's feelings through his cell-phone where he writes the feelings of his heart but could never muster the courage to send the sms to her. Aarti is seen behaving maturely and with more tolerance and resilience after coming to know about her son. But, this doesn't justify the perfect situation for any gay son coming out to his family in this country. Ramona F. Oswald suggests that choosing a kin in the family tree is the best way of disclosing one's sexual identity (Oswald, 2002, 375). Deana Morrow argues that there cannot be any generalization of coming out of a gay, it varies from individual to individual, from family to family, from society to society. In one gay man's life, may be the best way is choosing a kin, but it might not be the same with another gay and probably this film brings such a paradoxical situation to light where the coming out happens after crossing the temporal space of existence.

Now the fact is whether the gay son is accepted or not. The acceptance may not happen at once, as we saw Aarti is unable to accept her gay son immediately. However, with sequential changes of structure, which help Aarti to understand her son better, she realizes the blatant truth and accepts her son who left small bits

of his life's memories in Ornob and Sahana. The film might in overall have an under-toning emotional portrayal and less of glitzy or bright usage of tinges and hues, but these two traits of the film make the cinematic medium the best way to deal with such a theme by avoiding "being melodramatic" and too much "filmy". Usually, the mainstream Bollywood cinema has the "masala" stuff filled in for their commercial success, including hit and 'dhin-chak' or foot-tapping music. In that case too, the film stands apart as the scores of Dibyajyoti Misra are subtle yet sentimental, sensitive yet semi-classical, and all are used as background music to depict the exactitude of feelings one undergoes when such a traumatic turbulence attacks one's life-death of the closest person. In the realization of the sentimental affinity of Siddharth and his lover, Ornob, Sanjoy Nag gives the pinnacle of travails to Ornob who has no refuge, except shifting between emotional compartments because he is enclosed in "a huge ball of grief," whereas Aarti has two places of a child's emotion to harbour herself, that is one of coming to terms with him not being there anymore and the other is she not being able to accept the fact of her son being a gay. But, with the gradual development of the emotional bondage, she before the end accepts her son.

Here, the temporal space amalgamates with the death of a being, making his spatial existence as non-formity. *Memories in March* does deal with the fact of an individual's mortal existence in two different categories of one physical and the other psychological. The film, in fact, proves that psychological spaces of any individual's existence remain intact and firm, whereas the mere physical spaces corroborate with the temporal space of life and death. It also proves another basic philosophy of death that is prevalent in India–Rising. *Katha Upanishad*, where the story of Nachiketa and Yama, the god of Death, points out clearly that one enlivens an eternity and immortality through death as one engraves one's interaction with others and leaves a certain psychological space in others' minds. These metaphysical spaces and mind essentialism are described intrinsically by Luper in his *The Philosophy of Death* (Luper, 2009, 6). He explains how death

becomes transition of existence to non-existence of Epicurean physical existence. But, the essence of the person becomes important for the bondage being shared with inter-dependence of the being with every individual in life. In case of Siddharth Misra's essential existence, he crosses the temporal space to enliven his real and true identity, especially to his mother. When his mother visits Kolkata and comes across the two most important persons in her son's life, Sahana and Ornob, one as a Samaritan and confidante, and the other as a lover. Siddharth had dreamt to be together with his mother and Ornob as a family, nevertheless the limitation of hetero-normative orthodoxy and traditions prohibited him to do so, but he overcomes it through his death. And, his dream of Ornob being accepted as a family by his mother turns out a reality at the climax of the movie. Thus, more than coming out of the closet, the film is about acceptance.

Memories in March stands apart from other gay films produced in this country. It explores those plethora of emotions of life that mainstream cinema has always neglected. It deals with the right time of coming out for a gay, and also deals with the prejudices against, and stigmatization of being, a gay in this country. Looking for the right time and right atmosphere may appear whenever circumstances prevail for the individual to disclose his sexual identity. But for some, the right moment may never come, for such a person's disclosure can only be possible as with crossing the line of life to death, as it happens for Siddharth in this film. The different perspective of coming out, in fact, makes *Memories in March* a unique display of gay's emotions. According to the queer film theorist, Vito Russo, social inclusion of gays becomes visible through cinematic medium, may be juxtaposed with real life. Henceforth, death becomes an alternative truth for social inclusion of gays.

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SECTION II

Gay/Lesbians: Biography and Literature

Why my Books are Grass, not Trees: Re-reading my Work with Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus:* Capitalism and Schizophrenia

HOSHANG MERCHANT

Foucault, the founding-father of sexuality-discourse dealt with Power. Deleuze and I, both sons, push power into Desire, through *A Thousand Plateaus*. It is a study of Capitalism and Schizophrenia, capitalist fathers breeding homosexual sons. Freud deals with roots, causes, strata. Deleuze deals with the rhizome, all 'lines of flight', with multiplicity, different positioning of material, assemblages. Therefore, my books of a son, written against the father; against capitalism are not trees but grass. That is, they deal not in hierarchies but in assemblages. They seek to escape dialectics.

My books are *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* (Delhi: Penguin, 1979), republished 10 years later as *Gay Writing from South Asia* by the same publisher; *Indian Homosexuality* (Delhi: Allied, 2008) which is about gay history or a re-writing of India's history in light of gay discovery, *Forbidden Sex/Text* (London: Routledge, 2009) which is gay criticism and my Autobiographical Fiction, *The Man Who Would Be Queen* (Delhi: Penguin, 2012), written continuously as an assemblage over 30 years from 1979 in Tehran to 2007 in Hyderabad encompassing my life in Bombay, the US, the Middle East and the Deccan.

The rhizome is defined thus:

Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome (i.e. grass) connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same

nature, it brings into play very different regimes of signs (or non-signs). The rhizome is reducible neither to the one nor the multipleÖ It is composed not out of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills. (p. 21)

So what I was doing in my autobiography was that I was not only writing fiction but I was also un-consciously writing a post-modern text without having explicitly studied post-modernism because I had lived a post-modern life in gay America in the 1970s. And this is the crux of Deleuze's criticism of psychoanalysis:

We are criticizing psychoanalysis, for having used Oedipal enunciation to make patients believe they would produce individual, personal statements, and would finally speak in their own nameÖ at the very moment the subject is persuaded that he or she will be uttering the most individual of statements, he or she is deprived of all basis of enunciation. (p. 38)

Psychoanalysis is looking for an absolute coherence, an absolute subject, an individual to diagnose. It fails to understand the social, dialogic relations that produce individual voices. Consequently, dissatisfied even with Gastalt Therapy, I wrote an autobiography under Mulk Raj Anand's promptings so that the underpinnings of any lyrics would be apparent to my conscious self.

Of course I went to the philosophers. But as Deleuze would have it, I took them from behind (i.e. constructed a willful 'mis-prison' around them). Here is Deleuze:

The main way I coped with [it] was to see the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous because it resulted from shifting, slipping, dislocations, hidden, emissions. (*Negotiations*, p. 6)

Nietzsche comes in from this kind of treatment at the beginning and at the end (of the Iran chapter) in my *Autobiography.* I begin with an epigraph from *Zarathustra:*

Do you wish to go naked before your friend?
He who goes naked before another inspires anger in others.

And, at the end I quote poor Nietzsche, again, dreaming love of man and god in defeat:

Everything is chance but the Friend
bestows upon a friend, a complete world.

My meanings or willful misinterpretations may not be Nietzsche's original meanings but on these pages I hung then my tattered life. It allowed me to go on.

As Deleuze says in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

> We'll do a sequel because we like working togetherÖ Not that we just want to play at being mad, but we'll go mad in our own way and in our own time, we won't be pushed into itÖ We're going to stop compromising, because we don't need to anymore. And we'll always find the allies we want, or who want us. (p. 9)

I won't lie about my autobiography's rhizomatic nature. There is definite progression in the book, and the conclusion is a genuine one—as in *A Thousand Plateaus*, indeed—but that progression is obscured and each part of the book (in 3 parts) refers to concepts developed in other parts or in previous scholarship. Deleuze and Guattari, say about their first book *Anti-Oedipus*:

> There are two ways of reading a book: you either see it as a box with something inside and start looking for it. Or, you see a little non-signifying machine and you ask : "Does it work? And how does it work?" (*Negotiations*, p. 8)

As Deleuze says in the second chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, 'Multiplicity is a way to escape dialectics'. We forget coherence, dialectical syntheses. Multiplicities can be arborescent (trees), that is macro, extensive, divisible, molar, unifiable, totalizable, organizable, conscious, preconscious. Or, they can be rhizomatic (grass): libidinal, unconscious, molecular, intensive, "composed

of particles", distances that continuously construct and dismantle themselves in the course of their communication." Rhizomatic multiplicities' motions are Brownian, "their quantities are intensities, differences in intensity". (p. 33)

In other words, from the world of the Fathers to The World of the Sons; from the World of Dickens and Austen and by extension that of Seth, Ghosh, Mistri to that of R. Raj Rao, Agha Shahid Ali and Hoshang Merchant.

In Chapter IV, "The Postulates of Linguistics', Deleuze writes, most lucidly:

> Direct discourse is a detached fragment of a man and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage; [which] is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices from which I draw my voice. (p. 48)

This sounds like Bakhtin's 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' (deterritorializing) forces, the latter carrying away things into other assemblages. The first axis sounds like what Bakhtin calls 'dialogue'. This is Sanskrit infected by Prakrit, Indian gay writing in English infected by Bhasha. In a word, Yaraana!

Tools exist only in inter-relationship they make possible. Stirrup = Men + Horse. Man + Language (tool) = Society. That is, nature is made into culture. Sex into Love, Shringara into Bhakti, the Wild into the Garden, the amorphous life-experience into the New World Poem, Sex turns to text. This is the crux of my *Forbidden Sex/Text* (London: Routledge, 2009).

Deleuze distinguishes between internal pragmatics (linguistic) and external pragmatics (non-linguistic). We understand pragmatics to be super-linear rather than in a fixed-linear order, and rhizomatic understanding is an inter-penetration of language, society, politics (p. 91); a symmetrical understanding of the world, as I try it in my autobiography.

In Chapter V, very productive for my self-understanding of my own work, (done intuitively under a lucky star of the post-modern Zeitgeist), Guattari explains the 'Several Regimes of Signs':

(a) Index : Territorialise
(b) Icons : Re-territorialise
(c) Symbols : De-territorialise

They form a circle, as a continuum by shadowing each other in a network. This prompts paranoia and conspiracy theories which look for a master-sign that determines all signs. (Gay and straight paranoia have the same root). But the feat is, there is NO CENTRE, (no face, no faciality), only multiplicity. Christianity gives us Christ's face, we are in a post-Christian, even un-Christian world.

Signs can be pre-signifying: Like hunter nomads these signs live in plurality (without tyranny of nation-states); that is my autobiographical childhood; the infancy of my writing in *Yaraana* where I make a bouquet (one of the original meanings of the term 'anthology') or I scavenge for 'gay' texts in a desert, or work like a hunter-gatherer.

Counter-signifying signs proceed by distribution rather than collection, by breaks, by migration. This is Moses in the Desert, a leader of animal-raising nomads, the second stage from the primary hunter-gatherer. This is Rama's fourteen-year exile, the Hoshang persona of my fiction in America, a wilderness for gay life. The second part of my three-part autobiography; my Indian Gay History; my *Sex/Text* where I batten the text to slay it, devour it.

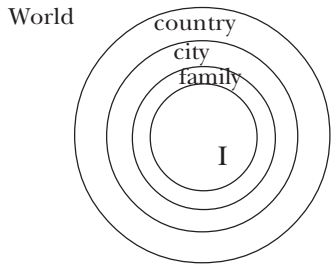
The third kind of function of a sign is post-signifying i.e. relation with the outside world expressed as an emotion (NOT as an idea); this is done more by effort than by imagination. The Hoshang persona chasing Love as a fiction, the boy, Arab or Persian coming face-to-face with the paranoid Pharaoh as a passionate Hebrew. Hoshang as and in the scapegoated Palestine/Israel, the homosexual as scapegoat! There is a natural bond between Palestine and gay writers as I show in my autobiography and as Genet docs in *Prisoner of Love*.

For the record, it must be said that Israelites were war-like nomads who toppled states. No faciality means God (Love) averts

His face; so does Moses. This is living in indefinite postponement of meaning. The *Promised* Land of the Bible is not here yet. This is the never-achieved Romantic quest for the grail meaning. The book becomes the Sacred Book. The Ten Commandments. It is a book, a de-territorialised thing that fixes territory and gene cology *Yaraana* destablises the canon and creates as new (gay) canon. Hoshang is debased or raised as only a gay poet. There be the tribe of Ben and then the tribe of Hoshang, which includes Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Kunal Mukherjee, Kuhu Chanana, Ashley Tellis, Dibyajyoti Sharma and Akshay Rath, a new rizomatic generation!

It is only intensities of Desire that circulate. In the chapter, 'Body Without Organs', we are told that the egg is a zero before organs form. It is not a negative because it has no positive, no opposite. Matter = energy. 'Energy is eternal delight' (Blake). Energy changes when the organ changes gradients, crosses a threshold. Bateson calls this 'double bind'. 'Plateaus gets stratified, becomes alluvious, gets sedimented, folded, coagulated. They could even re-coil. Then immanence becomes a subject; an organism. This is true of individuals and of history. In my history *Indian Homosexuality*, I rewrite history against the grain, see it from bottom up instead of top-down, account for the rejected rather than the elevated, rejectors. Many call this a concocted history, a mis-reading. "There are no facts, only interpretations' (Nietzsche). My 'history', then a 'body without organs' could say, 'They have wrongly folded me/They've stolen my body'! Or to me 'You, Hoshang, have wrongly told me! Body-without-organs is infinitely-postponed-desire in a control-society. It is an organizing principle: Ancient, Medieval/Modern/Post-modern. When will Utopia come? Rustom Bhaurcha tells me a gay Utopia will bring a gay Hitler (as if the historical Hitler wasn't gay enough!)

Chapter VII introduces Faciality as found at the intersection of two axes, viz. significance and subjectificatizes things: the kerchief in the jeans back-pocket, the key-chain in the right/or left trouser pocket, the ear-ring in right or left ear. It also fetishises



communities of lovers, e.g. the urban proletariat for urban upper class, intellectual gays. It fetishizes kinds of writing: Men's valued over women's Brahmins over dalit, straight over gay, masochism (Christ's) over Hedonism (Caligula's) etc. Christ invented the facialisation of the body and spread to sign everywhere. Everything is an accumulator of signs. The gay Marlowe's *Faust*, dragged to Hell by Mephistopheles, sees Christ's eye in Heaven: 'See! See! His blood streams in the firmament.!'

Chapter IX in Segmentarity distinguishes between three types which overlap. First, binary (e.g. Men/Women); second circular e.g.

There is an example of this in literature: Stephen Daedelus makes such a chart at his Clongowes school in *Portrait of the Artist.* And, lastly linear segmentarity is seen in proceedings.

Segmentarity explains PRIMITIVES: without State or politico institutions. Primitive society is based in lineage, territory, i.e. the clan/tribe are supple segments.

Modern society is RIGID: as in a centralized state. This is the difference between micropolitics (lines of flight of homosexual, the artist) and macropolitics (Marxism, the totalized state). It must be said that fascism belongs to the micro-unit, the individual. The state is not fascist as it includes macro-politics, that is molar segments.

FLOW, that is belief, Desire is the basis of all societies. Deleuze and Guattari exemplify the Crusades of Middle Ages Europe as

a connection of flows, not conjugation in which flows encounter stoppage. To recapitulate this segment in segmentarity, the primitive stage is the tribe/the tribe of childish homosexuals dancing in gay clubs, saunas, etc., the second, rigid over-coded stage of the state and heterosexual family; an overcode stage and the line of flight which also involves the war-machine, which de-codes, de-territorialises. Power stops lines of fight. Power involves rigid segments. Power is a consequence, not a cause. Money is power in its de-territorialised flow. Could it be that my autobiography is primitive and my criticism is power, power (of the critic) being a consequence of my life-flows and flights, of trajectories of living? Or, is it that codification in canons and histories is a rigid binding of life-experience in a book set free only in the fiction of *The Man Who Would Be Queen*? As we said before, the three segmentarities overlap.

On Affect, Guattari and Deleuze state that this is NOT a personal feeling but an AFFILIATIVE feeling i.e. social, communal, communistic. This is in the chapter titled 'Becoming-Intense' (X). Becoming is a grafting: of the individual into the body politic. Contagion v/s Heredity. Epidemic vs Filiation. Catholicism is a 'mind-virus' (So is 'homosexual-ism' and 'fascism'). But the Pope calls the priesthood on alternative to biological reproduction. (Buggery in the Catholic boys' schools recall is the opposite of this.) The Jewish authors dare not say this in nominally catholic France but this is my interpolation. They do say becoming is anti-memory (against childhood influences); becoming is rhizomatic (away from rigid class/caste stratification; something allowed by sexual affiliations).

On Genre, Bakhtin is quoted, 'A genre both remembers its past and adapts to new conditions'. Hence the new category of Autobiographical Fiction which I was by no means the first to use. Ages of literature are assemblages. As in the markings of birds or fish, e.g. All literature in the Age of Satire are marked by a 'langue de viper' (a vituperative tongue) I would further queer the pitch by calling the Age of Nin the Age of the Prose-Poem; the Age of Queer Writing, the Age of Fictive Autobiography and so on. (This includes Dalit and women's autobiography).

Nomadology teaches us about the War Machine. War questions hierarchy and is based on alliances. An alliance throws up a leader merely agreeable to the alliance; he may be no hers, at all. War is based on betrayal, of honour. Warriors are 'fundamentally indisciplined'. For years gays were seen as unfit for military service, not because they'd introduce buggery in the barracks but because they had already betrayed family-life by not marrying and by choosing their own kind and so they might also betray their country to the invader. In fact, ALL wars are won not by valour but by betrayal. (The Trojan Horse; the opening of Golconda's gates to Aurangzeb by a so-called 'miracle' of Sufis, come to mind; the inhuman bombing of Nagasaki also.

The War-machine belongs to the primitive. But the state CAPTURES the war machine along with the individuals; their territory. The state precedes material production and it precedes linguistic production as well. The State precedes writing. The pharaoh came before the pictograph; the family came before the gay writer-son who betrays them in his writings. Language is NOT for communication. Language is a translation. As I sing in my "Ballad of Poor H.M'

Then emerged
the fair angel
from the pupa
who had to learn again at 12
The meaning of world-pain.

Bottom! Thou art indeed truly translated!

CHAĪNĪ, CHOCOLATE AND *PĀN*: FOOD AND HOMOEROTIC FICTION[1]

RUTH VANITA

In many literatures, eating and food are primary figures for love and sex, and Indian literature is no exception. The specifics, however, differ. Questions that one might explore in this regard include: what cultural significance does the food item have? Is it a high-status or low-status food? Are different foods used to figure different types of desire or love?

In this essay, I discuss food in three early twentieth-century north Indian fictions about same-sex desire—Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaf*, Pandey Bechan Sharma Ugra's *Chaklet*, and Suryakant Tripathi Nirala's *Kulli Bhat*. Public discussion of homosexuality in early twentieth-century India was almost entirely couched in the language of Victorian sex-phobia and homophobia, and overshadowed by the sign of sodomy, imported into India by the British, most notably in the form of the anti-sodomy law introduced into the Indian Penal Code. Pre-colonial Indic traditions of depicting same-sex desire in pleasurable, non-judgmental ways were under erasure. I suggest that one of the ways pleasure resurfaces in Indian fiction about desire is through the figure of food.

By this time, both Hindi and Urdu had suffered purification campaigns launched by nationalist litterateurs inspired by Victorian norms, which had resulted in the bowdlerization and heterosexualization of much literature and the disappearance of much more. In the early twentieth century, a post-Freud freedom of speech regarding formerly silenced topics expressed itself through movements such as radical modernism, realism and naturalism, both in England and India. Of the three texts I

am looking at, two gave rise to public debates about homosexuality but interestingly, the third, which is the most positive about same-sex desire, did not cause any controversy. I suggest that this is because it is the one most seamlessly connected with pre-colonial traditions of representation.

In her 2004 book, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law,* Martha Nussbaum points out that homophobia in the West results not from logical reasoning but from visceral disgust and shame, similar to the kind of aversion that is generated from the idea of consuming taboo foods, such as dead bodies or faeces. She also suggests that at its root this disgust is directed at the human or the mortal predicament itself—the impure conditions of being born, eating, mating, excreting, reproducing, and dying. This disgust is projected onto groups like homosexuals who are seen as voluntarily engaging in disgusting acts.

Questions of purity were repeatedly raised in early twentieth-century Indian debates on obscenity, censorship and homosexuality, which almost directly mirrored such debates in England, and disgust was frequently expressed. Elsewhere, I have analyzed the language of purity as it surfaced both in England and in India, in discussions of the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's 1928 lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness.*[2] Although an explicitly Biblical component was not evident in the Indian debates, Judeo-Christian ideas and prejudices were implicit everywhere. Firaq Gorakhpuri was, perhaps, the only Indian writer who defended Hall's book as "pure."[3]

However, Hindu ideas came into play as well, and one of the ways they contested Christian ideas was through images of food. Despite traditions of fasting, abstinence and prohibiting certain foods, the earliest Indian texts view eating and being eaten as unavoidable. A certain amount of violence involved in eating is inevitable and acceptable—here, Hinduism differs from Jainism. The Upanishads formulate the entire universe and the Atman itself as food resting on food, as the perpetual play of eater and eaten, in which nothing is lost or destroyed: "From food all beings are born. Having been born, they grow by food. Food is eaten

by all beings and it also eats them." (*Taittiriya Upanisad*, II. ii.1) Hamlet, in his superficially similar formulation about a king going through the guts of a beggar seems to point to the wretchedness of the human condition. However, in the Upanishad, this becomes a reason to rejoice because it reveals the Self as the point of union. One who realizes the non-duality of Brahman, says, "I am food, I am food, I am food! I am the eater of food, I am the eater of food, I am the eater of food! I am the unifier, I am the unifier, I am the unifier!" (*TU*, III. X. 5-6) In the *Gita*, Krishna's universal form has many mouths which perpetually devour everything, yet everything is also sustained by this form.

In this world-view, every relationship in the universe can be formulated as a relationship between eater and eaten, and relationships can be sanctified by framing the act of eating as a sacrifice. Feeding the other may appear like an act of self-abnegation or self-denial but it is also often viewed as fulfilling for oneself because one identifies not only with the other but with the entire process.

I have suggested in earlier work that food is a central metaphor for same-sex desire in Indic texts, and that the Indic representation of male-male desire may differ from European texts in this regard.[4] In European texts, although "sodomy" encompasses many acts, it is yet overdetermined by the unspeakable act of anal sex. In Indian texts, the oral is more important than the anal. Thus, for example, the *Kāmasūtra*, although it briefly mentions anal sex, focuses on oral sex between males. It describes this in pleasurable detail, using the figure of sucking a mango to explain its nuances. What is interesting is that in ancient Sanskrit texts, the mango is a figure for heteroerotic pleasure—women's breasts are often compared to mangoes. Also, mangoes are pleasurable foods enjoyed by all, and consumed with gusto. The relative merits of different types of mangoes and ways to suck them are even today a favourite topic for discussion at dining tables in summer. Thus, the figure for male-male oral sex is not a despised food—it is a mainstream, even normative food. The *Kāmasūtra* also refers to oral sex between women in the women's

quarters and among courtesans.

Pandey Bechan Sharma Ugra, a nationalist writer whose pen name "Ugra" (Extreme/Violent) expresses his self-image, published in 1924 a short story called "*Chaklet*" (Chocolate) in the radical newspaper *Matwala*. Ugra writes that this story about a male-male relationship caused a storm among readers, had resulted in the editor having received sheaf upon sheaf of letters, and had struck all other newspapers dumb. This inspired him to write four more stories on the same theme, published in *Matwala* over the next four months. He was then sent to jail for nine months for editing an anti-British issue of the paper *Swadesh*. When he emerged from jail, his friends advised him not to write any more on the subject as it was causing suspicion that he was homosexual. He immediately wrote four more stories and published all eight in 1927 as a collection entitled *Chaklet*.[5] Ugra claimed that his aim was to expose homosexuality, which he said was a disease all-pervasive in modern India, among writers, politicians, actors and nationalists, and was destroying the country by effeminizing its men. His stories were intended to arouse public awareness so that parents could guard their sons against this vice.

But most Hindi writers disagreed with his assessment. They said *Chaklet* was obscene because (a) this subject should not be discussed in civilized literature and (b) because Ugra's stories, though ostensibly attacking homosexuality, actually portrayed it in an attractive light. The prominent Gandhian litterateur Banarasidass Chaturvedi invented the epithet *ghùsleù* (kerosene oil) to describe the inflammatory work of Ugra and writers like him.

Ugra used a number of terms for homosexuality but chocolate was the one that caught on. All participants in the debate started using this term. Ugra claimed that his stories were undiluted quinine to cure the disease of homosexuality, whereas other writers produced sugarcoated pills. One of Ugra's opponents wrote a long essay in which he asked why Ugra had not titled his book Quinine or Poison rather than Chocolate.

This writer had a point—Ugra's use of chocolate as a trope introduces a deep ambiguity into his portrayal of male-male desire. Ugra and his opponents denounced homosexuality as an import from the West. Although this claim was untrue, the trope of chocolate raises a further question. Should all food items imported from the West be banned? What about potatoes, tomatoes and chilies which have become inseparable from modern Indian cuisine? More fraught of course in the twentieth century are such items as Coca Cola or Macdonald's and KFC's menus. No one in modern India has, to my knowledge, called for a ban on chocolate. The closest anyone has come to this is in the Sangh Parivar's attacks on Valentine's Day, when chocolate boxes are often given as gifts.

Anxiety regarding the Western component of modern Indian identity, an anxiety shared by Hindus and Muslims, is highlighted through the figure of chocolate. The type of chocolate favoured by most Indians tends to be sweet, rich, milky and tasty, not bitter. Given the long Indian tradition of celebrating the virtues of milk products, such as *ghee*, butter and cream, the popularity of chocolate in India is not surprising. While underlining the supposedly Western origins of male-male desire, the term "chocolate" to some extent normalizes that desire because chocolate is almost universally popular.

Not only does chocolate as a symbol for male-male desire suggest that the desire is as ubiquitous as the delicacy, but Ugra depicts this desire as deeply embedded in happily hedonistic lives led amid urban pleasures. Ugra's stories represent the homosexually-inclined man as a sort of everyman about town, a modern version of the *nāgarika* (city-dweller) who is the protagonist of the *Kamasutra*—he is urbane, educated, pleasure-loving, attracted to beautiful persons of either sex, and familiar with Indian as well as Western literatures. The protagonists are mostly Hindu, some Muslim, but immersed in a syncretic urban culture. They move about in groups of friends, and their courting is a shared pleasure.

In the West, today, the view of homosexuals as a minority with

a clear-cut identity, whose sexual preference is probably fixed at birth or very early in life, has largely displaced the view that anyone may, some time in life, be attracted to a beautiful person of the same sex. However, most characters in Ugra's writings view desire for beautiful males, like desire for beautiful females, as a natural and logical result of loving beauty and pleasure, that is, the outcome of an aestheticist and hedonistic way of life. One of Ugra's characters, Mahashayji, a poet, tells the censorious narrator, "Truth must be respected wherever it is. Beauty alone is truth. So whether the beauty is a woman's or a man's, 'I am a slave of love.'"[6]

The stories depict same-sex love, not just sexual desire. They also associate it with pleasures of all kinds—going to movies and theatre, listening to music, reciting poetry, wearing fine muslins and embroidered silks, and the pleasures of eating. The groups of urban young men who are his protagonists eat both in public and private. They give parties where they consume sweets and other delicacies. They also court their beloveds at *pān* stalls, which even today are public places where men hang out together. In Ugra's stories, feeding *pān* to the beloved is a prelude to kissing him. In one story, the protagonist insists on feeding a beautiful boy *pān* with his own hand and then kisses him just before putting the *pān* in his mouth. There is a long history in Indian literature, art and cinema of this association between *pān* and erotic encounters. For instance, in Bankim Chandra's *Indira*, the female narrator's close female friend, teaching her how to seduce her husband, prepares and feeds her *pān* and then kisses her. The narrator says she will never forget that kiss.[7]

Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaf* (1941) depicts the problems with purity in a similar way, through its narrator's mixed feelings about sex and food. *Lihaf*, in my view, is at least as homophobic as the stories in *Chaklet*. Like Ugra's stories, it confuses the issue of same-sex desire by depicting homosexuals as pedophiles. Where Ugra at least depicts some men falling in love with other men, in *Lihaf* the relationship between women is shown as purely sexual and as mutually exploitative—Begam uses her maidservant Rabbu

to satisfy her cravings because her husband is unavailable, and Rabbu exploits the situation to obtain privileges.

Lihaf also suggests through words and tropes that sex acts between women are inherently repulsive. The female narrator has a crush on the Begam and thinks her very beautiful. She says the Begam too loves her, yet the girl responds to the Begam's sexual caresses with loathing. She also finds Rabbu disgusting (this is explained in class terms) and the atmosphere created by the two women claustrophobic. The story reinforces stereotypes by depicting the Muslim aristocracy as decadent, perverse and idle, with gender segregation fostering vice.

However, like the quilt itself, images of eating introduce some ambiguity into this depiction. The delicacies eaten by the Nawab's beautiful boys signify the pleasures denied to the Begam: "*unke liye muraghan hùalwe aur lazīz khāne jāne lage.*" The Begam's pleasures too are figured in terms of food—as Rabbu massages her, "*khushk mewe chabā rahī hain.*" Rabbu is always eating with the Begam and other servants are jealous.

Very significantly, the narrator finds the Begam's lips her most alluring feature: "The most amazing and attractive part of her face were her lips. Usually dyed in lipstick her upper lip had a distinct line of down."8 For the knowing reader, the downy upper lip recalls the long Perso-Urdu homoerotic tradition of celebrating the *khat* or down on a beautiful young boy's upper lip. Chughtai reinforces this, giving the homoeroticism a twist, when the narrator continues, "Sometimes her face became transformed before my adoring gaze, as if it were the face of a young boy."

At the story's climax, the narrator is eager to partake of the culinary delights she imagines the Begam and Rabbu are sharing: "*chapar chapar kuchh khāne kī āwāzen ā rahī thī, jaise koī mazedār chaānī chakh rahā hoī Rabbu mu'i hai sadā kī chattū. Zarūr yah tar māl urā rahī hai.*" The image of *chutney*, the sounds of eating, and the metaphor used earlier of a cat lapping all strongly suggest that what the narrator witnesses when the quilt is lifted is an act of oral sex. This would be in consonance with the long Indic

tradition of depicting oral sex as the primary kind of sex between women.

Chutney, like chocolate, is an extra, a luxury, not a staple food. It signifies the pleasures of life. Unlike chocolate, it is indigenous in origin; the word derives from Hindi *chāīnī*, to lick. However, the ultimate in edible pleasure that has perhaps the strongest claim to a hoary indigenous Indic past is *pān*. Early Sanskrit texts mention the consumption of betel leaf among the eight enjoyments—incense, women, clothes, music, bed and food. *Pān* occurs in the *Kamasutra* and the *Bhāgawatam*. Its origin is attributed to Ayurvedic physicians. It is supposed to be good for health and digestion. It is simultaneously sacred and erotic. It is part of religious rituals and offered to the gods. Lovers, including Krishna and Radha, are depicted feeding one another *pān*. It is used in many wedding rituals and distributed at wedding parties. Vatsyayana includes it as one of the *solah shrīngār*—a cosmetic to redden the lips. It is an important part of both Hindu and Muslim life in India. Because it is associated with pleasure and eroticism, it is forbidden to celibate ascetics and students (*brahmachārī*). Above all, it is intrinsically and, perhaps, uniquely Indian.

Therefore, the centrality of *pān* as a figure for same-sex desire in Nirala's novelette *Kulli Bhat* has the effect of placing this desire in the mainstream of Indian representation of the erotic. Nirala, arguably modern India's greatest Hindi poet, was perhaps the only major writer to react in a non-homophobic way to the *Chaklet* controversy. Nirala was an admirer of Tagore and his nationalism and, like Tagore, drew on an internationalist vision. Nirala was not particularly anxious about Western influences—he translated and wrote essays on writers ranging from Blake and Shelley to Vidyapati, Tulsidas and Bihari to Ghalib, Insha and Mir. Like Tagore, he advocated the study of world literature and judged uninational writing to be in inherently narrow.

In a 1932 essay, Nirala discusses modern litterateurs' obsession with pure moral "character," and argues that only one born of an *ayoni* (non-vagina) could possibly be pure. This reference is ironic because *ayoni* intercourse (which would include male-male

intercourse) is prohibited in some law books even while it is the preferred form of birth for many Gods and heroes in the epics and Puranas. God, says Nirala, has forestalled discussions on purity by fashioning the pathway into life through the womb and vagina, thus making us all inherently impure.

Nirala's non-judgmental approach to sexuality emerges in his 1939 novelette *Kulli Bhat*, where *pān*, sweets and other pleasures figure same-sex desire. The novelette is an autobiographical sketch of an old friend Pandit Patwaridin Bhatt, pet name Kulli. In the opening episode, Nirala, a rebellious sixteen-year-old, is sent to fetch his wife from her village. At the station, he meets a fashionable twenty-five-year-old named Kulli who gives him a lift home and stares at him all the way. His wife and in-laws express concern at his having accepted a lift from Kulli but they refuse to explicitly say what their objection is. His mother-in-law says, "It's not good for you to be friendly with him because you may get a bad name."[9] But she also says she cannot forbid Kulli to come to the house because one cannot forbid a fellow villager to come to one's house. Nirala imagines her prejudice is caste-based and cheekily retorts, "Maybe he will get a good name from being seen with me."

Nirala defiantly begins to associate with Kulli. He says, "Kulli looked at me, especially into my eyes, as if I was very dear to him. I had never experienced such a look before. I was curious and also pleased." Although married, the young Nirala here experiences for the first time the pleasure of being the object of another's active desire. Kulli takes Nirala on a tour of historical ruins and temples around the village. "He thought I had understood his intentions and was in agreement with them" At Kulli's suggestion, Nirala gets rid of the servant sent to escort him, so the two men are alone. Kulli takes Nirala to his house, and remarks, "I live as I please, that is what others don't like. Suppose I do have an *aib*, what is it to anyone else?" *Aib*, often translated as vice, is often used to refer to pleasures such as smoking, drinking and gambling.

Kulli then gives Nirala *pān* and presses his fingers as he does

so. This is the first physical interaction between them. Kulli invites Nirala to come eat sweets with him at his house the next day. Kulli remarks, "How beautiful *pān* makes you. You have wonderful lips—what can I say? The delicate lines of *pān* colour make your lips look like a sword." Comparing lips or eyebrows to a sword is commonplace in both Hindi and Urdu love poetry. Ugra's title story "*Chaklet*" begins with a man quoting a Banarasi love poem, "I kissed the eyebrow that I found so beautiful/ I felt as if a sword had struck my lips."

Unlike Chughtai or Ugra, Nirala does not undercut this presentation by introducing repulsive or gross images. The depiction remains erotic and sweet. Next day, Nirala goes to Kulli's house again, and Kulli embraces him. Nirala responds with emotion to the embrace, "I felt as if the Ganga and Yamuna had met."

Kulli takes Nirala before a mirror. Garlands are hung on the mirror in such a way that when they stand before it, it appears as if they are wearing the garlands. After eating sweets and *pān*, they sit on the bed. Nirala notices that Kulli looks tense. Kulli says, "Are you feeling unwell? Shall I call a doctor?" Kulli replies, "You are very cruel." Then Kulli says, "I love you," and Nirala replies, "I love you too." Kulli says, "Come then," and Nirala replies, "I have already come!" Kulli says, "Have you really never..." and leaves the sentence incomplete. Nirala gets annoyed at Kulli's inability to clearly articulate what he wants, so Nirala leaves. The humour arises both from Nirala's naivetÈ and from the double entendres in their conversation.

In contrast to Ugra, who depicts teenage boys as victims corrupted by men in their twenties, Nirala relates the same kind of encounter from the boy's point-of-view. Instead of being outraged, Nirala is puzzled, amused and pleased. In his brief foreword, he says that his character acquired breadth from contact with Kulli, who was "first and foremost a human being, who will always be honoured from a human point-of-view" (270).

Ugra violently denounces hidden homosexuals in the Hindi literary world as vicious hypocrites; Nirala, in his dedication of

Kulli Bhat, notes their existence, apparently looking forward to a day when they will be able to declare themselves: "I did not find anyone in Hindi literature worthy of this novelette's dedication. Although many share Kulli's qualities, all are afraid of those qualities being brought to light. Therefore I postpone this dedication."

Why did Nirala's novel not create a controversy despite its much more positive depiction of same-sex desire? I suggest that this is partly because of its non-defensive depiction. It is not geared to scandalize the reader or to attack a vice but to depict the poignancy, humour and vagaries of human desire. Nirala uses conventional words like love rather than newly coined terms or innuendo. He does not use any repulsive tropes or words that arouse disgust. In this regard, his depiction is in tune with continuous pre-colonial traditions, and can be compared to Vijay Dan Detha's depiction of female-female love in *Dohri Jun*.

Of course, not all readers responded censoriously to Ugra or Chughtai either. There is anecdotal evidence that male homosexuals were among the readers who eagerly flocked to buy *Chaklet* when it appeared, and some lesbian scholars today find *Lihaf* attractive.[10] Reader response may be compared to the subjectivity of the eating experience—the word "taste" expresses both. Reasons for liking or disliking certain food items remain inherently obscure and subjective. Tastes in food are culturally and socially constructed but they change rapidly with exposure. Although attempts are made to gender taste, it does not divide neatly along gender lines nor can it be reduced to social conditioning alone. The pleasures of eating mangoes, chocolate, *chutney* or *pān* cross gender, class, caste and other lines, often even species lines. Despite the *sattva-rajas-tamas* categories, food has been and remains an embodiment of and a trope for the inherent hybridity, messiness and impurity of life; as such, it undercuts attempts to maintain or impose an exaggerated purity.

NOTES

1. A version of this paper was first presented at an international

conference on "Food: Representation, Ideology and Politics," at the Centre for Advanced Studies, Department of English, Jadavpur University, November 2006.

2. "Tragic Love and the Ungendered Heart: Reading *The Well of Loneliness* in India and the West", in Ruth Vanita. Gandhi's Tiger and Sita's Smile: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Culture (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2005), 136-53.
3. For a translation of his comments, see *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History* ed. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (2000; New Delhi: Penguin Inida, 2008), 299-301.
4. "Vatsyayana's Kamasutra" in *Same-Sex Love in India*, pp 54-62.
5. For translations of all the stories and an extended analysis of the text and its context, see *Chocolate and Other Writings on Male-Male Desire* by Pandey Bechan Sharma Ugra, translated with an introduction by Ruth Vanita (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).
6. *Chocolate and Other Writings*, 49.
7. See "Bankim Chandra Chatterjee: Indira" introduced and translated by Shohini Ghosh, in *Same-Sex Love in India*, 265-68.
8. Translation by Syeda Hameed. http://www.scribd.com/doc/6516861/Lihaf-the-Quilt-Ismat-Chughtai
9. All translations by me, from *Same-Sex Love in India*, 306-10.
10. Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Desires and South Asian Public Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2005), 131-60, and Geeta Patel, "Homely Housewives Run Amok: Lesbians in Marital Fixes," *Public Culture*, 16: 1 (Winter 2004), pp 131-57.

Flesh, Desire and Resistance: An Examination of Reinaldo Arenas's *Paradise on Earth*

KRISHNAN UNNI P.

The Indian gay life and writing unarguably face challenges from the mainstream, authorial as well as the hierarchically situated historical and socio-political conditions of our time. While being gay is more or less an accepted term, the main difficulty springing up here along with its recognition is the taboo attached to it from the outside—the space of an inextricably stringent social set-up wherein all relations are manipulated, served or rather understood for the satisfaction of a set of people. The public domain where the gay life is structured seem to be the urban centres; while one never can dismiss its existence very much in the rural populations. Primarily, the policing and the other mode of surveillance have given urban spaces the places of gay activism, seclusion and immoral promiscuity. What troubles here is the Indian writer's difficulty to portray systematically the transformation of gay lives in the urban and the changes of the gay politics both in the urban and rural spaces. The desire and resistance of gay lives, therefore, are matters of a peculiar urban writing; in other words, of an urban economy. In order to counter this notion, we need to ask ourselves the reasons why gay lives are not particularly written and theorized from the other areas. With some minor exception, this alternative expression from the other angle of Indian life, sad to say, so far has not expressed its stamp upon the political context of Indian gay writing. This paper will examine the Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas's autobiography and three novels in the context of the existing problematic in Cuba regarding the gay sexuality and will try to

discuss Arenas's rural as well as urban experiences under systems of torture to highlight how in the Indian context there is the possibility of such a writing. The potential and the possibility of a corrective to the inherent imbalance of the Indian gay writing would perhaps need an expression by looking at the gay lives and writing from other Third World nations. The Indian experience further needs to be rearticulated from the given academic, social and biological parameters attached to gay lives. This can only become a possibility if the desire for our co-existence finds its expression in the act of telling what we are and the resistance we adopt to challenge the existing notions of sexuality.

The experience of the Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas under the regime of Fidel Castro opens up certain important parameters of gay writing seen against the framework of how this genre functions in our time. Arenas's narratives challenge the modalities of the Western gay writing as they are primarily predicated on the descriptive and overt expression of what they are as far as the definition of the gay, culture, tolerance and resistance are concerned. In the history of Indian gay writing, particularly, the open framework of ''being gay'' still is not properly defined and to include someone being gay in the wide category of ''alternative sexuality'' is commonly used. Of course, the Indian context is more interestingly complex and diffused when we look at the plane of defining someone gay and further theorizing his problems and writing in the context of other sociological writing. However, in the writing of Arenas, we come across the most difficult issues in the gay writing primarily posed against the state of oppression and then against all similar methodologies of understanding the writing against other structures of suppression and spaces of confinement. Arenas's writing has much to offer us in the diffuse situation of Indian gay lives. The need to promulgate the voice and opinion of gay communities in India needs to take its indoors into the definition and writing of what they are. This paper will look at Arenas's narratives and try to bring an extensive comparison of these narratives with the Third World problematics involved in the

gay writing and finally would try to come up with the Indian context where an alternative can be sought to locate/situate the gay writing.

Before Reinaldo Arenas died of AIDS, his autobiography *Before Night Falls* was published in the US. In this text, defending homosexuality and otherness, Arenas opened up a powerful battle against the systems of oppression. Arenas castigates Castro's police which drove an entire generation to work in the sugar plantations by pressurizing them to hear the erstwhile Communist Russia's slogans. The difficult Cuban lives narrated by the author marks the difficulty to have the same-sex relationship possible and at a wider level, this difficulty poses the question of understanding the ethos of writing as the corpus of writing had a sense of love immersed in the same-sex relation. When taken as a prisoner on charges of homosexuality, Arenas writes: "taking bath was almost theatrical" (*Before Night Falls*, 184). Further, he describes ironically, "at the baths I once saw all the ward chiefs fucking an adolescent who was not even gay" (*Before*, 185). The body of confinement here is an object of discourse. After the death of Virgilio Pinera, another gay poet whom Arenas worshipped, the Castro regime is put to shame; though the gay experience here is far different from the normal shame encountered by the common man. Arenas had to confront his own image "in the mirror" (*Before*, 275) to negotiate the reality of the death of Virgilio Pinera. Two fundamental issues of the gay experience spin here: the one of separation, both from the society and from him, and the other, more distinct, is the passion toward one's own annihilation. The mirror image, unlike depicted in other Latin American writing, should be considered as the effective positioning of oneself to recognize the shame and humiliation underwent by the same body.

The institutionalized state resists the gay relationships. But what about the institutionalized gay communities? Perhaps, this is the question Arenas raises vehemently in his phenomenal testimonial narrative *Before Night Falls*. Arenas believes in the natural and undifferentiated male love as the essence of his gay

identity. He proclaims and lives by what he believes and without this male love toward the male, the question of community never arises. It is here an interesting idea concerned with the gay and the other alternative sexualities emerge. Homoerotic desire strikes the very nerve of all patriarchy that mandates the conjoining of the male and female principle for its thriving. The freedom of choice of the male also seeks essentialism; which in Arenas's terminology is more brute and can be a savage in nature.

Arenas voices his concern for the peaceful conjoining of all the males for their thriving by invoking the histories of the ancient cultures and civilizations in the world. In the context of Latin America, these cultures have their adherence to a number of ideas that predate them from the time of the conquest of the Spanish conquisitadores. Arenas in his narratives implies that what Latin America was is not what it is and the journey back to the yore may reveal the peaceful life and bliss the continent had before all "strangeness" took place. Somewhere in Arenas, we find the pangs of the ancient tribes though he is not invoking their history anywhere in his writing. This is not to state that homosexuality is an invented or colonial construct. On the other hand, the myth of the gay life involved with the past is here counter-questioned and more innate primordial and rural expressions that are given to that.

The playful merging of identities that transforms the situations of individuals is what constructs the notion of essentialism in gay writing. Once this is created, the writing seems enclosed in the stringent walls of looking at what it has produced. This paraphernalia is not the one connected to history or culture. Hence, it is important to have a cogent mapping of gay writing for the understanding of its variance. Arenas's texts dismantle the essentialism by a variety of methods. The texts are the nodal points of departure from the streamlined narration of the omniscient narrator. Several times, the narratorial voice is enmeshed in "other voices"—the voices of the multitudes, which are denied of freedom and love of one's own body. The experience of the voice in Arenas's texts are multitudinous and as a result of

which, we have a plethora of voices and imaginary constructs operating within the same voice. This is a serious departure from the other celebrated gay writing by Jean Genet, Cabrera Infante and many others. The confluence of all voices also dismantles the uniformity of language by making the language a tool for endless distancing and paradoxical switching off from the domain of meanings. The language shows an erotic potential that redefines the possibilities of homosexuality and this very much challenges the fixed posture given to such writing by Rictor Norton when he says: "Homosexual literature is written, read, criticized and taught within a generally hostile environment. Although we may argue about the degrees of such hostility, and although we may debate its precise nature with regard to different kinds of repression, suppression and oppression, this pervasive hostility is nevertheless an indisputable fact. To recognize this is to appreciate the sociology of literature" ("The Homophobic Imagination", 23).

Arenas never intends his readers purposefully to purport his writing as homophobic and his life homosexual; he challenges the axis of homosexual writing by questioning the gay sociological context upon which it is predicated and by making the writing a playful doll. Writing has the function of playfulness and this is, indeed, satisfied by locating the space of his body's celebration in tandem with the notion of a child playing the ball at the beach or the identification of a child with the doll as its friend, who can easily be manipulated. The reader is pitted at a Freudian ground of making the narrative work by recognizing the unconscious—but later, only to thwart its very positioning. The gay writing is no more an institutionalized one; but the one of a careful *jouissance* intended to create another domain of creating veritable meanings and assumptions.

The playfulness connected to the double–genderedness is outlined in Arenas's *Farewell to the Sea*. The narrator is the impersonated ''she'' in this text. In this impersonated [she], he, Arenas seems to suggest that there is a ''he'' and a transgressed code of sexuality which occupies and undercuts all uniform

perception of sexualities. The narrator in her association with Hector; as we do not know his identity (the husband, lover, or enemy) of the narrated persona implicates the potential threats of the surroundings—the public sphere, both constructed and imagined. The image of the ocean that figures in the first part of the text "growing old" (*Farewell to the Sea*, 167) is the reference of escape as her question of exile is concerned. At the same time, the ocean is the all-encompassing structure that buffets the bodies in the bay, suggesting paradoxically the washed out bodies of all exiles, incapacitated in their attempts to escape from Castro's Cuba. The family saga of Hector, the narrator and the baby, thus can be seen as an attempt to escape from Havana to the land of freedom. The transgressed codes of sexuality that Arenas depicts in this text destabilize the narration many times, distance the reader from the overpowering authorial voice and surrender the flight/fight before a range of inconsequential voices. The text in a Bakhtinian sense is polyphonic and dialogic; but the multiple voices and narrative methodologies employed in it do not gel with the notion of privileging one gender for any political agenda.

The destruction of the authorial voice in *Farewell to the Sea* should be seen more in the light of the gay politics of Arenas. It is true that Arenas never wanted to engage himself in the process of essentializing his gay politics. For him, the voices and claims of all who are gay in Cuba were important and he further develops this in the light of the existing sufferings of the multitudes all over the world. In *Farewell to the Sea*, the sea is more than a metaphor; it becomes the benevolent state, which had promised the masses a lot and finally robbed them of all claims. The legitimacy of the narrator to believe "what she is" needs to be considered a strategic impersonation that claims to destruction of all writing. What Arenas implies here is the definite change of gender for a new narration to be possible. The competing claims of several voices in the text, therefore, do not bring us back to the past of Cuba; but reclaims our belief that the omniscient voice has failed in its attempt to depict what the situation is all

about. Language for Arenas dissolves also the quest of history when he writes: "The Ocean is yellow. The ocean/ clumsily outlining a stretch/ of anonymous sand- for there is no history" (*Farewell*, 229). The implied sense of the dissolved or disappeared history is what makes this exile feeling for self-destruction.

The symbiotic relationship of the narcissistic and masochistic self of Arenas implies a complicated discourse of gender equation in the oeuvre of his gay writing. The deep-rooted question of writing from outside is more resonated here and this is even reflected in the writer's notion of the body of self love as something other than what it is when implicated in the context of a totalitarian regime. The sense of outside reflected in the writing distances the affinity and sameness of all intimate relationships. The polyphony in Arenas's works operates on the level of his exile experience. This Cuban experience of writing is mirrored in Cabrera Infante's words "there are Cubans who suffer outside and those who suffer equally here, even more so, being in the burning hole of with the fearful anxiety of an uncertain space" ("The Invisible Exile", 40). Horst Bienek also shares Infante's anxieties when he writes: "the loss of language is probably the most decisive factor in determining exile" ("Exile is Rebellion", 41). Arenas carefully constructs a language challenging essentialism in *Farewell to the Sea* and this language becomes the trope of establishing what the gay experience need to undergo under the totalitarian regime.

If *Farewell to the Sea* is the playground of various narrative ploys and challenges, *The Color of Summer*, the next novel in the Pentagonia (the five novel series of Arenas) is the one of the final destruction of all voices and narrations. The jinxes and puzzles of history, documentation, archiving, culture, memory and the attempt to free from all straightjacketed codification seem to be the centre of this text. Structured into bits and pieces of drama, poems, tongue-twisters, letters and lengthy rumination of history, *The Color of Summer* portrays the gay freedom as the indispensable other in the world of confusions and obedience.

The persecuted under Castro's regime, including Virgilio Pinera and Jose Lezama Lima, find place in this text and Arenas makes them appear many times in his text as ghosts, commentators, jokers and the victims of totalitarianism. The text delves deep into the classic notions of male beauty and questions its troubled relationship in the present. The Renaissance art is both reconstructed and negated and the beauty of revolution is put forward. Arenas writes: "Had the Saint Bernard but gobbled the vittles, Virgilio's virginity would have been plucked, and undoubtedly to this day be intact instead of banished" (*The Color*, 139). The character Skunk in a Funk is modelled as the Bakhtinian character that creates lot of comic scenarios and he functions as the commentator who infringes the private realms of narration. Arenas's personal conversation with Skunk in a Funk reveals the strategic dialogue with his alter-ego.

The gay question here is not removed from the political dimension attached to it; on the other hand, other issues get entangled with it when we see how this character succeeds in dissolving the streamlined narration of the narrator. Arenas writes: "And the truth was, the sexual square-off between Skunk in a Funk and the young cop had no parallel in the sexual history of the public thoroughfares of Guanabo. The Skunk, pants around his ankles, had thrown her arms around the trunk of the guava tree as the cop had his way with her, and the force of their coupling was shaking the guava tree with such fury and their naked bodies were being pelted with falling fruit" (*The Color*, 95). The experiments of Skunk in a Funk with faggots and floozies, nevertheless, reveal the nature of bisexuality strangely predicated in the difficult contextualization of making one gay or lesbian.

Arenas's experiments in narration and treatment of bisexuality strangely oppose the contextualization and theoretical postulation of gay politics in the galaxy of other dissident writers. Arenas, while it seems he is in agreement with bisexuality, strategically oppose the uniform sexual code concerned with one privileging a political context. This further raises the question of legitimacy and appropriation. In one context in *The Color of Summer*, he

writes: "Sex is a source of bitterness. Life and death are two viruses that are transmitted by sexual contact" (*The Color*, 190). In the chapter funnily coined "CRUCKFUCKINGFIXION", Arenas writes:

Oh, the crucifuckingfixion was going exceptionally well. None of the well-turned ephebes had missed his mark. Each time a phallus penetrated the leader's deformed body, Fifo applauded and the audience panted. The crucifuckingfixion was just about to reach its climatic moment when one of the most diligent of all the midgets climbed up on Fifo's body and whispered the following news in his ear: The Condesa de Merlin had just arrived from Paris and was singing an opera in the city's great public urinal (*The Color*, 220).

While this image invokes the history of religious tortures in the past, Castro's figure is clearly evident in its description. Further, the author comes across with the description of a woman, The Electric Venus, who thwarts the political regimes of several world leaders, and revolutionaries whose names are misspelled and written—Mae Pse-tung, Leon Trovski, Breshnev, Che Guevara and others. This playful introduction of the woman revolutionary offers the female living inside the gay mind—a powerful synthesis of the gay and lesbian, rather than separating one from the other.

The "terrible beauty" as outlined in Arenas is intertextual and *The Color of Summer* becomes a compendium of several mixing up of speeches and dreams. Lezama Lima speaks in the text:

"*Observe, then, my friends, the reposeful and yet tense features of the sculpture; observe the circulation of the blood under the skin of the hands. Observe those feet planted with the assurance of a lord of columns, the legs, the thighs, which proudly rise with the plenitude of a king who, victorious, has just passed unscathed through a tempest; observe those buttocks, the backside of a demigod, clenched in the rectal contraction that implied the phallic thrusts, observe the pubes, still moist with sweat from the backside of Michelangelo*" (*The Color*, 292).

The Classic context of all beauty lies in the assumption of copulating with the sculptures and Arenas indicates that both men and women are prone to it always. A highly interesting notion

of bisexuality emerges here resonating the gender questions of stringent compartmentalization of bodies and contexts. The anger welled against all regimes of oppression and the resistance oriented against the body which resists inwardly becomes the crux of *The Color of Summer*. Judith Butler's opinion of what is a "political gay" and "being heterosexual" in tandem with the marriage as the performative function needs to be looked at here more closely. Butler seems to underscore the passive and celebrated gay lives and heterosexuality in opposition to all performative body politics. The complicated existence of the body in all heterosexual relationships, she implies, needs to have a politics of performance of its own. Butler writes:

For politics as this is constructed through this discourse on intelligibility, that we take a stand for and against gay marriage; but critical reflection which is surely any part of any seriously normative political philosophy and practice, demands that we ask why and how this has become the question, the question that defines what will and will not qualify as meaningful political discourse here" ("Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual? (19).

Butler's question seen in the light of the complex mechanism offered in Arenas's text may not make any headway to locate the performative nature of body. But this question of the performative aspect of the gay, lesbian and transgendered, doubtless to say, will remain as the primary issue affecting alternative sexualities all over the Third World, particularly in India.Arenas's texts seen in the Indian gay sub-culture context raises a number of issues. Though with the repeal of the Article 377(a) there is bit of a happiness and exhilaration in India regarding the recognition of the alternate sexualities, the larger Indian context does not allow any room of thought for the same-sex relationship to thrive in the state. The interconnected relationship with the state, police, surveillance mechanisms and alleged documents do not allow the free citizen either to breathe or think what she/he should be in the public sphere. The radical disjunction between the public and the private sphere where gay lives are understood marks the fundamental difficulty to make

the individual primarily locate his sphere of politics.

Ever since the Pushkin murder case, still not solved or pondered over by the police and the state, the public domain of India has shrunken too much to recognize the existence of minorities. More than in Arenas's Cuba where overt gay activists were persecuted, in India we see the innocents who sit in the park playing cards or discussing something being taken by the police and false charges implicated upon them being gay. This networking between the state and the police, it should be noted, goes in tandem with the notion of branding someone gay, without even recognizing the contours of what does the gay mean. The Indian sub-culture has in it the fear of identifying someone gay. This deeply rooted fear, ironically, works in opposition to the acknowledged level of all politics of liberation, including the overwhelming feminist discourse, understanding of the kinship within alternative sexualities and the fear of writing them. The fear of writing is not something that needs to be understood with the manual work of producing gay stories and novels. It implies the task of inscribing the gay identity on the body and the wall. Moreover, the supremacist tendency to recognize all Indian gay sub-cultures under one monolithic construct need to be changed.

Arenas's texts here are very much reflective of the fact of making us recognize the multiple awareness of the Cuban gay communities, including the gay lives that are tortured by the state and another group of gays who secretly enjoy them being part and parcel of the power structures. The Indian gay communities need to determine their boundaries to exclude other projects that despite explicitly aligning themselves with a queer approach are not acknowledged as the "subjects of being what they are".

The intricate and complex association of the gay lives in India with other minor cultures has succinctly left the movement and other issues stranded. Many times, we do not recognize the primary and the fundamental issues of what is being gay when posited against the law which abides one to be free. One of the real danger which gay life faces in India is its lack of imagining a

community of its own other than the cosmopolitan views adhered to some closed community networks. This has resulted in the deviance between the metropolitan and the rural gay lives—one privileging the elitist notion at all costs. The literatures and arts in India unlike what we had seen in Arenas's Cuba have more leniencies to this metropolitan gay lives situated around campuses, theatres and other public spaces. The public space here needs to be radically defined.

In Arenas's texts, we have seen all and everything becoming public and the fantasy of the protagonists becoming a new theorization for understanding what they are and should be. Arenas's texts are important in our times because of their freedom of imagination which, though sad to say, is completely lost in the Indian context. The politics of the minority too has its difference in the Indian context and at times it never allows the alternate sexuality to enter into it for making a daily discourse of what it is. The writing, therefore, should be the trope of these understandings. Once the writer frees her/his personal to engage in the political, the question of ethics in gay writing in India would help us realize its multitudes. It is toward this space we should orient our discourse—for realizing our alternative sexualities and literatures.

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Poetics of Abjection in Amruta Patil's *Kari*

PAYEL GHOSH

In simple terms, Amruta Patil's *Kari* could be dubbed as a 'coming-of-age' novel with a witty, amusing and a rather dark narrative. In addition, its graphic is as evocative as emotive: done mostly in unflinching black and white with occasional splashes of colour in a few panels. There is no explanation of the sudden use of colour, but because of the suggestiveness of Amruta Patil's writing, one might even take them for surrealist dream sequences or figments of the protagonist's imagination. The titular figure is a young woman trying to find a foothold in the 'smog' city of Mumbai. She is a woman whose life revolves around a workplace full of drudgery and a house full of strangers. All of this comes through a scathing sense of irony that cuts across the panels. Hence, *Kari*, could very well have been a piece of *bildungsroman* about a lost soul in exile. But, interestingly, it turns out to be much more than that.

To begin with, *Kari*, as a literary work, is itself doubly marginalized. First, because it is a graphic novel—a genre yet to find its feet in the matrix of the literary writing scene of India, and secondly because it explores queer sexuality—till date a taboo when it comes to Indian writing in English. The novel explores and addresses many complex issues related to queer identity and the position of a woman in a complex urban space in India. This brings us to the inception of the narrative, opening with an image pregnant with symbolism.

Figure1: first panel of the novel. (Patil 2008, 3)

The panel can be seen as Patil's homage to the painter Frida Kahlo. Kahlo's paintings were her way of eschewing the domineering aspects of the patriarchal society around her. The image here is quite obviously inspired by Frida's 1939 painting, *Las Dos Fridas*, or The Two Fridas.

The painting (*Las Dos Fridas*) is about the two selves of Frida.

Figure 2: *Las Dos Fridas*, (Frida Kahlo 1939).

Kahlo painted it in the same year of her divorce from the painter, Diego Rivera, after a decade-long tumultuous marriage. On the right hand side of the painting, we see Frida in a traditional Mexican Tehuana costume. This is the Frida that Diego loved and respected. On the left side, we have the Frida clad in a Victorian wedding gown that Rivera abandoned. Their hearts are exposed: whereas the Frida in the Mexican attire has a heart that is intact, the other Frida's heart is damaged, wounded and her apparel torn. A vein joins their hearts as they hold hands, a reflection of their solidarity, of the fact that she has no one but herself to comfort her, accompany her and even *die* with her. In her diary, she reveals how she thought of her imaginary childhood friend when she painted it. The stormy clouds that form the backdrop of the image reflect the ongoing emotional upheaval of the painter. The vein connecting their hearts is severed by the Frida on the left with surgical pincers as she tries in vain to stop the flow of blood staining her immaculate gown. The painting depicts the literal split or fissure between her two selves. They are the same, yet separated. When *Kari*'s narrator chooses to open the narrative with this very evocative image, she instantly problematizes the question of identity.

The image in the opening panel of *Kari* shows the protagonist and her beloved, Ruth—their hearts connected by the coronary vein—on their way to a sanguineous end. The narrative says:

> There are two of us, not one.
> Despite a slipshod surgical procedure, we are joined still. (3)

Like the two Fridas, they are also connected by a severed artery, cut off by Ruth, which causes a stain of blood on her pristine white skirt. Like in Kahlo's painting, Ruth is trying in vain to stop the bleeding. The conspicuous analogies between the two images make the reader question the very identity of the characters. As the image closely resembles a painting depicting a rupture between the two selves of a single individual, the reader might find herself asking if the two figures portrayed in the panel are two different selves of the same person. And, if so, then who is

the projected *other*—is it Ruth, whom no characters of the novel, with the exception of Kari, has ever seen, or is Kari herself a mere projection of Ruth's psyche? The second possibility in particular would lend a psycho-machiatic effect to the narrative. Thus, through a complex exploration of the identity question, the author sets the tone of the narrative suitable to explore the issue of queer identity.

Since the inception of the Poststructuralist movement of the twentieth century, the idea of a fixed and stable identity has been questioned and contested by many theorists. The contemporary thinkers recognize identity as an effect of multiple discourses such as that of religion, family, law and medicine. Discourse, Foucault writes in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, is "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (1972, 80). Discourse is regulated by a set of rules that keep certain statements in circulation and certain others out of it. In *Order of Discourse*, Foucault states:

> ... in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance eventsÖ (1981, 48)

Thus, only those statements that are in accord with the dominating institutions of the state or the church are kept in circulation unlike the others. This politics of exclusion creates a false sense of stability and fixity.

Mary McIntosh points out in *The Homosexual Role* (1968, 182-192) that society constructs a safe and pure identity for itself by ostracizing some subjects and labelling them as deviants and this is precisely how society decides what is permissible and what is not, inside the normative cocoon that it forms. This pattern of excluding the unwanted to build the sense of a fixed identity is germane to humanity according to psychoanalysis. Freud in *Civilisation and its Discontent* (1961) writes about the human subject who in his attempt to build a pure pleasure ego has to learn to demarcate between his body and the surroundings. The

infant believes its animate and inanimate surrounding to be a part of its own 'self.' However, to build a stable sense of 'self,' the subject has to exclude what he once considered to be an integral part of himself. While drawing borders between his own body and his surroundings, the child has to jettison whatever does not belong to his integrated self. Only through this process of jettisoning will he be able to build a sense of self and identity. For the subject, it is indeed a traumatic experience as he has to violently banish what he once considered a part of his own body.

This process of jettisoning is what the Bulagarian psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva calls abjection (*Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 1982). She points out that this process takes place even before the mirror stage. The subject, who is still in the imaginary order where he is submerged into the state of plentitude, has to now separate himself from others to build a border between the 'I' and the 'other'. Abjection, hence, is the process of discarding what had appeared to be a part of one-self. For the subject, the hardest part of this process is the realization that even the mother is not a part of his *self*, and that to attain a stable self (that is, a separate and congregated sense of identity), he must draw a line between himself and her. The process of abjection takes place when the infant is in the imaginary order; to be precise, when he is still in an imaginary union with the mother. In that case, to attain subjectivity the mother's body would be the very first thing that needs to be abjected. This feels particularly difficult for the subject as the mother's body is also the child's origin. Commenting upon Kristeva's theory of the abject mother, Noelle McAfee observes:

> In order to become a subject the child must renounce its identification with its mother; it must draw a line between itself and her. But it is so difficult to identify her borders: he was once in her and now here he is, outside her. (*Julia Kristeva* 2004, 48)

Unlike the *repressed*, the abject is never completely suppressed into the unconscious. Rather it haunts the periphery of the conscious mind posing a threat to its apparent stability. The abject never goes away and it possesses the ability to thwart the false

sense of selfhood and identity that the subject acquires through the process of abjection. In that respect, Kari herself can be seen as an abject figure. Due to her sexual preference and the denial of the norms of femininity, the heteronormative society would want to reject her, expel her out of it to maintain a stable sense of identity. Her leap from her apartment functions as a striking act of entrance into the narrative. Her jumping can be read as a metaphor for the violent process of abjection that she has to face. Like the subject rejects the abject through a procedure that is almost brutally physical, Kari too is vehemently rejected by the society. Her status as an abject-figure is reinstated in the image on the eighth page of the novel, where the reader sees her crawling out of the sewer almost like a reptile. She stares at the skyline of the city at a distance as it stares back at her.

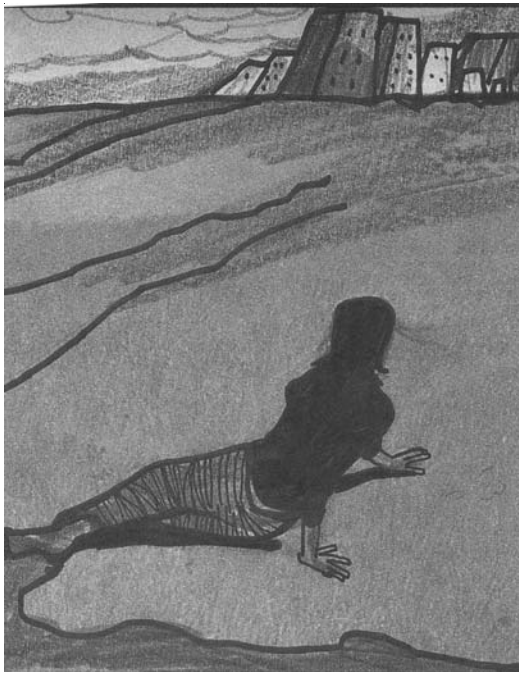

Figure 3: Kari after being saved by the sewer. (8)

Although, to create a perfect hetero-normative matrix, the society attempts to discard her, she does not go away. Saved by the sewer, she comes back as a *superhero*. The narrative beneath the panel reads: "Not only have I survived the fall intact, I even have me some kind of a Trinity outfit in PVC" (8).

Though the "Trinity outfit" is a reference to a fictional character of the *Matrix* franchise, the introduction of the word "trinity" once again attracts the reader's attention to the question of a fixed identity. The word trinity comes from the Latin "trinitas", which means a triad. Trinitarianism, which is an important aspect of the Christian doctrine, refers to the concept of one deity combined of three divine entities. The introduction of this idea in the narrative helps counteract the concept of a singular, stable and fixed identity that the hetero-normative frame of reference wholly endorses. The idea that one's sexuality would form one's core identity is a concept that came into existence only in the nineteenth century. Before that, certain sexual acts, especially those that were non-reproductive in nature, were prohibited by the church. Sexual preference was merely one aspect of life, not the *only* meaning of identity. According to Foucault, the attempt to make a discourse out of sexuality began in the nineteenth century. He writes in *History of Sexuality, Vol I*:

> The society that emerged in the nineteenth century bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society, call it what you will—did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. On the contrary, it put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex. (1990, 69)

According to Sara Mills, Foucault thought that sexuality was constructed along three axes:

1. Knowledge about sexual behaviour.
2. Systems of power which regulate the practice of sexual acts
3. The forms within which individuals... are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of this sexuality. (2003, 87)

Not only did the machinery produce the discourse of sexuality, but it also formulated the uniform truth of sex and made it the *norm* through that very discourse. Whoever did not fit into that normalized and standardized truth became a deviant. In the process, the deviant also earned himself a name—the homosexual subject. And, thus, the creation of the discourse of sexuality (with the help of the discourses of medicine and psychiatry) generated the discourse of homosexuality. Foucault credits the German neurologist Carl Friedrich Otto Westphal for the birth of modern homosexuality (*a la* his paper *Contrary Sexual Feeling*, 1870). Thus, the sexual body became the locus of power play. For this reason, Foucault locates the idea of sexuality within the power structure; as more of an available cultural category than an essential personal attribute.

Kari's sexual preference and her vehement denial of her femininity make her a deviant. As a result, the hetero-normative society would want to eradicate her. But, as an abject-figure, Kari, instead of being obliterated, comes back. Yet, a sense of in-betweenness never leaves her character. The day the sewer saves her life, she becomes a boatman. She says: "The day I hauled myself out of the sewer... I promised the water I'd return her favour. I'd unclog her sewers when she couldn't breathe" (31).Ĩt is interesting to notice how she sees the sewer as a suffocated female-figure. The sewer that carries with it what the society rejects enfolds Kari into its labyrinth of filth and dark water and gives her a "second life". But, as Kari says: "As a boatman you learn to row clean through the darkest water" (31).

Thus, Kari rows through the darkness of the saviour sewer—the superhero in her PVC suit. The boatman metaphor brings to mind the Greek myth of Charon, the boatman of Hades who carries the souls of the deceased in his boat across the river Styx. This analogy between Kari and Charon figures in her conversation with her dying friend angel who is on her way to the final moments of her life. In the chapter, "Angel on the Cornice," Angel says to Kari: "You have a sign above your head that says 'boatman'. People who are about to kick the bucket will

be drawn to you in hordes." What she says next is even more significant: "You must know though—once you opt in you can't opt out. Once a boatman, always a boatman. Why didn't you choose to play with the pretty boys instead (42)?"

Here, the boatman metaphor once again re-instates the feeling of in-betweenness that is associated with an abject-figure. The ferryman of Hades, Charon, sails his boat across the river Styx—the river that forms the boundary between Hades and the earth. Thus, Charon is fated to sail his boat on the periphery of both worlds never to belong to either. He will haunt the boundary between the two forever. This analogy with Charon re-establishes the metaphor of the abject figure: the one who will always stay at the margin, haunt the periphery of the apparently stable society with its false sense of fixed identity and never go away. Interestingly, the word Charon is derived from the Greek word Charopos, which means "of keen gaze." Throughout the novel, we see Kari with knitted eyebrows, as if she were intensely observing something. Here, the comparison with Charon acquires a new meaning. Kari, the *abject-figure* now becomes Kari the *observer,* one who has created a distance between herself and the thing she observes—the hetero-normative matrix that abjected her. Because she becomes the eternal abject-figure, she will never be a part of the normative society and this very act of distancing enables her with this power of gaze that helps Kari to see through the grids of the hetero-normative discourse. The *normal* subject living inside the normative cocoon formed by the discourses fails to see through the grids precisely because he himself is situated inside the grid and, hence, is a part of it. But, since Kari becomes the perennial outsider, the moment she is abjetced by the normative society, the false nature of the identity that the subject is conferred with, becomes transparent to her.

Foucault sees power as a strategy and not as a monolithic structure or an object of passion. He, therefore, believes that within the web of power and discourse rests the possibility of subversion. According to him, power can never have a one dimensional flow. If power relations, through negotiations and

the play of discourse, simulate identity, they then also create a space for a counter-discourse and counter-identification. Foucault suggests that instead of letting the hegemonic institutions oppress her, the individual should "revel" in the "stigmatised individualities that they have been assigned" (Mills 2003, 91). Kari is the emblem of this theory—through the sheer process of abjection she acquires the power of gaze that enables her to see right through the hegemonic discourses. She is able to perceive how issues like identity and sexuality, which are promoted as inherent characteristics of an individual, are actually a construct. This is what the queer theorists also wax upon. The queer struggle is not only intended to achieve a sense of equality but also to challenge the apparent immutability and naturalness of the constructed ideas such as identity and sexuality. That is why they do not have faith in a fixed definition. If they admit to a standardized definition, they will not be able to avoid the trap of categorization.

Throughout the novel, Kari vehemently opposes any attempts at the internalization of femininity. In her subversive mind she is already a man. Her growing discomfiture with female attributes reaffirms the fact. Her flat mates advise her to wear make-up, while Kari ponders why she does not look like Sean Penn. When her co-worker Lazarus asks her whether she is a "proper lesbian," Kari gives a rather cryptic answer, which once again shows that she wants to break free from this constructed reality categorized meticulously by the hetero-normative discourses. She describes her sexuality in the following words: "I'd say an armchair straight, armchair gay, active loner. The circus isn't in my life. It's in my head" (79).

She takes refuge in absurdity because she has already realized that the rigid belief in the constructed sexuality is nothing but a manifestation of absurdity itself. In the very next panel we come to know about her infatuation with k.d. lang— whom she refers to as the "genderless one" (80). lang defies the rules of gender-identity and wants to present herself as an icon of uncertain identity. She, in a way, exposes the construct that is sexuality.

Her voice is feminine while her attire retains a sense of masculinity. Instead of simply assuming the identities handed out to us as stable and one dimensional, we should always look for the subversive ways to use these positions, like lang does. Queer studies treat identity as performative. That is, it is something we learn to do and act, assimilating our lessons from the already existing discursive practices. Gender is nothing but a stylized repetition of these acts without any origin or copy. This is the crux of Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* (1999). These stylized acts create the illusion of an ontological "core" gender through repetition. However, this choice of performativity is not a voluntary one. Through linguistic interpellation, the disciplinary regimes (or the regulative discourses) decide in advance which possibilities of sex and gender are socially permissible and natural. For that reason, when individuals like k.d. lang defy these unwritten sets of rules, it becomes a disconcerting issue within the heteronormative frame of reference. Butler cites the example of drag in this regard. She shows how drag exposes the gender-identity as a construct by playing upon the difference between the anatomical body and the performed gender act. Through the course of the novel, the reader notices the gradually mounting discomfiture in Kari about her female attributes. Towards the end, Kari shaves her head, as her hair made her feel like a "drag queen" (107). As the novel progresses towards the end, the reader starts noticing a sense of growth in Kari. In the culminating scene, Kari stands atop a building, which takes us back to the inception. But this time she does not jump. This time the boatman wants to "step back, not step off;" she "won't be jumping off ledges for anyone anymore" (115). She vehemently refutes rejection.

The opening chapter is titled "The Double Suicide." Interestingly, the novel ends also with a suicide. When Kari sits atop the water tank of her building musing over life and death in the culminating scene, she sees the "pigeon girl" leap to death from the opposite building. This takes us back to the first chapter when it was claimed that Ruth too lived in the building opposite to Kari's. But the safety net that saved Ruth is conspicuously absent

now resulting in *pigeon girl's* death. Patil does not clarify whether the two buildings are the same, she just uses the adjective "opposite" and thus, problematizing the notions of space. The last page of the book is a haze of different strokes in black and white. Probably it is the author's way of warning the readers against finding a singular monolithic meaning in her work. The novel ends on a rather inconclusive conclusion, but when one considers that the narrative focuses to a large extent on issues of identity, this lack of a fixed meaning seems befitting. What Patil does well is to incorporate the harsh realities of the politics of identity within a framework of surrealism. The narrative often plunges into Kari's inner psyche. And, no distinction is made and no border is drawn between the reality and the imaginary. There is no preamble to Patil's surrealist narrative.

Kari is about pushing boundaries; it is about queer identity; but most of all, it is a quest for love for an absentee other which goes beyond petty construction of gender-identity and meaning making. As Kari herself says: "I espouse nothing but Ruth" (70). The eponymous protagonist is posited *beyond* the falsities of signification and that is why to her the normalized and standardized society created by the hetero-normative discourses resembles "a single cell organism" (22), like a mass of limbs and flesh without a face. To them, she is the "lady with the burning eyes" (71), the insider with the outsider's gaze—within and yet without.

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SECTION III

Gay/Lesbians: Philosophy and Psychology

Foucault and Homosexuality: Some Key Ideas and Their Application

R. RAJ RAO

Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is undoubtedly a seminal text that inspires multiple explorations in queer and sexuality studies. Foucault, like Freud before him, changed the way we looked at human sexuality across the cultures. The present paper is based on one of Foucault's numerous interviews that takes off from the *History of Sexuality*, condenses the views expressed therein, and then zeroes in specifically on the subject of "History and Homosexuality." Here, Foucault starts by rejecting the view that homosexuality was tolerated and practiced by the ancient Greeks and Romans. He says: "A person who went to bed with another of the same sex did not experience himself as a homosexual" (363). One of the key words in the preceding sentence is the 'person', for it indicates that he is "a *free* man born of a noble family" (363, emphasis mine). The free man in ancient Greek society was not a homosexual but a sodomite, because he was never "passive" in his sexual relationship with another man. Passivity here is equated with immorality, and Foucault goes on to say that "it was immoral for a free young man to be fucked"(364). Who, then, was a passive homosexual? The passive homosexual was a slave, for whom "to be fucked is a necessityÖ" (364). (To this day 'slave' is a code word for a passive homosexual in the gay subculture). The passive homosexual was also a "boy," as opposed to a man, and combining the two constructs of 'slave' and 'boy', Foucault says: "That a man pursues a boy goes without saying, and that this boy be a slave, in Rome particularly, is only natural" (364).

The formulation, I would say, enables us to read a text like Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* in an insightful way. It also throws much light on homosexual practices and behaviours in contemporary India. The insistence on the part of many Indian men who have sex with men (MSMs) to be the active partners or penetrators in a sexual relationship with another man may be attributed to the fact that such men perceive themselves as free men. I would interpret the term 'free' here in terms of two constructs, patriarchy and masculinity. The connections between patriarchy and homosexuality have been brought out, among others, by the queer theorist and feminist Diana Fuss. But, what I wish to argue here is that for a man to be passive in a homosexual encounter or relationship is to make a severe compromise of patriarchal privilege, and it is one of the two times he is likely to indulge in *real* homophobic violence. All other types of homophobic violence and gay bashing in Hindu India's shame culture, as opposed to the Christian West's guilt culture, are feigned and usually have to do with pecuniary gain: Hoshang Merchant has written eloquently on this in his Introduction to *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India*.

Being passive in a homosexual encounter or relationship with another man also challenges a free man's idea of masculinity, because here he becomes a party to the feminization of his body, which can render a serious blow to his narcissistic self image. It is the other time this jolt, as it were, can provoke him to indulge in *real* homophobic violence.

Foucault's free man/slave formulation has much to do with cross class gay sex in contemporary India and elsewhere, while his man/boy formulation has equally to do with intergenerational gay sex. Incidentally, both these tropes occur in my own novel *The Boyfriend*, but I shall not go into it here. What I wish to say, instead, is that if it remains un-negotiated, cross class and intergenerational gay sex can perpetuate the hegemonies that earlier existed in the ancient Greek and Roman societies and, thereby, substitute mainstream hetero-normativity with what may accordingly be called 'homo-normativity', a term first used by

Lisa Duggan. However, if properly negotiated, as for example in case the slave/boy is active and the free man is passive in an inversion of roles, this may imply the anti-essentialist or transgressive homosexual politics that Jonathan Dollimore (citing the instance of Oscar Wilde) speaks of in his book *Sexual Dissidence*. It may also imply the "universalizing" as against the "minoritizing" view that Eve Sedgwick discusses in her book *Epistemology of the Closet*. Here, the "universalizing" view acknowledges the existence of a spectrum of sexualities.

In his interview, Foucault next speaks of "monosexual society" where there is "a very clear separation between men and women." (364). Doubtless, such monosexual communities existed even in ancient Greece and Rome, but they also did in Islamic society with its insistence on *purdah* and in Hindu, Buddhist and Christian monasteries. Then, the kind of segregation of the genders that one finds in prisons, dorms, the armed forces and so on, may also amount to living in a monosexual society. What Foucault, however, is really concerned with is how a simple inversion of the hetero/homo binary, without any attempt to deconstruct it, fosters monosexuality. He says: "Thus, that you have homosexuals who live in a group or community, in a relation of constant exchange, reveals completely the return of monosexuality." (365).

Monosexuality is, indeed, essentialist by definition. The fact that it is practiced in monasteries, nunneries, the state run armed forces, educational institutions and so on, also makes it right wing. In my "Introduction" to my book *Whistling in the Dark: Twenty one Queer Interviews*, co-edited with Dibyajyoti Sarma, I identify several monosexual, or non-heteronormative male single-sex spaces (as I call them) in contemporary Indian towns and cities. These are the *nukkad* or street corners, the public urinals, the beer and country liquor bars, the *paan-beedi* and *gutkha* stalls, the gents' hair cutting saloons, the auto-rickshaw stands, the second class local train compartments, etc. Here, I must say, the mischief rules and, therefore, the watchword is *masti* and the idiom macho. Thus, in the incident that took place in a Mangalore pub a couple of years ago, where women drinking in the pub were assaulted

by men in the name of morality, my take on the episode is that the men were really threatened by an invasion of monosexual space by the women.

Foucault critiques monosexuality in the context of homosexuals living in a group or community. I would follow his use of the words 'group' and 'community' to refer specifically to the gay support groups and gay community of the post-Stonewall West, and, by extension, those, say, of the post-globalization India. These communities perpetuate the idea of normativity by substituting (what I have called above) homo-normativity for hetero-normativity, and, correspondingly, 'heterophobia' and misogyny for homophobia. Normativity of any type does nothing to dismantle the status quo; it is only through a destabilizing of normativity that revolutionary change can occur. Thus, we must oppose the idea of gay pride and gay marriage. Or, to put it a little differently, normativity engenders essentialism.

Next, Foucault speaks of his native France. Here, two institutions come in for sharp criticism, the law and medicine. Speaking of the law, he says: "A whole system of traps and threats is set up, with cops and police spies, a little world is put into place very early, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (369).

In contemporary India, the public face of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code has been those very traps, threats, cops and police spies that Foucault refers to in the context of Europe. As the petition for the revoking or reading down of Section 377 is currently being heard in the Supreme Court, the Government of India has, therein, submitted that very few actual convictions have taken place under Section 377. The reason being money changes hands at the constabulary level; policemen set up traps and serve as spies and agent provocateurs in mufti at places such as public parks and public urinals where homosexuals network. These *havildars*, once their palms are greased, are happy and contented, and they do not let the matter (of the networking) reach the courts. (*I speak here from personal experience, though I refuse to divulge the salacious details.)* Foucault, therefore, says:

"This is all inscribed within the framework of a surveillance and organization of a world of prostitutes—kept women, dancers, actresses—fully developing in the eighteenth century." In this context, one may speak of the ban imposed on bar girls by the Maharashtra government a few years ago, which continues to be in place even though it is delegalized by the court.

About medicine, Foucault speaks of the "noisy entry of homosexuality into the field of medical reflection in the mid-nineteenth century" (369). Noisy probably for the fact that medicine pathologizes homosexuality more vociferously than either the religious or legal texts. In America, where the American Psychiatric Association was obliged to strike homosexuality off its list of mental ailments, AIDS nevertheless led heterosexist society as well as orthodox feminists to denounce the gay community. In India, it is noteworthy that the petition to revoke Section 377 could not independently stand in court, but had to use AIDS as a prop. The Delhi High Court relented in July 2009 not because it believed in the naturalness of homosexuality per se, but because it was convinced that criminalizing homosexuality encouraged the spread of HIV. Attempts to resist the noisy entry of homosexuality into the field of medical reflection have been made, I think, by the anti-AIDS lobby and their 'conspiracy theory'. This lobby strongly believes that AIDS is a myth, foisted on the world by multinational drug cartels.

The most significant observation Foucault makes in his interview concerns the lifestyle: "Öit is not necessary to be homosexual, but it is necessary to be set on being gay" (370). As to the meaning of the statement, Foucault replied: "Saying 'one must be set on being gay' puts oneself in a dimension where the sexual choices that one makes are present and have their effects over the whole of our life" (369). He further adds: "Ösexual choices must at the same time be *creative* of ways of life (emphasis mine). To be gay means that these choices spread across a whole life; it's also a certain way of refusing *existing lifestyles* (emphasis mine); making sexual choice the *operator* of a change of existence" (370, emphasis mine).

The operative words and phrases in the sentences quoted above are: (1) sexual choices (2) creative (3) existing lifestyles (4) change of existence. Let me take these up one by one.

(1) Sexual choice implies that there is a spectrum of sexualities (Sedgwick) from which one can/must choose. For Sedgwick, the term sexuality really means a range of sexual behaviours and practices, and by this formulation, most sexualities, apart from procreative heterosexual sexuality, are non-normative. Foucault's emphasis on sexual choice, then, must be taken to mean his upholding of a wide variety of non-normative sexualities.

(2) If non-normative sexualities are also transgressive sexualities (Dollimore), Foucault sees transgression as creative (artistic, aesthetic), and perversion as power. This is, perhaps, best understood in terms of Dollimore's Nature/Culture binary, where attributes in the X Column (Culture) must be substituted for attributes in the Y Column (Nature). These are as follows:

X	*for*	Y
surface		depth
lying		truth
change		stasis
difference		essence
persona/role		essential self
abnormal		normal
insincerity		sincerity
style/artifice		authenticity
facetious		serious
narcissism		maturity

(Dollimore, 10).

(3) Existing lifestyles have to do with the maintaining of the status quo. They would make procreative (and hegemonic) heterosexual sex imperative in most cultures. Foucault rejects existing sexual lifestyles, opting thereby for 'non-existent' ones, which would validate a whole host of 'outlawed' sexual behaviours and practices, including, to take the most outlawed ones,

pedophilia, incest, bestiality and S/M. (I have left out homosexuality and lesbianism from the list because these are already 'normative' and therefore 'existing' in many parts of the world). Ironically, it is the slave who becomes here the harbinger of change.

(4) A change of existence is facilitated through (perverse) sexuality, making sexual choice the motor. Therefore, it was George Steiner, I think, who believed that sexual revolution had more explosive power to it than even the Great Wars. The phrase 'change of existence' implies a dismantling of the status quo through a destabilization of normativity. The formulation is 'militant' in import, for militants are said to destabilize the State.

Foucault finishes his reply to the question put to him by saying: "Not to be gay is to say: 'How am I going to be able to limit the effects of my sexual choice in such a way that my life *doesn't* change in any way?'" (370, emphasis mine)

Two negatives make a positive, *limiting* sexual choice so that life does *not* change; it is tantamount to maintaining the status quo. For that matter, Foucault says, "I would say that one must use sexuality to discover or invent new relations" (370).

Foucault's "new relations" would even have to do with making 'relationships' out of outlawed sexual behaviours and practices, such as those mentioned above. In a Sappho for Equality seminar at Jadavpur University in September 2011, a participant spoke, for example, about a Calcutta sect that upheld and practiced S/M as a mode of sexual gratification. Other groups, such as the banned NAMBLA (North American Man Boy Love Association) similarly upheld and practiced pedophilia. Incest and bestiality may also exist at random in the tribal and non-tribal communities in different parts of the world.

Foucault finally says: "To be gay is to be in a state of becoming" (370). This is because 'being' is essentialist; 'becoming' is anti-essentialist. Foucault's views on sexuality are radical and highlight the difference between being gay, homosexual and queer. In the post- Victorian India, few homosexual men and almost no lesbians would be able to make the paradigm shift from 'existing

lifestyle' to 'change of existence'. The term 'community' as we have already seen, signifies 'existing lifestyle'. Communities, thus, must be dissolved, whereas in India newer and newer gay support groups, always monosexual, seem to be emerging in metropolitan cities and smaller towns. The lesbian predicament is, perhaps, best brought out by Ranjita Biswas in her essay, "The Lesbian Standpoint" in the volume *The Phobic and the Erotic: The Politics of Sexualities in Contemporary India,* edited by Brinda Bose and Subhabrata Bhattacharya. Biswas here writes:

Staking claim to Foucault's theories of the sexual subject as a historical, cultural product, gay theorists have cast off their faith in the notion of a 'gay essence' and embarked on a detailed analysis of the historical construction of sexualities. This theoretical shift, as it were, finds realization in their personal lives too, as they portray a whole spectrum of sexually creative lifestyles and a proliferation of sexual cultures. Their supposed affinity for sexual pleasure as evident from their investment in anonymous lovers, pederasty and their preoccupation with ageist standards of sexual attractiveness has drawn flak from lesbian activists and feminists alike. (278)

A justification for the rift is provided by Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet*, where Axiom 3 in the introductory chapter "Axiomatic" reads as follows:

There can't be an a priori decision about how far it will make sense to conceptualize lesbian and gay male identities together. Or separately. (36)

If Foucault's paradigm shift seems 'immoral' to some of us, we must realize that it is *meant* to be so. Transgression and perversion are to Foucault, as to Oscar Wilde and Jean Genet before him, the route to utopia. That Foucault dreamt of utopia is evident from his remark, "One day the question 'Are you homosexual?' will be as natural as the question 'Are you a bachelor?'" (369).

Roland Barthes also dreams of utopia when he says: "Öonce the paradigm is blurred, utopia begins: meaning and sex become the objects of free play, at the heart of which (polysemant) forms

and the (sensual) practices, liberated from the binary prison, will achieve a state of infinite expansion" (133).

The binary, then, is a prison, and (sexual) practices must be sensual.

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The Role of Self-efficacy on Stress in Lesbians/Gays: A Recent Perspective

SHONALI SUD

Stress is a bane of life. Its fangs grip human beings indiscriminately and mercilessly. Yet, both psychologists as well as physicians continue to find ways and means to cope with it. Way back at the turn of the twentieth century, Cannon did talk of stress in the form of some kind of strain on the body.[1] But, the real credit goes to Hans Selye[2] who popularized the concept as well as explained it in greater detail and suggested that stress was the failure of an individual in adaptation to chronic challenges. Or, to state a bit differently, "it is the rate of wear and tear in the organism."[3] One of the best explanations of stress in recent times, however, is forwarded by McEwen: "Stress may be defined as a real or interpreted threat to the physiological or psychological integrity of an individual that results in physiological and/or behavioural responses."[4] Stress is caused by a host of demands (stressors) such as an inadequacy between what we need and what we are capable of acquiring, what our environment offers us and what it demands of us, etc. One needs to show a certain amount of responsibility as well as exercise control over what is happening around us. When one feels in control, stress becomes the spice of life, a kind of challenge instead of a threat. Contrarily, when one lacks this crucial sense of control, stress can spell crisis, which is a bad news for one's health and one's community. Stress in the biological sense cannot be eliminated altogether. Without it, the process of life would cease, for an absence of stress may even mean death. The relevant question therefore is: What is the appropriate level of stress? Is it proportionate to the needs

of the situation? When we are exposed to stressors in the form of lack of control over our lives combined with excessive demands, unsatisfied needs, unfulfilled expectations, over-stimulation, under stimulation, or role conflicts, most of us experience different kinds of emotional reactions, such as anxiety, depression, uneasiness, apathy and alienation.

From this, one can visualize, that if stress brings about such catastrophic physical and mental changes in normal humans, what could it be doing to an LGB (lesbian/gay/bisexual)? Does it cause some change in their cognitions and behaviour? Do they react differently? Are they comfortable with their life-style? How could efficacy be of help to them?

It is important to know that the difference between the terms sex and gender is somewhat unclear and, therefore, the two are frequently used incorrectly and interchangeably. According to Woodhill & Samuels, "sex refers to the person's biology and body features/characteristics, therefore a narrower term. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the psychological and social characteristics typical of a society or culture, involving socialized patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving."[5] Hence, masculine and feminine roles are more culturally ingrained within any individual and therefore solely responsible for creating gender role differences between men and women. They are defined as roles that fit one's level of sexuality and perhaps do not raise unnecessary eyebrows.

Research conducted over the last few decades (between 1940 and 2010) indicates that homosexuality is by itself not a disorder. Rather, it is simply a normal and positive variation of human sexual orientation[6],[7],[8],[9],[10]. Ever since 1975, the American Psychological Association (APA) has vouched that it is only prejudice and discrimination against homosexuals and bisexuals which appears to cause psychological harm.[11] In the same belief, the APA is in favour of legalising same sex marriages.[12]

Although accepted with a pinch of salt by fellow psychologists and classified as a pseudo scientist, it would be unfair not to mention Sigmund Freud and his concept of sex in the present

context. According to him, the sex drive (libido) is the most important motivating force within any person. Much to the chagrin of his colleagues, Freud was bold enough to suggest that sexual urges are present in children as well as infants just like any normal adult. His belief that early childhood experiences were crucial to the development of adult personality has been the most important landmark of his findings. His viewpoints on the life instinct or libido or the motivational urges of eros and thanatos, the life and death urges did arouse apathy. He believed that of these life urges, sex was one of the most important needs of the human body and, thereby, suggested that repressed sexuality or sexual drives lead to most kinds of behavioural disorders.

Furthermore, Freud viewed homosexuality as pathological, yet different from neuroses and, therefore, unlikely to be treated by psychoanalysis. On female homosexuality, Freud in his paper entitled "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,"[13] has described the case of a young woman, who entered psychotherapy because her parents were concerned about her being a lesbian. Her father hoped that psychoanalysis would cure her lesbianism; but, according to Freud, the prognosis was unfavourable because of the circumstances under which the woman entered therapy. Moreover, in his view, homosexuality is not an illness or neurotic conflict and changing homosexuality in this woman was a difficult proposition and would be possible only under unusually favourable conditions. Freud expressed that "in general to undertake to convert a fully developed homosexual into a heterosexual does not offer much more prospect of success than the reverse."[14] Success meant making heterosexual feelings possible rather than eliminating homosexual feelings which is rather unlikely.

Research by Cochran, Sullivan & Mays[15] as well as by Meyer[16] in the West indicates that lesbian, gay and bisexual adults have greater psychiatric morbidity than their heterosexual counterparts. In their view, this is mainly due to stress in the form of prejudice, discrimination, and violence. Lesbian, gay

and bisexual (LGB) are, perhaps, aware of their somewhat different way of life and, therefore, try to accept it unconditionally. Yet, maybe suffering from unhealthy cognitions, which by itself is stressful, it becomes essential to also know about psychiatric morbidity. It implies some kind of illness or a diseased state of mind, which requires treatment. An LGB is someone obsessed with gruesome and unwholesome thoughts. This preoccupation with their unhealthy state of affairs makes them wonder whether they can ever live a wholesome life like heterosexuals. This query undoubtedly raises serious concerns regarding the ethics of their behaviour and lifestyle. Surely, they are in this regard under tremendous pressure or stress.

Homosexuality is generally considered as a taboo both by the society as well as the government in India. It is mainly because sexuality in any form is rarely discussed here. Historical/literary evidence indicates that homosexuality has been prevalent across the Indian subcontinent since ancient times. One has ready evidence in the erotic temples of Khajuraho and Konarak. But, one has hardly dared investigate any LGB's mental health aspects, like stress, self-efficacy or well-being? Rather, homophobia in the form of negative attitude towards homosexuality such as contempt, prejudice, aversion and irrational fear has dominated Indian mentality since long.

Hence, there is a dearth of research in the mental health of gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Of the 1,285 LGB respondents who were examined by Warner and his associates[17] in UK in 2004, 556 (43%) had some kind of mental disorder or the other. Of the entire sample, 361 (31%) had attempted suicide. It was also recorded that there were high levels of perceived discrimination in the form of physical attacks, verbal abuse, property damage, bullying at school and suicidal ideation. Young LGBs were found somewhat more open about their sexual orientation and showed greater hostility, harmful drinking and deliberate self-harm. Hence, their major conclusion was that gay, lesbian and bisexuals had high levels of mental disorder, possibly linked with discrimination, and a tremendous amount of stress which

mounted further because of this realization that they are different or perceived differently. They felt they were a marginalized lot and, therefore, required special assistance or help, and when they started living with this ideology, it began to affect their perceptions and life-style in totality.

Studies carried out in North America up to 2003 on community based samples, suggest that gays and lesbians are more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, deliberate self-harm and substance misuse than heterosexuals[18],[19],[20],[21]. On a series of studies conducted in the West, it has been observed that LGBs suffer from stressors mainly constituting minority stress, a specific type of social stress to which individuals from stigmatized groups are exposed as a result of their minority position [22],[23]. Very less evidence is available regarding the effect of minority stress on social well-being despite the inherently social nature of stigmatization. However, the task of psychosocial development undertaken by LGBs has helped overcome this stigmatization. This has been done by way of establishing new social networks, cultivating a positive in-group minority identity, and revising heterosexually-based social norms defining sexuality, intimacy, and purpose in life[24],[25].

Recent evidence from the United States[26] indicates that lesbians live in a world that is dominated by oppression and heterosexist aversion that can lead to a deep sense of shame regarding their sexuality. Anti-oppressive social work involves taking and supporting action to advance both individual and structural change aimed at improving the lives of lesbians. This can again raise their level of stress and anxiety due to the fact that they are not considered normal or acceptable.

Derived from social-cognitive theory way back in the 1970s, Bandura[27] conceptualized the term self-efficacy as nothing but a "can-do" cognition. His finding added a milestone in the domain of understanding the importance of motivated thinking and action in the field of psychology. He reiterated that "SE is a belief within a person that he/she is capable to perform in a certain manner that can affect his/her life."[28] Thus, an individual is in total control over his/her life. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel,

think, motivate and behave. Such beliefs produce these diverse effects through four major processes. They include cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes. A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways.

People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. Such an efficacious outlook fosters intrinsic interest and deep engrossment in activities. They set challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them. They heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure. They quickly recover their sense of efficacy after failures or setbacks. They attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skill. They approach threatening situations with assurance that they can exercise control over them. Such an efficacious outlook produces personal accomplishment, reduces stress and lowers vulnerability to depression. A person who believes in being able to cause an event can conduct a more active and self-determined life course. This "can do"-cognition mirrors a sense of control over one's environment. It reflects the belief of being able to master challenging demands by means of adaptive action. It can also be regarded as an optimistic view of one's capacity to deal with stress. An LGB is in dire need of all these aspects. Thus, perceived self-efficacy predicts degree of therapeutic change in a variety of settings[29].

There are four ways in which efficacy can be developed or enhanced: (i) *mastery experiences*, that is successes strengthen efficacy beliefs while failures undermine it. Persevering effort helps in overcoming obstacles and builds self-confidence (ii) *vicarious experience* is the next step to build self-efficacy. Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities required to succeed. Observing others fail despite working hard lowers one's own judgment of efficacy and, thus, undermines effort. Hence, the impact of modelling on perceived self-efficacy is strongly influenced by perceived similarity

to the models. The greater the assumed similarity the more persuasive is the models' successes and failures. If people see the models as very different from themselves, their perceived self-efficacy is not much influenced by the models' behaviour and the result it produces (iii) *social persuasion* is the next way of strengthening people's beliefs that they have it within themselves what it takes to succeed. People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given activities are likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it rather than when they harbour self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies and problems arise. Such persuasive boosts in perceived self-efficacy lead people to try hard enough to succeed by promoting the development of skills and a sense of personal efficacy (iv) *positive appraisal* enhances self-efficacy. It is not the sheer intensity of emotional and physical reactions that are important but rather how they are perceived and interpreted. People who have a high sense of efficacy are likely to view their state of affective arousal as an energizing facilitator of performance, whereas those who are beset with self-doubts regard their arousal as debilitating. Physiological indicators of efficacy play a significantly influential role in health functioning and in athletic and other physical activities.

Hence, in what manner does efficacy help the homosexual? This is an avenue of research still under study. However, regarding the self-efficacy-LGB linkage, some interesting evidence[30] has shown that 90% of lesbians felt they lagged behind their heterosexual counterparts in career development. The 60% of LGB's either quit college or abandoned their careers. Some research with gay men found that they chose careers based on whether or not they would be accepted as gay in the careers of their choice. Most of them wanted to select counselling as a career option. They also found that while heterosexuals perceived more social support, bisexuals perceived much less, followed by lesbians and then gays. A majority of them complained of a lack of social support, kicked out of their home, being homeless, financial support ripped away, and some also complained of physical

assault, facing constant taunts and were even fired from their jobs.

This kind of an observation does indicate that such people start lacking confidence in their daily life to do even minor chores. They begin to downsize their self-identity and become unhappy souls. Surely, their efficacy zeroes down, totally incapacitating them to a vegetative mechanical existence.

In another study on self-identified gay Asian men living in Sydney,[31] it was seen that high efficacy resulted in fewer risks regarding sexual behaviour; it, thereby, not only consolidates but also further promises the benefits of social-cognitive factors among LGB's. Another observation explored the degree of confidence among lesbians to disclose their sexual orientation to others, and it was found that self-efficacy in the form of emotional arousal, verbal persuasion, and vicarious experience aided their sexual behaviour towards other women, which kept them going. Furthermore, self-efficacy correlated with lifestyle satisfaction and psychological adjustment among lesbians[32]. One of the best recent approaches is to help LGB's develop a safe and supportive atmosphere to successfully deal with career challenges. They should be made to feel that they are not alone and someone is there to help them. But, very few are eager to offer assistance to an LGB. Even though lesbians/gays are being legally accepted by most nations, there is a great degree of hesitation in one's mental make-up to freely interact with this section of society.

Since the past three decades, the American Psychological Association (APA) has opposed the stigma, prejudice, discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and has taken a leadership role in supporting the equal rights of lesbian, gay and bisexuals. Sexual risk-taking behaviour such as not using condoms to protect against sexually transmitted diseases has also been studied among homosexual men with multiple partners and intravenous drug users. Belief in one's capability or self-efficacy to negotiate safe sex practice has emerged as the most important predictor of such behaviours[33],[34],[35],[36],[37]. Hence,

self-efficacy forebodes sexual health as it can help one to exercise control over ones' sexual activities. Interestingly, there is an evidence to prove that homosexual men have focussed on their level of efficacy to adopt safe sex practices.[38]

Therefore, in recent times, there has been a change in perceiving the behaviour/acceptance level of homosexuals. Ever since the marriage of Leela and Urmila in 1987, the two women constables of the Indian police, perception towards lesbianism has undergone a transition, despite several controversial debates. As evidence to the fact, a course on homosexuality has been introduced in the University of Delhi and conferences and film festivals on LGBs have also been organized. Women rights movements have begun to discuss "lesbianism" without the earlier inhibition. It, therefore, appears that some form of social acceptance towards this marginalized lot is gradually dawning in the minds of people in India. But, according to Kannan,[39] lesbians are still conspicuous by their absence in Indian mainstream society as compared to gays. This establishes male supremacy and high self-efficacy in sexual relations. It has been found that a strong sense of personal efficacy is conducive to better health, higher achievements and easy social integration.

In one evaluation of lesbianism, the database record of 2010[40] points out that lesbians differ from heterosexuals by having (a) more pathological home environments; (b) mother-dominated families; (c) greater tomboy tendencies; (d) more boys or no girls as childhood playmates; (e) more childhood desires to be boys and (f) greater adult tendencies to consider themselves masculine and to prefer masculine attire. The result of the May 7-10, 2009, *USA Today*/Gallup poll,[41] conducted in Washington DC wherein Americans were asked about their views on a number of issues relating to gays and lesbians, show that 57% of Americans oppose legalizing gay marriage. However, those who personally know someone who is gay or lesbian are almost evenly divided on this matter in terms of 49% in favour and 47% in opposition to the marriage. Among those who do not personally know a gay man, 72% oppose legalized gay marriage while just a small

number (27%) favour it. On the whole, a majority of Americans (58%) admit they have a friend, relative, or co-worker who is gay or lesbian and this statistic has remained more or less consistent since 2003.

Nearly two-third of Americans (63%), who do not personally know a gay or lesbian, believe that legalized gay marriage will change society for the worse. Only a small minority of Americans believe legal gay marriage will change society for the better, but those who personally know someone who is gay or lesbian are three times more likely to say this than those who do not know anyone who is gay or lesbian. The 67% of those who know a gay person feel that same-sex relations should be legal, while 57% who do not know a gay or a lesbian say it should not be legal. The 88% of those who know a lesbian or a gay say they feel quite comfortable with them and, surprisingly, very few feel uncomfortable. There are two plausible explanations for this relationship. One is that exposure to gays and lesbians leads to greater acceptance, regardless of one's ideology. The second is that people who are more accepting of gays and lesbians are more likely to place them in situations in which gays and lesbians are socially approved as responsible members of society in terms of city and region of residence, as well as workplace and social choices.

The APA has taken a lead in promoting the idea that sexual orientation can be changed. Their move of "SOCE" or "sexual orientation change efforts" holds promises in spite of a great deal of controversy raised by the homosexuals in the society. Hence, besides offering social support to LGBs, coping strategies in the form of heightened efficacy can promise better success in elevating the social status of this segment of the society. Parents as well as close associates need to offer emotional support and, thus, help lower the debilitating aspects of minority stress. What is unfortunate is that LGBs are still referred to as the "hidden minority" due to their invisible nature of sexual orientation as well as lack of research which influences many factors in their daily lives from income to social identity to career development.

In fact, research proves that LGBs on the whole suffer from a bottleneck effect in career development. Therefore, social support and self-efficacy can help to overcome this distress.

It is, therefore, appropriate to wind up this essay with the idea that *nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.*

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Is Sex-drive a Death Drive? Or What has Happened to Sex in the 21st Century? A Reading of Lacan and Foucault

ANKUR BETAGERI

1

The advertising machinery, vulgar Freudianism and the sexual rights movement have displayed the unfortunate tendency of reducing the infinite complexity and depth of human personality merely to his penis- and vagina-function. Even if the domain of sexuality is broadened, and other forms of sexuality (other than the penetrative) are considered, it nevertheless does not hide the fact that the sexual rights movement is working hand-in-glove with the forces of capitalism and not for the emancipation of the sexual minorities even though that has been the chest-thumping claim over the loudspeaker. It is actually working towards an obscene sexualization of the entire human personality and all aspects of our "cultural" life.

One may say that this is just the furthering of Freud's grand project of unravelling human personality in the light of libido (or Eros), which in his view was the life-affirming energy behind all constructive human activity. Lacan too, in his series of lectures on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, tried to trace equivalences between the act of a canonized Christian saint (the reference is to a certain Angela de Folignio) such as the drinking of water, along with putrid pieces of flesh, with which the feet of lepers had been washed, and that of a twentieth century nymphet who, in the heat of sexual passion, consumes the shit of her rugby-team-forward boyfriend. It makes one curious to know—what does this disturbing psychoanalytic trend reveal? Lacan ends this

apparently outrageous claim with the mysterious statement, "the erotic side of the things remained veiled in the above example,"[1] which anyone not acquainted with his earth-shattering work would easily be tempted to dismiss as an intellectual mischief.

It is interesting to note that Foucault joins with Lacan to talk about moral laws as a support to pleasure and *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is sexual enjoyment that transcends Freud's pleasure principle. It informs that the experience of pleasure to be effective should not be more than the tension created by the drive which made the person seek for pleasure in the first place. Hence, *jouissance*, in other words, is an infinite experience of pleasure; it is a state of psychic tension caused by a pleasure so intense that it accepts the varieties of Sadeian sado-masochistic tortures, including death. To put it briefly, it is a pleasure which becomes pain and a craving which ends in catastrophe.

If the end, in the civil rights context, of the sexual rights movement is to decriminalize the routine sexual activities of the sexual minorities and to normalize the act of seeking partners, courtship, or even marriage and living together as a family, then the psychic end of the movement is the experience of *jouissance*, the demand for which (because of the way sexuality itself is being theorized and universalized) peeps out of every object and phenomena that constitutes our cultural life, from literary novels, paintings, popular cinema to TV commercials. So knowing the nature of *jouissance* is almost the equivalent of knowing our destiny as sexuated (a word which I use to indicate how sexuality has been, and is being, written on our bodies and personalities as a predominant characteristic) individuals.

What precisely is the nature of this *jouissance*? It is, in Lacan's own words, "the idea that there is no law of the good except in evil and through evil."[2] And when he specifically mentions the "jouissance of transgression," instead of stating what it constitutes, he asks the following rhetorical questions: "Does it go without saying that to trample sacred laws underfoot, laws that may be directly challenged by the subject's conscience, itself excites some form of *jouissance*? We no doubt constantly see the strange

development in a subject that might be described as the testing of a faceless fate or as a risk that, once it has been survived by the subject, somehow guarantees him of his power. Doesn't the law that is defied here play the role of a means, of a path cleared that leads straight to the risk? Yet if the path is necessary, what is the risk that is involved? What is the goal *jouissance* seeks if it has to find support in transgression to reach it?"[3]

Lacan follows these questions by an analysis of the Old Testament commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and the Old Testament statement "God made man in his own image" through which he seeks to clarify the meaning of *jouissance* of transgression. So, through these Biblical detours, and an engagement with Marquis de Sade's *The Story of Juilette,* he comes to the conclusion "that which is most myself in myself, that which is at the heart of myself, and beyond me... the notion of the self or same (meme)... is this interior or emptiness, and I don't know if it belongs to me or nobody."[4]

This conclusion that "that which is most myself in myself" is an "emptiness" which "I do not know belongs to me or nobody" leads him to a paradoxical thesis, one which defines the nature of the "jouissance of transgression." Lacan says, "my neighbor possesses all the evil Freud speaks about, but it is no different from the evil that I find in myself. To love him, to love him as myself, is necessarily to move towards some cruelty. His or mine? You will object. But haven't I just explained to you that nothing indicates that they are distinct? It seems rather that they are the same, on condition that those limits which oblige me to posit myself opposite the other as my fellow man are crossed."[5]

At this point, let us pause and look at where exactly we are heading with regard to the aims and objectives of the sexual rights movement. Sexual rights movement as an identity politics relies on the foregrounding of one's sexual identity and fighting for its right to exist as it is. It is also fighting for a space for it to become what it can. Talking about the extraordinary significance of politics for the modern man—as a means to find the very space for his existence—Foucault says, "It was life more than the

law that became the issue of political struggles, even if the latter were formulated through affirmations concerning rights. The 'right' to life, to one's body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, and beyond all oppressions or 'alienations,' the 'right' to rediscover what one is and all that one can be, this 'right'—which the classical judicial system was utterly incapable of comprehending—was the political response to all these new procedures of power which did not derive, either, from the traditional right of sovereignty. This is the background that enables us to understand the importance assumed by sex as a political issue."[6]

So, even as Foucault speaks of sex as "a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species."[7] he notes the historical shift that occurred in the nineteenth century which turned sexuality into a "standard of disciplines and as a basis of regulations"[8] so that "it was put forward as the index of a society's strength, revealing of both its political energy and its biological rigour."[9] It doesn't take long for the mercurial intellect of Foucault to assert that the importance that blood relation or "sanguinity" had in mechanisms of power, its manifestations and rituals have been taken over in our time by sex so that "We... are in a society of 'sex', or rather a society 'with a sexuality': the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used. Through the themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke *of* sexuality and *to* sexuality; the latter was not a mask or a symbol, it was an object and a target."[10] Foucault further states:

> We have arrived at the point where we expect our intelligibility to come from what was for many centuries thought of as madness; the plenitude of our body from what was long considered its stigma and likened to a wound; our identity from what was perceived as an obscure and nameless urge. Hence the importance we ascribe to it, the reverential fear with which we surround it, the care we take to know it. Hence the fact that over the centuries it has become more important than our soul, more important than almost our life; and so it is that all the world's enigmas appear frivolous

to us compared to this secret, minuscule in each of us, but of a density that makes it more serious than any other. The Faustian pact... is now as follows: to exchange life in its entirety for sex itself, for the truth and sovereignty of sex. Sex is worth dying for. It is in this (strictly historical) sense that sex is indeed imbued with death instinct.[11]

If Foucault is here using the word "death instinct" in the Freudian sense of the "urge in organic life to restore to an earlier state of things" whose "function is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death," [12] then he is talking about sex "as an instinct of destruction directed against the external world."[13] If Foucault's observation is right, then we have reached a strange and shocking paradox because sexual energy or libido or Eros is the life energy itself and the very opposite of Thanatos or the "instinct of destruction." So if sex, the life instinct itself, is fraught with the destructive death instinct, then it is important for us to reflect with the necessary caution on the crossroads that we as human beings have reached in relation to our desire.

At this point, let us return to Lacan and see how he understands *jouissance* as death drive. It is known that Lacan divides the psyche's experiential world into three fundamental orders: The Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The Real is the realm from which we are forever severed due to our entrance into language; it is, in Lacan's own words, "the realm of the impossible" as far as human beings are concerned. The Imaginary is the realm in which the subject—after the Mirror Stage in which the subject for the first time perceives its "self" as an image in the mirror called the Ego-Ideal—moves from the primal need to what he calls "demand". Demands are, by definition, unsatisfiable, and so in this order the self makes a movement towards the realization of a lack which defines the human subject. The Symbolic realm, also called "the Big Other," is the language and narrative in which the subject exists. It is, in other words, the rules and dictates of the society, which enables a person to deal with others, expressed as language. One enters the Symbolic order through the acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father, that is the laws and restrictions that control both one's desire and the rules of communication.[14]

The Real is the realm of needs which can be satisfied. However, the "demand" of the imaginary realm and the "desire" of the symbolic realm are by definition not satisfiable. Once man enters the domain of language, desire is forever bound up with the play of language. It, in fact, becomes our way of not coming into contact with the Real as desire is ultimately not interested in obtaining its object of desire but in reproducing itself as desire. The Imaginary realm unfolds in a framework of narcissistic images in which the subject demands for the unobtainable Ego-Ideal. For Lacan, this is the domain of love, and to make love functionally realizable, the subject must re-inscribe the narcissistic imaginary relation into the laws and contracts of the Symbolic order. As Lacan affirms, "No love can be functionally realizable in the human community, save by means of a specific pact, which, whatever forms it takes, always tends to become isolated off into a specific function, at one and the same time within language and outside it."[15]

So, *jouissance* in this context is not what it becomes after it gets transformed through language, or as it is often represented and made part of the civilization. Lacan clarifies this point by quoting Freud, "there is nothing in common between the satisfaction a *jouissance* affords in its original state and that which it gives in the indirect or even sublimated forms that civilization obliges it to assume."[16] Here, sublimation is defined as the transformation which occurs when the signifier becomes much more important and is charged with libidinal energy than the signified.

Access to *jouissance* presents itself to us in the form of a central emptiness ("that which is most myself in myself"). When approached, it breaks the neighbour's body into pieces, so that the neighbour's body presents itself as "part object" which, while it "wants to be reintegrated into the object, into... the object of our love and tenderness," is yet in a state of independence, in a field that we take to be central as if by convention. Lacan clarifies this through a quote from Sade's *Juilette*, "Lend me the part of your body that will give me a moment of satisfaction and, if you care to, use for your own pleasure that part of my body which

appeals to you."[17] So, this obsessive desire of the subject for the "part object," which constitutes *jouissance*, makes the subject lock himself up in defences to stop an access to what Freud calls "a horror he himself doesn't know."[18] And, this jouissance is, though it wants to reach into the Real, is socially and symbolically constituted. That is, it is desire, and Lacan reminds us that "there is no way one can reduce desire in order to make it emerge, emanate, from the dimension of need."[19] It is a need, which, as stated earlier, is satisfiable.

So "*jouissance* presents itself as buried at the centre of a field and has the characteristics of inaccessibility, obscurity and opacity; moreover, the field is surrounded by a barrier which makes access to it difficult for the subject to the point of inaccessibility, because *jouissance* appears not purely and simply as the satisfaction of a need but as the satisfaction of a drive."[20] The drive is nothing but the Freudian Death Drive.

At this point, Lacan wonders whether there is a parallel between the concept of entropy, as it is understood in energetics (defined as "the operation of an irreversible tendency that proceeds in the direction of the advent of a terminal state of equilibrium"), and the Freudian death drive. And, he clarifies that death drive, unlike entropy, is not just "a general tendency to return to a state of equilibrium," but it is actually a "destructive drive" as "the drive, as such,... has to be beyond the instinct to return to the state of equilibrium of the inanimate sphere"[21] and describes it as "Will to destruction. Will to make a fresh start. Will for an Other-thing, given that everything can be challenged from the perspective of the function of the signifier."[22]

So, sex drive, as *jouissance*, is a death drive—one which answers nature's call for annihilation. It is a drive made possible by man's demand to break out of the system of the play of language which seeks only to reproduce itself while disciplining and ritualizing human behaviour to the point of death. Man embodies this drive for annihilation though he knows very well that it is beyond his "capacity to achieve the scale of destruction that nature desires."[23]

However, Freud articulates *jouissance* as a destruction drive

because "it challenges everything that exists."[24] So it is more apt to see it as "a will to create from zero, a will to begin again."[25]

2

BUT HOW IS *JOUISSANCE* RELATED TO THE ACT OF SEX ITSELF?

Given the omnipresence of sexuality in our culture and everyday language—the increasingly sexualized imagery of advertisements, reality television, cyber sex networks, xxx sites on the internet and celebrity sex videos which get 'leaked' and offer a 'real fare'—*joiussance* is no more the reward for an individual at the end of his/her sexual or romantic conquest; it is a standard-of-pleasure which has already been set by the filmic craft of celebrity sex scandals and 'real sex' videos floating around in the cyberspace. The act of intercourse or lovemaking happens in the context of the fantasy-of-sex that these reality shows and porn videos have concocted so that a person does not make love to make love anymore, he makes love to match—and be a witness to—the fantasy of sex he has been forced to be a witness to; to complete his role as a voyeur-by-rule that the sex-obsessed culture has transformed him into. The important thing here, one that makes this contest frighteningly incongruous, is that while the fantasy of sex is a glamorous spectacle, with the act of lovemaking being feigned, exaggerated, sensationalized and cinematically constructed (the work of camera angles, lighting, editing, dubbing, etc.) the real act of sex which often takes place in a much more intimate space, where the third eye (the voyeur's eye) is missing, feels impoverished, and inadequate, – the scene less made up, under set up and lacking in the accoutrements and concomitants of the third eye – to match up to the feigned *jouissance* of the fantasy-of-sex. The sense of lack of fulfilment which is a direct result of the imitation of—and comparison wit—'real sex' videos is all the more sharp and jarring because it undermines or destroys the very fantasy—involving the two persons in the act of lovemaking—which would be the phantasmatic support for their physical act of lovemaking.

If sex was reinvented as a spectacle in the early twentieth century for large-scale public consumption through erotic and pornographic films, in our own century it has become an omnipresent phenomena—a given of the social reality, something in the air—by becoming a reality show or an internet event. Though sex symbols have always existed, even the iconic sex symbols of Hollywood in the heydays of sexual freedom, hardly simulated the physical act of sex on screen. They embodied the seductiveness and mystery of their sex and conveyed an idea or fantasy of sex by largely playing on the fertile imagination of the viewers. But, today, sex symbols leave nothing to the imagination, they prove their sexual prowess and exhibit their sexual appetite by simulating the sexual act on screen and it is this spectacle of sex which actually constitutes their sex appeal. This is definitely an internet-age phenomena and the very fact that we have porn stars as celebrities (Kim Kardarshian and Sunny Leone, for example) is proof that we are passive voyeur-consumers of a culture factory which mass-produces, mass-consumes and mass-imitates the act of love making as a spectacle. The cold, impersonal gaze of the camera (the third eye), playing the role of the Big Other, an agent of approbation of the sexual act, looks out of the eyes of lovers as they witness each other from a distance, alienated from each other, and perceiving each other as only images, even in the midst of the most intimate act of their lives.

The almost universal shift in the place accorded to sex in the mainstream popular culture, one of the most visible symptoms of the uni-formalization of the global cultural register, has played a major role in changing the experience of the sexual act in our times. When Freud (1930) said that "a *modern upbringing* conceals from the young person the role that sexuality will play in his life... [and] does not prepare him for the aggression of which he is destined to be the object,"[20] he had ethical percepts of civilization in mind; what is different about the *post-modern upbringing* is that these ethical percepts are replaced by fantasies-of-sex conjured by a society made unreal by its own spectacles. The key word here is "aggression"—what happens to the

aggression inherent to sexuality itself when it encounters the sexual fantasy as a super ego command? How does the aggression of sexuality respond when its desire is not limited by super ego commands like 'thou shalt not commit adultery', but by commands that try to delimit desire with commands like 'thou shalt fornicate', 'thou shalt enjoy—make the most of your time?' If desire is experienced as a transgression of the limit that it imposes on itself,[26] what kind of limit does desire impose on itself when its limit is made into a rule, a general standard, an obscene commandment? If desire by its very nature aspires for the state of being an exception – or even, the *exceptional* – to realize itself, what is *exceptional* in a society which has made the exception itself into an unwritten rule? The exceptional today does not belong to the realm of Eros; it is realized through a blind will for destruction, through acts which aim at the destruction of the object of desire. In other words, the exceptional, today, is realized through death instinct.

NOTES

1. Lacan, Jacques. 1992. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960.* London: Routledge. p.231
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3. Ibid., p. 240.
4. Ibid., p. 244.
5. Ibid.
6. Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality- Vol. 1.* Victoria: Penguin Books. p.145
7. Ibid., p. 146
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 147
11. Ibid., p. 156
12. Freud, Sigmund. 1990. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company. p. 308
13. 1960. *The Ego and the Id.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company. p. 381
14. 1991. *Freud's Papers on Technique.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company. p. 230
15. Ibid., p. 174

16. Lacan, Jacques. 1992. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: 1959-1960*. London: Routledge. p. 246
17. Ibid., p.249
18. Ibid., p. 250
19. Ibid., p.256
20. Ibid., p.258
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22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p.260
24. Ibid., p.262
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p.240

SECTION IV

Gay/Lesbians: Society and Culture

Queering Cityscapes

ZAID AL BASET

I. Travelling to create stories

We ambled our way to the Ballygunge Army Camp on a winter evening. Shiraz wanted to take me there. I didn't know that civilians were allowed at the park inside the army premises (apparently this has been stopped now). I was a little hesitant about 'interviewing' him there. We sat on a bench facing each other, amidst a group of children playing in front of us, making a lot of noise. Shiraz and I have known each other for over three years now. We are friends. I had intended to record his voice on my cellphone. I switched on the recorder telling Shiraz "let's talk" and then we both burst out laughingÖ Listening, I realize, is a difficult exercise which I, as an ethnographer, am expected to master. It requires not simply a pair of alert ears, but also a careful orchestration of one's body language. I knew I needed to appear interested, encouraging, non-judgmental, empathetic and so forth. But the challenge of making a friend narrate a life has its own entanglements. It requires distancing—an act of unknowing and then (re)knowing. What made us laugh, at the beginning, was this abrupt changing of roles, from friends to researcher and subject, storyteller and listener. This shifting of roles is rather comical (far from the seriousness that ethnographic practices demand or claim to be). We couldn't help but feel as though we were play-acting in an awkward place where I had stepped for the first time. Being my first 'story' collecting encounter, I was perhaps more uncomfortable than Shiraz was. Shiraz was meeting a friend, whereas I was encountering a subject. And, as I listen to our recorded conversation over and over again,

I must confess he sounds much more at ease than I doÖ I did not have a fixed set of questions in mind, I did not want my questions to structure my subject's story, yet I think I inflected the cadence of his story in more ways than I can begin to unravel. It is interesting to note that the locations of the storyteller and listener are not fixed in the creation of a story. The telling of a story and its writing continuously keeps this relationship in a state of flux. Shiraz's tale changes directions with the questions I ask or the comments I make; I create his story by punctuating his accounts. In the act of storytelling, we, the storyteller and the listener, create a story together which traverses a history of experience in the present. In the act of writing this story, this relation is reversed; the listener tells the story he was told. The listener becomes the teller. The question is how does the story travel between these subject positions? Whose story is it really? While I write Shiraz's story, I am aware of how I recreate it on the page. I edit his story keeping in mind the eccentric demands of academic writing—an absurd attempt to fuse the objective with the subjective. A writer who works with a word-limit, with a specific argument in mind, trained in a certain theoretical paradigm, armed with a set of concepts, burdened with a host of assumptions, obliged to bring other writers in conversation on his page, can never be objective while writing/telling a story. What would objectivity signify here? How does one represent a story objectively when the story is a subjective product of both the listener and teller? The situation is worsened when writing, which is the listener's job (who is now the teller), has to mediate between the teller (the subject) and the reader. What transpires between Shiraz and me is replayed between my anticipated reader and me. Now I begin narrating a story, keeping in mind the interest of my reader. Shiraz's story and stories of all my subjects take shape in a discursive space of ever shifting positions of the teller-listener, and the writer-reader. Academic writing, far from occupying the rational objective stance, is a product of conflicting and impossible demands and claims. Academic writing, at least those which chime with the reigning pedagogic demands, in a bid to 'appear' scientific, erases

the subjective position and experiences of the author. Mary Louis Pratt in her essay "Fieldwork in Common Places" takes note of this paradox in ethnographic writing convincingly, arguing that field work is "anchored to a large extent in subjective sensuous experienceÖ but the professional text to result from such an encounter is supposed to conform to the norms of a scientific discourse whose authority resides in the absolute effacement of the speaking and the experiencing subject" (1986: 34). The vignettes of lives that I wish to narrate have already undergone multiple translations. My subjects narrativized their lives for me and I am attempting to narrativize it for the purpose of academic discourse. If there is any transparency, value-neutrality or objectivity that I can endorse, it would be a frank acknowledgement of the subjective and creative elements in providing accounts of lived experience.

II. Sex, Sex everywhere

Shiraz's life changed with the arrival of the internet at home. He was desperately yearning for a 'gay act' and the internet proved a boon for him. Previously he would go to cyber cafÈs to watch gay porn. He was caught once! Later, he discovered yahoo messenger (a chat portal) and the Kolkata gay chat room. He met many gay guys through the internet and learnt about gay cruising areas in Kolkata. "I would be online all day. I would not reveal my true identity. I would tell others I am Zaid. At that time I did not know where you could find gays. I was dying to meet one. The first gay person I met was through a yahoo chat. He called me to his place. I was excited". Shiraz took a local train to meet Amit at Santoshpur. He was 20 then. It was January; he had told his mother that he was going to the book fair. Amit took him to his place.

"He was dark, not good looking at all. I remember when he took me to his room. Actually, he had said he had a lot of gay movies. I was quite excited that at least I would get to watch gay movies, even if the guy turned out to be bad. We began watching gay porn. Then he said *chalo utho* (get up). There was another

fat guy. I knew they both wanted to make out with me. I was scared and very nervous. I remember when I hugged Amit. I began shivering visibly. I was so nervous. Then I kissed him. The fat guy started joking about me *darpok darpok* (coward! coward!). Then they began 'making out' in front of me, they masturbated each other and ejaculated. I found it dirty. Then the fat guy went away. Finally, when I was with Amit, I felt more comfortable. He said '*dekhao muhje kaisa hai... mujhe 'woh' dekha na* (show me I want to see '*that*') show me your penis.' I was initially hesitant but I gave in and he masturbated me. Then I went home. When it was over, I felt I had done something wrong—lost my virginity. For a few months after that I was in a daze. I felt dirty", tells Shiraz animatedly, describing his first sexual experience with another gay.

"There was a time I would go to Minto Park daily to look for someone who would want to do something. I just wanted to have fun. I used to have a high Libido. I would go there whenever I felt like."

Amit introduced him to Minto Park and took him there. Minto Park is located on one of the busiest thoroughfares in Kolkata—AJC Bose road, overlooked by the Belle Vue Hospital. Minto Park is a well-known gay cruising space (at least to the gay men) in Kolkata. It is a rectangular park with narrow walkways around a big lake with fountains that don't work. The lake is surrounded by tall palm trees which shade elongated cement benches along the edges of the lake. At the entrance of the Park is the Minto Park Bus Stand. There are enough nook and corners in the park, including a public toilet which makes it an interesting cruising space. The park has no entry fee and receives a generous footfall from morning to evening throughout the year. People of all ages from children to octogenarians frequent the park. They can be seen sauntering, walking briskly, and jogging along the relatively clean walkways. The park does not have any observable markers of 'queerness'. In fact, it is blatantly hetero-normative as one can observe old and middle ages couples (sometimes with young children) walking around the lake, breathing the rare fresh air,

evoking a perfect picture of marital bliss, familial love, health and vitality. Yet, it is this visibly heterosexualized space which exhibits (for those who have a keener eye) a gay sub terrain especially in the evenings and on weekends. Shiraz enlightens me: "The very first sign is that 'they' stare at you or try to touch you, especially 'uncles'—middle-aged men. Once I was sitting on the bench and an uncle came along. He was eating a *bhutta* (corn) and asked me suggestively *khaoge?* (Will you eat?). I refused him. I remember on a rainy evening, another 'uncle' came to me. He asked me my name. I told him 'Zaid'. He thought I am interested in him. He told me *chalo na chalte hain, mausam acha hai, masti karenge, jiyo zindagi ji bhar ke* (lets go, the weather's fine, we shall have fun, live life to your heart's content). Then there would be people I would like. Often they would initiate the conversation. Sometimes when I was 'high' and horny I would be the one to start a conversation. If I found a good-looking guy, I would go sit next to him. I would stare at him every now and then. If he did the same then I would try and initiate a conversation saying 'can we talk' and take it from there." Shiraz tells me that he never mistook a straight guy to be gay, that there was always a way of knowing, a consciousness of the 'others' presence; guys who are not interested do not stare at other guys. He never made out at Minto Park since the space is too public. He has passionately smooched a guy inside a tiny toilet in a slum at Beckbagan. He has indulged in mutual masturbation on the terrace of a commercial building near Minto Park. He has also 'made out' quite a few times at a park behind British Council which is relatively darker because it does not have too many lights.

On a Sunday morning, I met Rohit at South City Mall (Kolkata's largest shopping mall). I was meeting him for the first time although I have known him for quite some time. He happens to be Saurav's friend. Saurav is a phone/message friend of mine which means we rarely meet face to face but are in regular touch 'textually'. Rohit is a twenty-five-year-old working man. He belongs to a middle-class family. He is a gay. He is a 'bottom' (someone who prefers to be penetrated) and revels in calling himself a gay

slut or better still '*slutty savitri'*. Sitting amidst a buoyant crowd at the food court, we began talking about the vagaries of life. I was as usual armed with my cell phone recorder which I held close to his mouth all the while we spoke lest the music and people's cacophony spoil the recording. It was a strange sight, yet nobody seemed to notice. Among other things, Rohit was telling me about the cruising areas in our city and his sexual experiences therein. "I was having sex in Maidaan. My shirt was up to my chest. The other guy was shirtless when the police came. Police understood. I told him, *bhool kore dukhe phelech Ö cheredin.* (Have entered by mistake. Let us go). Sometimes they charge but I was lucky. He asked us to run away and I just ran. Another friend of mine also faced a similar situation. He confessed, *dada amra prem kora jiagah payi na, bari te amader allow kore na, amader mene nichche na society...* (Big brother, we don't get places to make love; they don't allow it at home; society is not accepting us). The policeman became emotional and left him somehow. But police harassment is more common at Dhakuria Lake."

Rohit informs me that the first and last compartments of the metro railway are also cruising spaces. "Just behind the driver's seat, if you stand there people will know what you want. By their 'look,' their *ishara* (suggestion), one can make out that they want to be touched," he exclaimed. During the rush hour, when it's crowded, men (even married ones) allow other men to fondle and caress their genitals. If a man is interested, he inches closer to another man and 'touches' him nonchalantly. If the guy is aroused and interested, the caressing of the crotch begins more deliberately amidst the office going crowd". Rohit has 'fondled' men inside the Metro many a times. He has even 'served' two men simultaneously in the metro.

"I was holding dicks of two men. One of them told me 'Don't hold his dick. He is not a regular one. I told him that neither was I and continued rubbing both of them," he says, smiling wickedly.

III: Cruising

Parul insisted that I must go to the 'gay park' before I leave

Delhi. I was in Delhi for a few days in January to take a couple of interviews. This was my first visit to the capital. Since my sense of direction is disastrous, Parul and her friends decided to take me to the 'infamous' place. Perhaps the most striking feature of the park is its name. It doesn't leave much to the imagination and from what I gather most Delhites are aware of the 'gayness' of the park. The park is located at CP (Connaught Place) overlooking the entrance to Pallika Bazaar. It is a relatively small park. It is situated above ground level and a series of steps leads to its entrance. The park is generously endowed with benches and is poorly lit. That particular evening the park was filled with men (of all shapes and sizes), some in large groups, some strolling alone. I was with two women (and they were the only two in the park). All three of us stood together, looking around. I was playing 'participant' and 'observer'. My eyes followed a group of four sturdy men who had just entered the park and encountered each other. All of them, tall, well built 'hunks'. They seemed like 'regular' North Indian men. There was no hint of effeminacy in any of them (at least from the distance that I was observing them). I could hear them exchange greetings; "*kaisi hai tu?*" ("How are you?") asked one of them. Another enquired "*aaj kahan chalegi*" ("where will you come today?"). 'Masculine' men were referring to each other using the feminine gender. Before I could 'read' the situation in a *Butleresque* fashion, I caught a pot bellied man staring fixedly at me with a large pair of eyes which I felt would pop out if he stared even a bit harder! He was middle-aged and seemed drunk. I stared back, thinking that he'll avert his gaze. But, of course, he didn't do so. Our eyes met. He gave me an 'eyebrow flash'. I immediately turned towards Aarti and started speaking to her. If he were remotely attractive, I would have played this 'eyeing' game with him. The three of us, Aarti, Parul and I began walking around the park. As we passed cliques of men sitting/standing together, I could feel that they were all 'checking' me out. These unabashed stares made me feel awkward yet excited. It was an openly queer space, the stares were obvious, men's desire for other men, piercingly palpable. If nothing else,

men could stare at other men in gay abandon out here. Then suddenly Aarti's phone rang. It was John on the line. He wanted to know where we were. Aarti spoke into the phone 'Come! Come to Gay Park'. I guess John couldn't hear her properly so this time Aarti shouted 'COME TO GAY PARK'. No sooner did she shout than a bunch of 'gay' men, who were in the vicinity, burst out laughing and gaffed at Aarti. Aarti was visibly embarrassed. She told us, John would meet us somewhere else. John is straight. As we move passed the laughing men, I turned back and smiled at them. They all smiled back. Some were even giggling.

IV: Queering spaces

The scenes sketched above provide interesting ways of understanding the transient contexts or travelling sites where queer stories unfold. Until now, the accounts I have provided feature public spaces—Minto Park, Maidaan, Metro railway and 'Gay Park'. Often 'queer' readings of space begin with the insight that spaces are "produced as 'ambiently heterosexual, heterosexist and hetero-normative" and that the presence of 'queer bodies' is able to "reveal that this heterosexing of space is a performative act naturalized through repetition and destabilised by the mere presence of invisibalized sexualities" (Bell and Valentine: 1995: 16-17). I wish to question the easy assumptions of space as heterosexual on the grounds that a) it reproduces stable notions of self, identity, sexualized bodies and sexual orientation, b) it produces stable notions of spaces (as gendered/sexualized) and c) if spaces are heterosexualized then 'invisible' sexualities far from destabilizing it will only reinforce compulsory heterosexuality either by 'otherizing' itself or by simply 'trivializing' it.

I must begin with a question—what is a sexualized space? If we understand it as space inscribed by a calculus of desire or the possibility of its expression both overt/covert or as enabling certain forms of sexual interaction or exchange (and not others) then a given space can never be 'sexualized' in a homogenous manner. The 'sexuality' of a space is contingent on the specific

forms of interactions that actors 'perform' therein at specific points in time. This time-space configuration heterogenizes and fractures a given context. This is not to encourage an understanding of space as blank and solely as a function of performances and inscriptions. The role of space as enabling or disenabling certain forms of interaction cannot be denied. What emerges then is a complex 'play' between space and sexuality. This makes contexts (as specific intersection of time and space) inherently elastic. Spaces like selves who occupy them are closeted. They reveal as much as they hide/conceal. This closeted-'ness' is a function of myopic frames of 'looking'. For instance, Minto Park 'objectively' observed is simultaneously heterosocial and homosocial, which means it permits both same-sex and opposite sex social interaction. I use hetero/homo with the suffix social to suggest that a space such as Minto Park is sanitized of sexuality, that desire in itself is already closeted. This 'objective' assessment is of course closeting the subjectivity of a 'heterosexual gaze' which 'looks' at the space from a specific angle which tends to erase other forms of desire and its manifestations violently but innocently. As I noted earlier, Minto Park appears as a space of familial harmony, an encomium to the 'benefits' of being 'heterosexual'. The question is to whom? It is noteworthy that the space is not 'heterosexual', the 'angle of sighting' is. For Shiraz, there is nothing heterosexual about the place at all. It is a space which offers a blatant 'play' of homosexual desires. It is a space which gives 'vent' to his 'deviant' desires whenever he is 'horny'. Shiraz is not very tall, he is skinny, looks very serious, dresses 'decently', does not wear make-up, does not swish his hips, has a hoarse voice and isn't effeminate. In other words, subject to a heterosexual scanner, he can pass off as 'heterosexual' rather easily. His presence, then, does not challenge the heterosexuality of Minto Park, if we at all assume, it is inscribed thus. However, for Shiraz, it's a space where 'uncles' are 'predatory' and a space where he can 'hunt' for sex. It is a location popular among gay men in Kolkata where strangers 'hook-up'. It is a site where queer rituals take place in public such as the

ritual of 'staring' and the 'gaydar'[1] is on high alert. Arguably, taring is not a ritual typical to queer men; in fact, it is an established form of 'looking' implicated in patriarchal gaze which has historically objectified everything it desires. Men staring at each other from a distance, inching closer towards one another on a bench, holding hands at Minto Park, may be playing out their homosexual desire but it can easily slip into the space of 'homosociality'. Homosociality and homoeroticism does not have impermeable boundaries. Yet, homosociality diffuses the threat of 'homosexuality' in public space aiding the heterosexual gaze to overlook or understate markers of homosexuality. Moreover, there seems to be a rather rigid notion of sexuality being deployed here, the domain of the 'sexual' is stifled within the heterosexist discourse. Holding hands, sitting close to each other, or even staring with sexual intent ARE forms of sexual expression. For Shiraz, these 'moments' are anything but sexually charged. Hence, it is the heterosexual gaze that makes homosexual space a blind spot through practiced ways of looking. I argue that spaces are always already polymorphous and that this sexual eclecticism is made possible by the multiplicity of angles from which a space can be looked at. Minto Park is heterosexual or homosexual or even sexual or non-sexual depending on the viewpoint of the onlooker. While Shiraz may revel in the homoeroticism of the space, an elderly married couple may jog around the same space discussing family issues blissfully unaware of Shiraz's exploits. In fact, blind spots make sexual play possible. They allow contexts to remain elusive. Queer stories play out in these elusive contexts. They reveal the blind spots of hetero-normative contexts, by not really reclaiming a space for themselves as the 'other'. It isn't as confrontational. The queer exists, unnoticed and sometimes this makes possible forms of sexual interaction which the heterosexual gaze fails to recognize altogether. To elucidate the possibility of play is to undermine heterosexual hegemony over contexts, but it is in no way an effort to undermine the visible forms of sexual violence and assault that 'straight' women and visibly queer men and women face in Indian cityscapes. Public spaces perpetrate

the myth that it has nothing to conceal and there are no closets to unearth, that all is inscribed on the surface. The heterosexual gaze is unaware of its blind spots. Closets escape signification, they are not there and yet they are made possible by their very absence. Compulsory heterosexuality erases and forgets this erasure of 'queer'-ness from public spaces. This erasure functions as the private in the public for non-heterosexual desires and subjectivities. The heterosexual gaze has forgotten that queerness is a 'reality'. This reality, nevertheless, 'exists', it is always-already there, precisely because it has been conveniently forgotten.

Rohit talks about a crowded space inside the metro which offers possibilities of alternate forms of pleasure where men fondle each other's genitals. He insists that it is not only gay men who participate in this act. There is no way to ascertain the sexual orientation of men indulging in such acts. I would, however, focus on the specific moment before the 'actual' fondling begins—the ambiguous 'moment' of hesitant approach before the furtive consent to such acts is secured. Rohit tells me that a man who is interested often initially 'pretends' to touch another man. Such 'mistakes' of hands inching towards another crotch, or hands stroking buttocks, or simply standing 'too close for comfort' is made possible by a prevalence of a masculine homosocial space where male bodies are allowed greater physical proximity between them sans the fear of the 'homosexual'. The gay man, inadvertently benefits from such spaces. 'Mistakes' even if they do not culminate into full-fledged sexual acts are still a source of pleasure. The interstitial space between the visibly homosocial and the invisible homoerotic is a space marked by immense opportunities of pleasure. Two gay men fondling each other amidst a deluge of other male bodies is a 'fun' experience for many like Rohit. In fact, in this very situation, in a strange twist to the gay tale, queer desire is ensconced within the masculine homosocial which, although on the surface appears homophobic, can 'protect' same-sex male desire. Until now, I am aware of the implicit assumption of the homosexual/heterosexual binary of sexual identity in the above passage. In India, not all individuals

who indulge in same sex acts are necessarily sexually oriented towards their own sex. The space of *masti*, *yaari* or even 'discharge'—sex[2] questions the neat alignment between behaviour, identity and acts. The anonymity of urbanscapes creates these 'fictive' contexts which foreground queer tales, where spaces emerge out of non-space, where desire, identity and bodies are in a permanent state of flux, where markers of alternate desires and subjectivities are more misleading than telling.

Contrastingly, Gay Park is inscribed by pulsating gay desire. It is an overtly queer space where gay male desire is unabashedly visible. Gay Park is confrontational; it challenges hetero-normative contexts in an overt way. Marked as a space for the 'other', Gay Park radically challenges and deliberately erases markers of heterosexuality by a) hypersexualizing the space, every stare that one encounters there demands sex and b) by replacing the homosocial with the homoerotic.

Lee Edelman, in his book *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*, elaborates on his neologism "homographesis'' which he employs to assert how the homosexual body as a text is so marked as to make it legible in a heterosexual context and that it is this very legibility/visibility which produces the very essence of the homosexual. For instance, the homosexual male is often 'written' as effeminate and, hence, visibly distinct from the heterosexual male. He notes that "like writing, then, homographesis would name a double operation: one serving the ideological purposes of a conservative social order intent on codifying identities in its labour of disciplinary inscription, and the other resistant to that categorization, intent on de-scribing the identities that order has so oppressively inscribed." (1994: 10) The notion of homographesis when transposed from essentailized/codified bodies to space may produce interesting ways of writing/inscribing the sexuality of spaces.

Gay Park seems to have homosexuality inscribed on its topography. The very interpellation of the space as 'gay' risks the chance of any male body present in the space to be 'written off' as a homosexual body, except that this may well NOT be the case. Precisely because the space appears already homosexual,

straight bodies within the space risk being read as gay bodies and this possibility of (mis)reading "effectively disrupts the cognitive stability of the visual perception between 'sameness' and 'difference' written on male bodies". Homosexual and heterosexual bodies are 'different' to the extent that there is 'writing' to mark out *this* difference on bodies that are also simultaneously 'same' for they are both male bodies. This play of sameness-difference, homo-hetero destabilizes a space written 'essentially' as gay.

Likewise, a metro compartment or the apparently heterosexualized Minto Park are spaces 'unwritten' by homographesis, wherein they present the risky as well as exciting possibility of homosexual bodies merging with heterosexual bodies in a mass of male bodies thereby destabilizing the very act of producing bodies already written by heteronormaive ideologies as either homo/hetero. Hence, spaces whether inscribed by homosexuality/heterosexuality remain a complex play of visibility/invisibility, are always more polymorphous.

NOTES

1. 'Gaydar' is a hybrid of two words 'gay' and 'radar'. It refers to the intuitive ability of gay individuals to 'recognize' the presence of other gay persons in a given social context. It relies almost exclusively on non-verbal cues.
2. See Shivananda Khan's report titled 'Sex and needs assessment amongst men who have sex with men, in Lucknow, India' for an elaboration on the concept of 'discharge' sex. The report can be accessed online. The concept basically refers to 'opportunistic' and 'immediate' sex acts among men meant for 'sexual release' which may not necessarily align with their gender behaviour or sexual identity. The report is accessible online at http://www.nfi.net/NFI%20Publications/Assessments/Lucknowrpt.pdf

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Poetics of the Sexualized Body during the Raj: The Andaman Connection[1]

AKSHAYA K. RATH

I

Two "holy" men: one the often represented "holy" king of Puri, Gajapati Dibyasingh Dev (1859-1888), who sweeps the path the chariot of Lord Jagannath takes, and the other, a self-proclaimed "Vaishnava saint," Shiva Das, who was an advisor to the Queen-Mother. In 1878, the state of Orissa witnessed a strange case that involved actions of both these "holy" men. The king of Puri was reported to have committed a heinous crime. In the dreary night of February 23, 1878, he summoned the "saint" to the wrestling ground of his courtyard and rebuked him brutally. A historical fiction informs that "Divyasingh urinated on his face" as his servants "overpowered"[2] him. The king branded parts of the saint's body with a hot iron rod. The cruelty of his action did not stop there. He further put quicklime in his genital, inserted jute sticks in his rectum and burnt them, and forced him to eat human excrement. The man was thrown out of the courtyard when he was half-dead and could no longer scream after four hours' torture. The impact of the torture inflicted upon him was so harsh that he remained fainted throughout the night. *Utkal Deepika*, a leading contemporary periodical, reported that a constable saw the man's alarming state and took him to hospital the next morning.[3] The victim narrated the incident to the constable, accusing the king and his associates of torturing him harshly. Hence, the colonial judicial system ordered an enquiry of the highest order on receiving the report. So shocking was the incident that the magistrate himself enquired about the case at

the king's courtyard. Before the trial began, the king was taken into judicial custody on February 25, 1878, was given a separate cell and a servant, and he remained there as a captive. A medical examination doubted the victim's survival. With this began another trial in the colonial regime that involved a rare sexual crime in the Oriental world. The king, along with two of his associates, was transported to the Andamans to serve a life-term.

The incident generated a lot of discussion in the field of letters. The interpretation has been two-fold. On the one hand, British legal documents and contemporary periodicals reported the incident as against the course of a "natural act," condemned the act, and followed the incident until the king's transportation to the Andamans. The *Indian Daily News*, published from Calcutta, for example, supported the court's verdict.[4] Oriya periodicals such as *Utakal Deepika* reported the incident, highlighted the king's mischievous deeds in targeting common folk, but were sensitive to Oriya sentiments because the Gajapati dynasty was synonymous with the spiritual power.[5] On the other hand, modern historians claim Gajapati's patriotic activities for the motherland and conclude that it was a British conspiracy to put an end to the king's regime.[6] Hence, in the first type of texts, readers witness the "unnatural act" represented, and the reports highlight Section 326 of the Indian Penal Code, which subsequently became a murder case under Section 302 following the man's death in the hospital. Alternately, Oriya documents such as Gajapati histories narrate a different side of the story. Many of them state that the King was a freedom fighter, participated in "Paik rebellion", showed a war-like performance in the town of Puri prior to the incident and, hence, it was a "conspiracy charge"[7] deliberately brought in to send him away from his subjects. This report, however, has been proved to be a forgery by many. Further, the *Indian Mirror* "criticized Judge Dickens for having chosen to ignore the views of the assessors of the case."[8] The king's immoral act, on the other hand, has been a subject matter of both Indian and British narratives; and as the "Paik rebellion" of 1817 was a matter of distant past, it questions the authenticity of such a claim.

J.P. Das's historical fiction *Desh Kaal Patra*, which has been translated as *A Time Elsewhere*, has the following to document about the King's character and activities:

> ...nothing about his [Divyasingh's] *nature* seemed to have changed. Not having received the benefit of education, and having spent all his time in the gymnasium in the company of servants had completely *corrupted his nature* and *perverted his character*. Let alone ordering the affairs of the temple or taking care of his landed property, he even *avoided polite company*. Almost always high on opium and bhang, he often beat up his servants who complained about him to Suryamani [the queen-mother] almost daily. The rani would hush the matter up but she was scared that *Divyasingh's doings might not remain a secret for long*, for he was not in his senses when he *assaulted* the servants (emphasis added).[9]

The king's trial generated a lot of sympathy for him among the common folk. Some were interested in witnessing the special proceeding of the Raja's trial. Some others, however, came thinking that his "holiness" has been tricked for the larger benefit of strengthening the British Empire. Legends say that on the day of the court proceeding, people came like a flock of birds and waited in front of the court throughout the day to hear the court's proceeding. There was a well and they drank half its water while waiting for the trial. If not much, it indicated in principle the sundry people assembled to witness the trial.[10] After the trial, on March 11, the court decreed a penalty of transportation for life to the king for having done such a heinous act. The king appealed against the verdict but the sentence remained stagnant and on March 23, he was taken away to Calcutta from where he was transported to the Andamans to serve a life-term. There exist a few romantic representations of the incident. This incident has to be read within the context of the Raja's "corrupt nature" and "perverted character" as represented in historical and literary texts. Further, terms such as "pervert" and "unnatural" that are found in colonial documents and are widely used in different colonial sources to portray people's "nature" and "character" need to be addressed within the framework of colonial sexualities and prison transportation in India. Hence, in what follows we contextualize the king's transportation against the backdrop of

prison transportation with a focus on sexual crimes and finally read the transportation within the framework of colonial discourse.

II

It was evident to the British administration that India was culturally a land of erotica—of the *Kamasutra*. The British officials, thus, had sufficient reasons to conclude that Indians by nature were more lascivious than their western counterparts.[11] Child marriage and polygamy, and temple carvings and erotic books seemed to have proved it. A proposal for destroying Konark for its erotic architecture was a matter of debate in early years before the archaeological reconstruction took place. Consequently, in such a land, the responsibility of saving the "young" British soldiers from moral decay had fallen upon the colonial administration. It had also fallen upon the administration that records concerning homosexual behaviour were to be codified and were to be strictly observed and monitored for the much required correction. Such an attitude towards the prevailing form of homosexuality came into existence not without an "honest" attempt towards its codification and correction. In the colonial form of government, the health of British officials and soldiers was to be strictly monitored; and in actuality, any form of unsanctioned sexual behaviour was to be strictly supervised for correction so that the "young" British soldier would stay "healthy" and perform his duty properly. Kenneth Ballhatchet in *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj* quotes from "Memorandum" to justify the naïve conclusion the government officials drew:

> For a young man who cannot marry and who cannot attain to the high moral standard required for the repression of physiological natural instincts, there are only two ways of satisfaction, viz., masturbation and mercenary love. The former, as is well known, leads to disorders of both body and mind; the latter, to the fearful dangers of venereal diseases.[12]

It is remarkable that homosexuality was hardly ever mentioned in such colonial documents that drew conclusions. Homosexuality was an issue not to be written about if it could be repressed by

force or could clinically or otherwise be corrected. Ballhatchet further comments: "An even more fearful alternative, referred to only in oblique terms, was homosexuality: it was despised as unmanly, and it was dreaded as a threat to military discipline."[13]

There exist documents, however, which narrate the benefit of sexual contact between British soldiers and Indian women folks; this "sanctioned" physical relationship was also to be monitored. There came a period toward the last part of the eighteenth century when brothels were established in the colonial military cantonments so that the physical need of British soldiers could be monitored. This required supervision of the physical condition of the prostitutes, which they did. It was all intended to run the Empire smoothly. It became a subject of much discussion in the administration. Further, the British and Indian soldiers who succumbed to the mercenary love after the establishment of brothels needed special protection from the prevailing venereal diseases and therefore before "the end of the eighteenth century, the Governor-General in Council had authorised the building of 'hospitals for reception of diseased women' at Berhampur, Cawnpore...Dinapur and Fatehgarh."[14] In the next phase, when the availability of prostitutes was no more an issue, the availability of prosperous and healthy prostitutes became a significant topic for discussion. And, by the end of the eighteenth century, the *lal bazaars* and lock hospitals functioned in the Empire to save British masculinity. Moreover, the idea of fulfilment of carnal desire was central to the establishment of *lal bazaars*; and with this, the administration thought of wiping out homosexuality from the military domain:

> Indian prostitutes were...seen in a positive role as necessary to the satisfaction of the soldiers' needs. If those needs were denied satisfaction, dire consequences were envisaged. The soldiers' masculinity would be at risk: the prospect of homosexuality was revealed in guarded terms by the authorities whenever there was talk of excluding prostitutes from cantonments.[15]

Further, the master-slave sexual relationship was also a concern for the British officials who had to gain control over the Empire

and to see its smooth functioning in the larger interest and not just for their personal gains. Apparently, there were other associated problems in the process of establishing brothels in the military settlements. We have earlier stated that the British officials were convinced that Indians were embodiment of sexual desire because of the prevailing form of child marriage and polygamy. The establishment of brothels, *lal bazaars*, and the establishment of lock hospitals in various corners of the vast country were then mere indicators of correcting and saving the soldiers—both British and Indian—from the "deadly" homosexual afflictions. The British documents of the period—both journals and letters—narrate the events of "Oriental vice" that came into existence among the young European soldiers so as to propagate a sense of heterosexual intercourse to keep them able colonial personae.

With these perceptions and developments, the *lal bazaars* and lock hospitals were fully functional in the Empire to save British masculinity by the end of the eighteenth century. With venereal diseases spreading over military cantonments and further homosexuality and sexual crimes at rage, by the end of the eighteenth century the colonial government had taken into consideration both the native and European population to its remedial custody. Hence, supervision and discipline, and punishment and correction emerge as the key words when we look for the history of sexual differentiation in the colonial period. The primary notion of correction, as we know, extends most crucially to sexual differentiation. There were other socio-cultural institutions such as Sati and polygamy that needed correction as well. Even before Macaulay drafted the *Indian Penal Code*, all forms of sexual differentiation, along with sexual crimes, were under the purview of the colonial administration. It is difficult to trace the fate of those who were repeatedly brought to the court under the purview of unnatural offences or were propagators of homoeroticism. An act of sexual cruelty or a repeated act of sodomy was not merely a challenge to British masculinities, it was also a challenge to the court and to the form of punishment

awarded. It became a threat to the act of supervision, to the disciplined soldiers, and further to the "masculine" and "disciplined" Empire as well. Nothing else seemed to have shamed the judicial authorities and the colonial administration than a repeated act of sodomy or a sexual crime falling under the purview of the colonial jurisdiction. Worse fate awaited those who could not be tamed at the first instance of correction through punishment. They were to be transported for the greater safety of the Empire and some of them were to serve a lifetime imprisonment at Kalapani.[16] Kath Weston in "A Political Ecology of 'Unnatural Offences'" notes:

> Under the British rule in places like India, some people were sentenced to transportation explicitly for the crime of having committed an "unnatural offence." Others, duly convicted on unrelated charges and transported, received extra punishment for "unnatural crimes" allegedly committed while serving time in a penal colony or offshore prison.[17]

Historical, anthropological and legal documents remain sceptical about the actual reasons behind sending prisoners to Kalapani unless it was a grave crime against the state or the Empire. In spite of the prevailing silence of the documents, there exists however a strong queer tradition in the field of prison migration and criminal transportation to Kalapani.[18] Such transports, occasionally misunderstood or projected as an occurrence of participating in the Indian freedom struggle in the 1857 war of independence, provide us with much information about the history of Indian sexualities. It also offers us the reasons as to why a liberal queer cultural tradition could not flourish in India and why queer literature could not be produced in such a period of surveillance. There remains, however, a series of problems with the propagation of prison migration. Weston projects that within the penal settlement, there existed a suppressed (but strong in another way) queer culture; both male and female homosexuality flourished in the dark prison; and often some groups cared less about the "visibility issue" implanted upon them while serving a term at Kalapani:

What else could authorities expect but lax morals and "unnatural vice" under such conditions? Wouldn't prison discipline suffer accordingly? The suggested remedies ranged from encouraging female migration to creating round-the-clock visibility to discourage liaisons of the sort more culturally suited to the dark.[19]

The invention of the oil press in Andaman penal settlement came handy in the act of supervision, where men replaced animals at work, because it produced enough oil for lamps so that there would be a round-the-clock visibility in all affairs of the prisoners.[20] The discourse of "correction," like in the *lal bazaar* system, continued further for the prisoners who could be corrected and, it would seem, were allowed to live a "happy" heterosexual life in Kalapani.[21] The scope of it ranged from bringing female prisoners from various parts of the subcontinent to educating local girls for the same purpose. The idea that such female prisoners or trained local girls would make prospective wives for the convicts did not decrease the problem of the administration either. Weston writes:

...some of the men continued to pursue male partners without a care for who could see, some of the new female migrants seemed more interested in one another than in securing husbands, and some of the heterosexual marriages arranged between prisoners with administrative approval allowed couples to use their newfound privileges to bring in a little extra money through sex work.[22]

The issue of moral purity was not limited to the prisoners only. Its scope extended to the native population of the island. It was never too late for the British officials to correct both the native population and the convicts settled on the islands. "In respect to morality, too, it must be confessed that they (trained native children of both sexes) have suffered from contact with the convict population,"[23] observes Captain E.H. Man who was in charge of the islands to see the affairs of the convicts. Without mentioning a single word pertaining to the prevailing form of sodomy and sexual crime, Man claims the islands lacked a sense of gentleman's morality. Hence, the British authorities were of the view that the moral decay among the Indians, convicted of unnatural offence or otherwise, was potentially dangerous to corrupt anyone

around, and the people had to be tamed even at such a remote space. Man writes:

> If the evil ended here there would be ground for regret, but a graver cause exists in the deterioration which has taken place in their morals through their unavoidable contact with the alien convict population, the lamentable consequences of which will be found under the head of "Pathology." So widespread is the evil influence that has been exercised, that on no point probably will future writers differ so strongly as on the social and moral virtues of the Andamanese.[24]

With regard to unnatural offences and sexual crimes, reformation of the prison law in the 1870s came hand in hand with strictest punishment for "homosexual behaviour" as well as reward for "good behaviour" in the form of getting mercenary and conjugal sex. Like the *lal bazaar* system, there came a settlement for women prisoners who were to satisfy the carnal desire of many a "good" prisoner as well.[25] The prisoners who showed "good behaviour" or, in other words, who did not have sex with other fellow prisoners or did not exploit them physically, were allowed to meet female prisoners and in a few cases they were even allowed to marry after they were set free.

However, the propagation of heterosexual sexuality for the satisfaction of the carnal desire hardly solved the problem of the colonial authority. There were prisoners who were set free after serving a prescribed term at Kalapani; they were termed as free settlers. As per the colonial code of conduct, they were allowed to marry and lead a heterosexual life. However, issues like repeated act of sodomy, less number of marriageable females, and increasing crime pertaining to sexual activities became the order of the day on the islands.[26] Rabin Roychowdhury comments in *Black Days in Andaman and Nicobar Islands*:

> ...he (the free settler) was allowed to live in the society where female was counted as the most enviable property. As to ratio, at that time there was one female for seven males. Naturally, very few could marry and due to allurement or some other charms, at times, even married women would indulge in entertaining more males. This sort of debauchery was an open secret and very few bothered for morality. Sometimes, the affairs would go to that extent as one resorted to further murder or fatal convict (sic).[27]

Colonial rules and regulations concerning sodomy and other forms of alternative sexualities were essentially a non-religious move of the British officials to regulate all forms of "abnormal" sexual behaviour under the colonial system. That flourishing homosexuality was considered to be a disease and was to be treated against the availability of Indian prostitutes and the idea that it would not flourish if there were enough brothels by colonial cantonments are some of the issues the whole discourse addresses. There remain few documents, however, in the so-strict administrative profile, which narrate the soldiers' or the preachers' homosexual move. Everything is written between the lines. There were attempts not only to "save" the soldiers from committing buggery but also to correct the native who would be instrumental in "corrupting" the soldiers and thereby would play a vital role in challenging the British masculinities. The colonial administration strictly addressed statements of criminal records and in some cases even housed a category under the heading "unnatural offences." By the end of the eighteenth century, in India all acts of unnatural offences were strictly monitored; and after the enactment of the anti-sodomy law all acts of buggery were to be drawn to the notice of the district magistrate under criminal cases. The initial procedures of "correcting" the offender with punishment would take place either in public or in the jail. In most cases at the first instance of committing an unnatural offence, the "culprit" would receive eleven to twenty stripes in addition to "other punishments," the mode of which was hardly ever specified. Such cases were documented under statement "showing whippings inflicted in addition to other punishments" under criminal cases.[28] The reports also housed an explanation, in addition to documenting the whippings in chart forms, whether such unnatural crimes were flourishing or were slowly decreasing.[29]

Owing to the nature of the increase in number of criminal activities pertaining to both crime against the crown and debauchery, it was in the last decade of the nineteenth century that the colonial administration deemed it fit to have a cellular

jail in the penal settlement.[30] Nearly forty years after the formation of the penal settlement, the construction of a cellular jail was taken up in 1896 and was completed in 1906. It is, thus, evident that in addition to controlling people's behaviour and unnatural vice, the colonial government had initiated consequential work to eliminate all forms of disobedience to the Empire. The impact of such act of supervision indicates in principle less queer Indian literature during the colonial period could be produced and its historicity remained unwritten. What we have, instead, is a faint homophobic voice in prison narratives and the authority's insatiable desire to wipe out homosexual activities in the penal settlement.[31] For instance, prior to 1873, the issue of flourishing homosexuality became so central to the administration that Major General D.M. Stewart proposed to the Government of India to import public women for the Port Blair Free Police.[32] One may tend to ask if such a move ever corrected the police's behaviour or not. One might also ask if the marriages implanted ever had any impact on the convicts as well. In March 1880 the Administration appointed a committee that suggested measures to prevent unnatural crime among convicts in Port Blair.[33] Among sundry other suggestions, the committee recommended that "no convicts under the age of 22 years, nor those suspected of being addicted to unnatural crime, be sent to the Settlement.[34] And by 1906 it was made into a rule that "all convicts pronounced by the Medical authorities to be recipients in unnatural crime shall be posted, by order of District Officer, to the Cellular Jail as Cellular Jail prisoners for 5 years."[35]

Michel Foucault is right in his observation that the figures "scarcely noticed in the past"[36] were to make the confession about their sexuality; in India, it became the duty of the administration to ensure them "justice" on the same platform. The following excerpt comes from *Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency during the Year 1869-70* (henceforth *Report*) under the heading "Attempts to Commit Suicide":

> One case of abetment of suicide was reported in which conviction was not sustained. 259 (sic) cases of attempt to commit suicide were reported against

224 in the preceding year, but only 129 persons were found guilty of this offence. Seventy-two cases of causing miscarriage were reported, conviction followed in 19 cases only, and 34 persons were punished, of whom 25 were females. Thirty-five persons were convicted in 80 cases of abandonment of children and concealment of birth. In 107 cases of kidnapping or abducting, 40 persons were punished, of whom 6 were females. *There were 2 cases of prostitution of minors, in one of which 2 persons were punished. Seventy-six cases of rape were charged, and 25 persons (of whom one was a juvenile) were convicted in 15 cases. Out of 6 cases of unnatural offence charged, 2 persons were convicted in 2 cases.*[37]

However, it is important here to note that the *Report* documents crimes of unnatural offences and crimes against the "supervised body" under the heading "Attempts to Commit Suicide". Available documents hardly ever support any enquiry into the psychological motive of the colonial administration and hardly ever mention the thought process of a criminal charged against a case. Were sodomy and rape synonymous with committing suicide? Were they treated differently from abduction and rape? This remains a potential field of research. Moreover, attempts to commit suicide and all forms of sexual practices, except the supervised "legal" prostitution and conjugal relationships came under the purview of the strict administration. If they were in control, the administration would function smoothly. The *Report* continues further. There remain other cases relating to abnormalities besides those who were under the category "miscellaneous" cases. "There were 15 complaints of bigamy, and 3 persons were punished in 1 case. *Out of 119 complaints of adultery only 15 were successfully prosecuted*"[38] (emphasis added, 20). In Bombay presidency, in the year 1907, the cases were highly standardized. At the first instance, three persons convicted of "unnatural offences" and received 11 to 20 stripes; eight persons were discharged whereas fifteen persons were actually convicted. The report also states that the number of cases decreased under the head "unnatural offence."[39] This is one of the numerous instances of controlling sodomy and other forms of unnatural offences in the colonial India.

In such a period of surveillance and strict judicial administration, thus, documenting a case against the charge of

sodomy has been highly fabricated. The Andaman administration and prison transportation to Andaman have housed enigmatic cases the trace of which are chiefly wiped out and what we have is a faint voice of many historians who constantly highlight the freedom struggle movement along with the history of prison transportation in India.

III

Consequently, in the backdrop of the trial remains the issue of moral purity that the Empire sought to establish among its citizens—chiefly among those who remained "instrumental" in corrupting the disciplined Empire. All potential threats to the masculine Empire needed to be wiped out. The nature of such moral purification extended to people with higher dignity, and hence, the king's trial remains important for multiple reasons. It was known to everyone that the king was highly "immoral" and everywhere he was represented as a "perverted" being. Having kept concubines in the palace hardly ever bothered the colonial authorities unless they had to pay them for their survival after the death of a king. The term "moral impurity" did not come under the purview of heterosexual sexuality as the king's temple, and hence his palace, was popular for its Devadasi tradition. The limitations continue further. What then is the "immoral act?" Why is the king's behaviour portrayed as "perverted?" Why did the queen-mother feel that his [Divyasingh's] doings would no longer remain a secret? Was it for his act of sodomy, in other words, that the king was transported to serve a life term? How unnatural or corrupt was the offence of a murder for which a king was to be transported to the Andamans to serve a life-term? How, in other words, other crimes of murder were different from the murder of a holy man? The possible answers still remain a mystery and are subject to interpretation because in such a period of judicial surveillance, there remain few documents that project "queerness" in actuality. And, further, the cases depicted during the period provide a strong sense of historicity to the modern queer movement.

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NOTES

1. I acknowledge the financial support extended to me by ICSSR, New Delhi, in the form of a sponsored research grant, for the present study. The original project is entitled "Prison Migration and the Regulation of Colonial Sexuality: A Study of the Sexualised Body in Andaman Penal Settlement."
2. J.P. Das, *Desh Kaal Patra*, trans. Jatindra K. Nayak as *A Time Elsewhere* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009), 250.
3. "Puri Rajanka Makaddama," *Utakal Deepika*, February 2, 1878, 13:9 in *Sambadpatraru Odishara Khabar: 1856-1881*, ed. Sudhakar Patnaik (Cuttack: Grantha Mandir: 1972), pp. 372-402.

4. Das, *A Time Elsewhere*, 258.
5. "Puri Rajanka Makaddama," 372-402.
6. Bikram Das, "British Conspiracy and Banishment of God King Gajapati Dibya Singh Dev III" in *DuraDrusti: Journal of Odia Samaja* 5, no. 2 (2007): 11-15. Let readers be appraised that this reference, in no way, becomes a scholarly source and stands as a fabricated document in support of Gajapati history. Strangely, the journal, in a footnote, had the following to state about the article: "The editorial board is aware of the conflict of this story with the one presented by Jagannath Prasad Das in his book *Desh Kaal Patra* that comes with well-documented references. The story here may not be a factual statement on the history of Orissa, but is definitely a record of what Late Bikaram Das believed to be the case" (15). Currently, there hardly exists any documentation of the Raja's life after his deportation to the Andamans.
7. Ibid., 13.
8. Das, *A Time Elsewhere*, 258.
9. Ibid., 248.
10. Though not properly documented as a sexual crime, the story of the Raja has been there in folk memory for generations. In my conversation with Suvendu R. Patnaik, he mentioned his grandfather, Harihar Patnaik, who worked under the Raja of Dhenkanal, Shankar Pratap, narrating the story of the trial explicitly as a sexual crime. Though not a standard source for citation, oral history shows how the trial has been received and interpreted among common people. The story of the well remains popular even today.
11. Kenneth Ballhatchet. 1980. *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and Their Critics, 1793-1905* (New York, St. Martin's Press), p. 5.
12. Ibid,. 10.
13. Ibid., 11.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 162.
16. A life-term at Kalapani is often associated with those criminals who were a threat to the Empire after the Sepoy Mutiny (1857). The first batch of such people arrived to serve a term at Kalapani on March 10, 1858. There were insufficient guards and insufficient cellular jails for the convicts. Many of them used to run away from the island and several of them were brought back to the island after being caught. Rabin Roychowdhury writes: "During March and April 1858, as many as 258 escaped, of which 88 were recaptured. Though two were forgiven, the rest 86 run-away convicts were executed in one day under the order of Walker" (*Black Days in Andaman and Nicobar Islands*. 2004. New Delhi: Manas Publications, p. 55). In most cases, books such as

Roychowdhury's often associate the nature of such prison transportation with a cause of freedom struggle or the transportation of women prisoners with heterosexual marriages.

17. Kath Weston, "A Political Ecology of 'Unnatural Offences': State Security, Queer Embodiment, and the Environmental Impacts of Prison Migration," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 14, Nos. 2-3 (2008), 218.
18. Documenting texts that deal with the history of prison migration, Weston claims when "it comes to histories of migration, this 'big story' of transportation has had little to say about queerness" (218).
19. Kath Weston, "A Political Ecology of 'Unnatural Offences': State Security, Queer Embodiment, and the Environmental Impacts of Prison Migration," 219.
20. See Weston's article for further reference regarding the formation of a committee investigating unnatural crime at Andaman, which was to suggest prison reformation (221).
21. Starting 1862, during the regime of Colonel R.C. Tytler, transportation of female prisoners from various parts of the Indian subcontinent to the Andamans started. Roychowdhury writes: "...weddings between these women and male convicts who were awarded the credit of 'Self-supporters' after their term was over, were encouraged through marriage parade by the female convicts" (62).
22. Kath Weston, "A Political Ecology of 'Unnatural Offences': State Security, Queer Embodiment, and the Environmental Impacts of Prison Migration," p. 219.
23. E.H. Man, "On the Andaman Islands, and Their Inhabitants," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 14 (1885), 265.
24. Ibid., 263-64.
25. Kath Weston, "A Political Ecology of 'Unnatural Offences': State Security, Queer Embodiment, and the Environmental Impacts of Prison Migration," p. 221.
26. It was in May 1874 Major General Sir Henry Norman visited Port Blair; he documented on June 11, 1874, that there were 7,820 males, 895 female life convicts, 888 term convicts, 500 married couples with 578 children and 1,167 free ticket holders. Among them 476 were women. [See Roychowdhury for an analysis of the male-female ratio in the islands (2004, 65).]
27. Rabin Roychowdhury. 2004. *Black Days in Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (New Delhi: Manas Publications), p. 62.
28. *Report of the Administration of Criminal and Civil Justice in the Bombay Presidency for the Year 1907* (Bombay: Office of the Superintendent, Government Central Press), p 39.
29. Ibid.

30. Most prisoners who were young and could swim used to flee the islands. There was a misconception among prisoners that the landmass of Burma was very close to the islands. Further, there were insufficient guards in the initial period of the penal settlement. Roychowdhury writes that during March and April 1858, as many as 258 escaped, of which 88 were recaptured. Though two were forgiven, 86 run-away convicts were executed in one day under the order of Walker (2004, 55).
31. See B.K. Ghose's *The Tale of My Exile: Twelve Years in the Andamans* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2011) for a record of unnatural offence prevalent in the Cellular Jail.
32. *Home Department Proceedings*, Port Blair, October 1873. pp 581-582.
33. *Home, Revenue and Agricultural Department Proceedings*, Government of India, May 1880, 61-63.
34. Ibid., 61.
35. *The Andaman and Nicobar Manual*, Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1906, p. 12.
36. Michel Foucault. 1980. *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books), pp. 38-39.
37. *Report on the Administration of Madras Presidency during the Year 1869-70*, (Madras, 1870), pp. 17-18 (emphasis added).
38. Ibid., 20.
39. Ibid., 39.

SECTION V

Gay/Lesbians: Law and Legisation

Decriminalizing Homosexuality: A Review of the Naz Foundation decision of the Delhi High Court

MRINAL SATISH*

Introduction

In July 2009, the Delhi High Court delivered a landmark decision in the case of *Naz Foundation v. Union of India*.[1] The Court held that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC), so far as it criminalizes consensual homosexual acts by adults in private, contravenes the Constitution of India.[2] It was for the first time in the 150 years of the Code that a constitutional challenge to the controversial Section 377 had been accepted for legal scrutiny. In this piece, I briefly describe the interpretative history of Section 377, the issues before the Delhi High Court in the *Naz* case, as well as the court's decision and analyze the contribution of the case to the law. Before proceeding further, it is important to keep in mind that an appeal against the judgment of the Delhi High Court is pending before the Supreme Court of India, which is likely to deliver its judgment in the next few months. Hence, the future implications of the Delhi High Court's decision will depend on the forthcoming decision of the Supreme Court.

A Brief History of the Interpretation of Section 377

The Section 377 of the IPC deals with "unnatural offences": it criminalizes and seeks punishment for a person who voluntarily has "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" with any man, woman or animal.[3] While proposing the introduction of this provision in the IPC, the Indian Law Commissioners, headed

by Lord Macaulay, refused to justify the rationale for criminalization of sexual act against the "order of nature". They explicitly stated that the clauses related to "an odious class of offences respecting which it is desirable that as little as possible should be said."[4] Referring to the subject as "revolting", they opined that any discussion on the topic would harm the morals of the community.[5] Thus, Section 377 found its way into the IPC on the ground that carnal indulgence against the "order of nature" is a "revolting" and, inherently, immoral act, which needs to be prevented through its criminalization.

The Section 377 has an interesting interpretative history. In *Khanu v. Emperor*,[6] the question before the Sind High Court was whether penetration of the mouth falls within the ambit of Section 377. The Court held that the "natural object" of carnal intercourse is procreation and consequently any non-procreative sexual act could be classified as an act against the "order of nature". Further, defining the term "intercourse", the Court held that intercourse requires "the temporary visitation of one organism by a member of the other organisation for certain clearly defined and limited objects."[7] Holding that intercourse connotes reciprocity, the Court held that for an act to be considered as intercourse, the "visiting member" has to be enveloped by the "visited organism". Due to this interpretation, the acts of lesbianism that involved penetration were in the opinion of the Court not covered by Section 377. In dealing with the purpose of Section 377, the Court viewed Section 377 as a provision to protect young people, both from being "indoctrinated into sexual matters,"[8] and from being depraved in such a vital part of life.[9] Interestingly, the Court also expressed its disgust at "such acts,"[10] thus continuing the view that disgust and conventional understanding of morality is a sufficient justification for criminalization.

Another interesting case is *Lohana Vasantlal Devchand v. State.*[11] In this case, the issue was whether all forms of intercourse against the "order of nature" are criminalized by Section 377. Answering this question in the negative, the Gujarat High Court held that if, for instance, penetration of the mouth by the penis was a precursor

to penile-vaginal intercourse, then it is "a mere prelude to carnal intercourse".[12] However, if penetration of an orifice other than the vagina replaces the "desire of coitus", it would amount to a deviation and, hence, would be punishable under Section 377. The Court accepted the defence's argument that the theory that sexual intercourse is meant only for conception, was out dated. It, however, opined that the mouth was certainly not an orifice meant for sexual or carnal intercourse.[13]

In *Brother John Anthony v. State*,[14] the Madras High Court, after discussing the interpretation of Section 377 by various courts, ruled that penetration is essential to constitute the offence.[15] Hence, the section would cover within its ambit "non-coital carnal copulation with a member of the same or opposite sex";[16] anal intercourse by a man with another man or a woman; anal or vaginal intercourse by a man or a woman with an animal; and "sexual intercourse by a human being with a lower animal."[17]

A brief overview of the interpretation of Section 377 reveals that criminalization of homosexual acts was based on notions of societal morality, as well as disgust. Further, the section not only covered non-consensual acts,[18] but also consensual "non-procreative" acts between two adults. With this brief background as to the interpretation of the law, I now turn to the *Naz* case.

THE NAZ CASE

Arguments of Parties:

Naz Foundation, a non-governmental organization, filed a Public Interest Litigation before the Delhi High Court, challenging the constitutionality of Section 377 of the IPC, in so far as it criminalized consensual sexual acts between adults in private. The petitioners made five main arguments. First, they argued that their HIV/AIDS prevention efforts were being severely hampered because of the discriminatory attitude that the State took towards homosexuals, in the guise of enforcing Section 377. Second, the petitioners argued that Section 377 violated the fundamental right to privacy. They argued that a person's sexual

preferences, his/her sexual relations form the core of one's private space and any other interference in consensual sexual relations of individuals violates the right to privacy, and the right to dignity, guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution. They further argued that the right to privacy can only be curtailed for a compelling state interest which, they submitted, Section 377 did not provide. The third argument advanced by the petitioners was that the legislative intent of Section 377 to criminalize "unnatural sexual acts" did not have a rational nexus to the classification between procreative and non-procreative sexual acts. This violated, the petitioner argued, the right to equality as guaranteed by Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. The fourth argument made by the petitioners was that "sex" in Article 15 of the Constitution should be read to include "sexual orientation", and not gender alone. If read in such a manner, Section 377 would violate Article 15 since it discriminated between individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation. The final argument made by Naz Foundation was that Section 377 violated Articles 19(1)(a),(b),(c) and (d), by restricting a homosexual person's right to speak, right to assemble freely, right to form associations and right to move freely within the territory of India.

In response to the arguments of the petitioner, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, argued first that Section 377 was the only legal provision to deal with child sexual abuse. It also filled the lacunae in the rape law, in that it dealt with intercourse that did not involve a penile penetration of the vagina. The second argument made was that homosexuality ran contrary to societal morals and values. The fact that homosexuality was ostensibly strongly disapproved by the majority of society, it argued, is a sufficient justification for its continued criminalization. The Ministry of Home Affairs further contended that Indian society was not yet ready to show tolerance towards homosexual practices. Thus, the core of the Ministry's argument was based on legal moralism—that public disgust and disapproval of an act is a sufficient justification to criminalize it.

Another interesting argument made by "Voices Against Section

377", a coalition of organizations that intervened in the case, was that Section 377 created an "association of criminality". Individuals are considered to be criminals, only on the basis of their sexual preferences, leading to their social ostracization. They further argued (and provided instances to show) that Section 377 led to brutalization of a vulnerable segment of society.

Decision of the Court

The Delhi High Court held that Section 377, in so far as it criminalized consensual sexual acts between two adults, violates Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India. In order to decide on whether Section 377 violates the right to privacy, the Court had to rule on whether curtailment of such right was based on a "compelling state interest."[19] Since the Ministry of Home Affairs had argued that enforcement of morality is a compelling state interest, the Court had to determine whether that was the case.

In order to decide on whether public morality is a ground to curtail the fundamental right to privacy, the Court referred to decisions of certain foreign courts. It referred to the US Supreme Court's decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*,[20] where the Court had held that moral indignation cannot be the sole ground for justifying sodomy. The European Court of Human Rights in *Norris v. Republic of Ireland*[21] had ruled that even if the public was shocked by homosexual acts, this could not be a ground for penal sanctions to be imposed on consensual and private homosexual acts.

The High Court then ruled that public disapproval or popular perceptions of morality were not valid justifications for curtailment of a person's fundamental right, guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution of India. It held that it was only a "constitutional morality —morality that was derived of constitutional values— that could pass the test of compelling state interest, not public morality. It held that criminalizing homosexuals only on the basis of their sexual orientation would not be in tune with constitutional morality.

On the question of whether Section 377 violated the right to

equality guaranteed by Article 14 of the Constitution, the Court held that consensual homosexual acts in private do not harm anyone. It noted that the State had stated no reason other than public morality to criminalize homosexual acts. The Court found if classification was based on irrational, unjust, or unfair grounds, such classification was arbitrary. Using this ground, the Court held that Section 377 targeted homosexuals as a class and, thereby, discriminated against them. Such discrimination, the Court held, was both unfair and unreasonable and, hence, violated Article 14 of the Constitution.

Finally, while dealing with the issue of Article 15, the Court again made some important rulings. It held that sexual orientation was analogous to the term "sex" used in Article 15 and, consequently, discrimination on the basis of a person's sexual orientation was prohibited. It also held that Article 15(2) incorporated the principle of horizontal application of rights, thus prohibiting discrimination of one citizen by another in matters of access to public spaces. The Court, thus, ruled that Section 377 disproportionately impacted homosexuals, solely on the basis of their sexual orientation, and was thus unconstitutional, when applied to consensual homosexual acts in private.

Important Principles laid down by the Court

In arriving at its decision, the Delhi High Court laid down several important principles, which if upheld by the Supreme Court, would have a long lasting impact on the scope and application of fundamental rights. The first, as discussed above, was whether morality involved a "compelling state interest" that would justify the violation of a person's privacy and claim on dignity. In *Gobind v. State of Madhya Pradesh*,[22] the Supreme Court held if a court found that a right claimed protection as a privacy right, the law that infringed such right had to meet the compelling state interest test. The Supreme Court, however, did not rule on whether enforcement of morality was a compelling state interest which could justify violation of the fundamental right to privacy. The Delhi High Court in *Naz* took the next step. It ruled that

enforcement of *public* morality did not constitute a compelling state interest. It was only *constitutional* morality that could satisfy such a standard.

Furthermore, while discussing whether Section 377 violates Article 14, the Court held that "it is not within the constitutional competence of the StateÖ to regulate conduct to which the citizen alone is concerned, solely on the basis of public morals."[23] If this standard was upheld by the Supreme Court, it would have a long-lasting impact on laws which criminalized one's conduct solely on the basis of public morality. Cases where public morality was provided as a justification for criminalization had arisen before the Supreme Court in the past, especially in the context of laws relating to obscenity[24] and laws relating to intoxicants.[25] Although these cases had been in the context of Article 19 of the Constitution of India, on which the Delhi High Court did not rule on in *Naz*, these decisions were based on an interpretation of the term "morality" in Article 19(2). The Court interpreted morality to mean "public morality". With the Delhi High Court in *Naz* stating that "morality" should in some situations mean "constitutional morality", it was interesting to see if such an interpretation was taken in the future with respect to Article 19(2) as well.

The other important contribution of the *Naz* decision is whether the "strict scrutiny" standard or the "proportionality review" standard should be applied when testing the *vires* of a law which interferes with the fundamental rights of individuals. These two standards were discussed extensively by the Supreme Court in *Anuj Garg v. Hotel Association of India*.[26] In *Anuj Garg*, the Court held that in cases where legislation sought to curtail fundamental rights for the ends of protection of individuals, the interference should be proportionate to the legitimate aims. The Court further held that the standard of testing for proportionality should be reasonableness. However, in cases where the legislation had pronounced protective discrimination aims, the "strict scrutiny" test should be applied. This means that the legislation should not be tested only with regard to its proposed aims, but also with

respect to its likely implications and effects. In *Anuj Garg*, which dealt with the constitutionality of Section 30 of the Punjab Excise Act which prohibited employment of women in premises where liquor was served, the Court held that "it is for the Court to review that the majoritarian impulses rooted in moralistic tradition do not impinge on individual autonomy."[27] On the other hand, in *Ashoka Kumar Thakur v. Union of India*,[2828](2008) 6 SCC 1.

the Supreme Court refused to apply the strict scrutiny standard in cases of affirmative action. Faced with these two seemingly conflicting judgments, the Delhi High Court held that the two judgments should be read harmoniously to imply that the strict scrutiny standard should be applied to cases where "measure[s] that [disadvantage] a vulnerable group defined on the basis of a characteristic that relates to personal autonomy,"[29] but not in cases involving affirmative action. Applying the strict scrutiny test to Section 377, the Court held the criminalizing of consensual homosexual acts in private to be unconstitutional, on the ground that it disproportionately impacted homosexual men on the basis of their sexual orientation. It also held that classifying a section of society to be criminal only on the basis of moral disapproval of their actions led to the violation of the right to equality under any standard of review.

The Impact of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 on Section 377

The Parliament has recently enacted the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, purporting to major amendments in the existing rape law. Under the new law, the definition of rape not only covers non-consensual penetration of the vagina, but also of the mouth and the anus. Further, it not only covers penetration by a penis, but also by objects, fingers and other body parts. However, the law does not recognize that a man can be raped. According to the new law, as earlier, rape can only be committed against a woman. Further, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 now covers penetrative and non-

penetrative sexual acts committed on children. Hence, Section 377 now covers non-consensual and consensual penetrations of a penis into the mouth, anus, etc., of a man. It also covers consensual penetration of a penis into the mouth, urethra or anus of a woman by another man. It is worth noting that one of the arguments made by the Ministry of Home Affairs before the Delhi High Court was that if Section 377 was read down, then the law will not cover sexual abuse of children, besides other gaps in the rape law.[30] Since the law now covers these areas, the argument that certain non-consensual sexual acts do not come within the purview of any section does not stand anymore.

Conclusion

The Delhi High Court, by holding Section 377 unconstitutional to the extent that it criminalizes consensual sexual acts between adults in private, took the right step towards ensuring that discrimination only on the basis of a person's sexual orientation was put to an end. Further, it also sent a clear signal that criminalizing an act, solely on the basis of "public morality" or feelings of disgust, was against the constitutional order. The doctrine of "constitutional morality", if upheld by the Supreme Court, will have a major impact on the fundamental rights of the citizens of the country and the power of the State to use its coercive powers for the curtailment of these rights.

NOTES

1. 2010 Cri.L.J.194 (Del).
2. *Ibid*, 132.
3. Section 377 reads as follows: "Unnatural offences – Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine."
4. Thomas Macaulay, *A Penal Code Prepared by the Indian Law Commissioners* (London: Pelham Richardson, Cornhill), 117 (1838).
5. *Ibid.*
6. AIR 1925 Sind 286.

7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 287.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. AIR 1968 Guj 252.
12. *Ibid.*, 253.
13. *Ibid.*,254.
14. 1992 Cri.L.J.1352 (Mad).
15. *Ibid.*, 1358.
16. *Ibid.*, 1353.
17. *Ibid.*
18. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 now defines the offence of rape to include various forms of penetration, such as digital and object penetration. It also includes penetration of orifices other than the vagina. However, rape is a gender neutral offence, where only a man can be the perpetrator, and a woman, the victim. Consequently, various non-consensual sexual acts, which were earlier covered under Section 377, now come within the ambit of the offence of rape.
19. This principle had been laid down by the Supreme Court in *Gobind v. State of Madhya Pradesh,* 1975 Cri.L.J. 1111, where the Court had held that a privacy claim can only be denied if a compelling state interest were shown.
20. 539 U.S. 558 (2003).
21. 142 Eur. Ct. HR (ser. A) (1988).
22. 1975 Cri.L.J.1111 (SC).
23. Naz Foundation, ī 92.
24. See for instance, the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court of India on the issue of obscenity: Ajay Goswami v. Union of India, AIR 2007 SC 493; Samaresh Basu v. Amal Mitra, AIR 1986 SC 967; Chandrakant Kakodkar v. State of Maharashtra, 1970 Cri.L.J. 1273; K.A. Abbas v. Union of India, (1970) 2 SCC 780; Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra, 1965 Cri. L.J 8 (SC); See also: S. Khushboo v. Kanniammal, (2010) 5 SCC 600.
25. See for instance: P.N. Krishna Lal v. Government of Kerala, 1994 (5) SCALE 1; Har Shankar v. The Deputy Excise and Taxation Commissioner, (1975) 1 SCC 737; Cooverjee Bharucha v. The Excise Commissioner and Chief Commissioner, Ajmer, AIR 1954 SC 220.
26. AIR 2008 SC 663.
27. Naz Foundation, 41.
28. (2008) 6 SCC 1.
29. Naz Foundation, 111.
30. Naz, 11.

SECTION VI

A Queer Bibliography

NILADRI R. CHATTERJEE

It is not an easy task to compile a comprehensive bibliography on any subject. It is even more so the case when that subject is in a state of tremendous churn and scholars are publishing on it at a fervent pace. The best that one can do is provide a wide, rather than a deep, bibliography. In the bibliography that I have put together there can be noticed an effort at representing as much as possible the ever-expanding contours of queer studies. An attempt has been made to trace queer scholarship as far back in history as possible as well to make space for the very latest examples of queer studies. I would like to clarify that some authors have been represented by the mention of one book or short story, while others have been represented with several. In this case, I have had to depend on my own admittedly biased judgement. I have chosen to mention the one novel or one play/poem/short story or two that best represent/s the author in this context. I am willing to admit that my judgement may not chime favourably with the next person's. I have simply tried to ensure that as many authors, playwrights, poets, historians and theorists are mentioned as possible, so that those who are interested can pursue further research on those particular individuals and their work. As with any list, or indeed bibliography, this one also contains numerous lacunae. For this I can only plead my ignorance, and hope that others may fill in the many gaps this bibliography contains. The bibliography may be seen as a postmodernist, post-structuralist text in itself. It is incomplete, it does not assume a centre – although some may find the work Anglo-American-centric! – and it has tried to ensure as fair a representation of the vast field of queer studies as is possible for

one person. I hope that those using this bibliography for their initial spadework in the area of queer studies will add to it and enrich it as the field itself gets wider and deeper continually.

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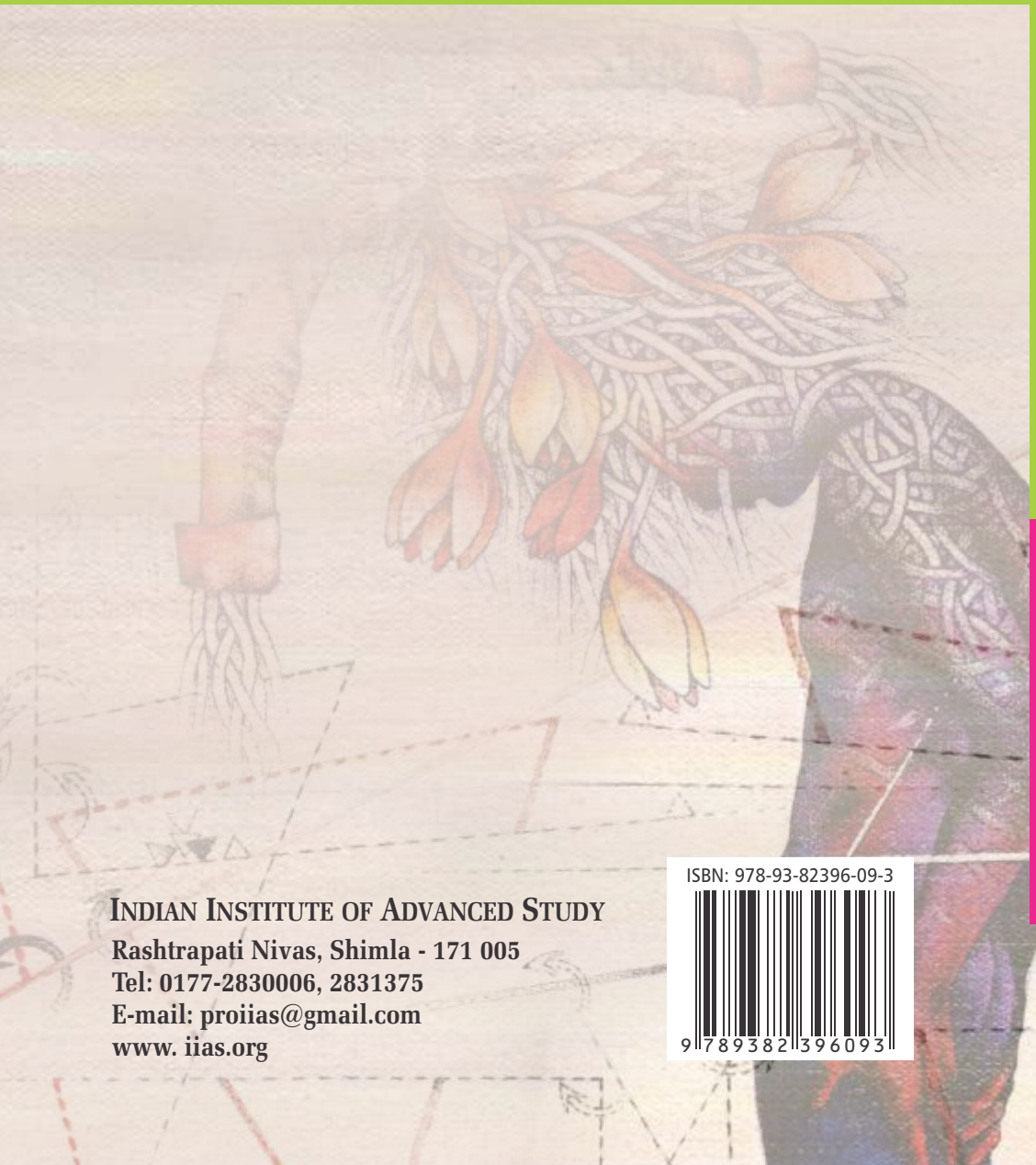

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