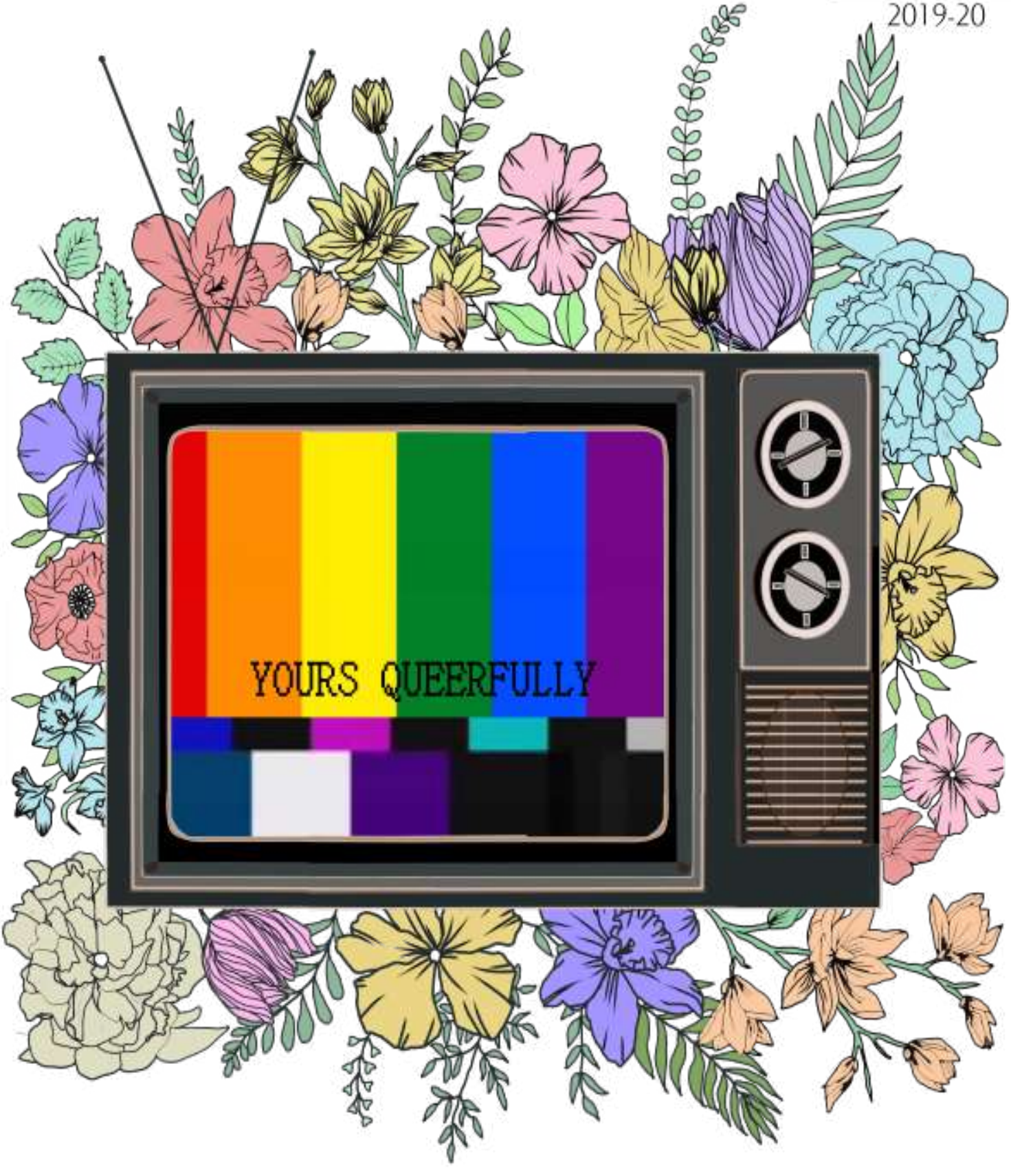
The Department of Sociology and Anthropology

EIDOS

2019-20



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EIDOS 2019-2020

# YOURS QUEERFULLY

Department of Sociology & Anthropology
St Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This edition of Eidos is a culmination of the efforts of a large number of people. This journal would not have been possible without the unwavering enthusiasm of every student who has put in tireless hours of research and contributed to this issue in an extremely interesting and refreshing manner. The journal is deeply indebted to all its editors—Isha Borkar, Ishika Chatterjee, Prerana Sannappanavar, Sara Maria Varghese, Stuti Nabazza, and Vanshika Jain for their resolute support and hard work. The publication is highly thankful to an immensely talented team of illustrators, photographers, layout designer, and cover designer led by the colourful vision of Visalakshi Mantha that brought it to life.

We would like to extend our gratitude to all the professors of the department—Dr. Sam Taraporevala, Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley, Ms. Radhika Rani, Ms. Ankita Gujar, Dr. (Fr.) Savio Abreu, and Ms. Sahana Sen for guiding us through the entire process of this endeavor and for helping us review all articles. It would not have been possible to publish this edition without the help of our faculty co-ordinator—Ms. Ankita Gujar whose unswerving encouragement made us strive for the best. We are also grateful to the staff and students who helped us incorporate two remarkable papers from this year's annual seminar conducted on the theme of 'Azadi' into the journal.

We would also like to thank our guest contributors for their immensely valuable inputs. We are very fortunate to have interviewed author, cultural curator, and head of the Godrej India Culture Lab—Parmesh Shahani for this edition. We are also delighted to have a memoir titled 'The Underground Rainbow Days' by Sridhar Rangayan who is a filmmaker, activist, and founder of the KASHISH Mumbai International Queer Film Festival among various other organisations.

We are also sincerely grateful to all our sponsors and patrons who helped us materialize our effort.

Our sincerest thanks to the treasurer and the marketing team of the Academy of Sociology and Anthropology for helping us in the publication process. Our gratitude also goes out to all the students who participated in the photo shoot conducted for this issue.

A big thank you to all our readers, we hope you enjoy this queer edition of Eidos!

# EDITORIAL

The past decade has seen an escalation in the discussion around queerness in our country. During and post the decriminalization of Section 377 in 2018, the discourse around the same took center stage in spheres of economics, politics, law, and public culture. In the light of this decriminalization, it was the unanimous decision of this year's team to initiate a conversation in a student-academic space regarding the various experiences under the umbrella of queerness and to investigate the possibilities the future beholds. We thus present to you this merrily gay edition of Eidos —"Yours Queerfully".

I was overwhelmed by the number of students who expressed interest in writing for this issue and am grateful to all contributors for the same. The wonderful women on the editorial board and the creatives team worked especially hard to accommodate these numbers and this edition is the fruit of their determined effort. To aid the understanding of the theme, we have attempted to go beyond the written word by incorporating artwork by the students. Additionally, we have been fortunate to have conducted a queer photo shoot for the students of the college, glimpses from which are also a part of this issue.

This publication explores the experiences of being queer in our country and across, the various features of the queer movement itself, as well as the physical manifestations of these lived experiences. It inspects the intersection of sexuality, tradition, and religion, the representation of queer folx on various media platforms, the financial, legal, and linguistic concerns of the community, while also examining the shortcomings of the queer movement—both on a national and global scale. As author and cultural curator Parmesh Shahani said during his interview with us, "Being queer in India is not some new or modern thing. People have always been queer in the Indian society and have also been included and accepted regardless." Following the same, this issue aims to open dialogue on not only inclusion, but also integration of the queer community in spaces such as corporates, the academia, and the performance arts. We also embark on a heartfelt journey of transformation through the experiences of filmmaker Sridhar Rangayan who has very kindly contributed a memoir to this edition.

I hope that each reader finds something for themselves in this publication—something that makes them think and re-think; something that makes them question the binaries; and as Judith Butler would say, something that "troubles" their understanding. Only then will we know that we have successfully queered your thoughts. If we did, write to us at **journal.eidos@gmail.com** and tell us what sparked this dilemma. If we didn't, we would love to hear what could have been better.

We at Eidos wish you a pleasantly unsettling read. Don't forget to keep it queer!

Sanchi Mehra
*Editor-in-Chief, Eidos 2019-20*

# DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY: THROUGH THE YEAR 2019-2020

Department of Sociology & Anthropology

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology held many activities for the academic year 2019-20. The official student body of the Department — The Academy of Sociology and Anthropology has had successful and lively year.

**The Mentor-Mentee Program:** This program maintains an interdisciplinary approach as students of all ages interact with each other. Third-year students are allotted as mentors to help younger students as they study the discipline. The mentors explain new ideas and complex theories, facilitating interactions between students across the three years. Mentors also help first-year students get acquainted with academic writing styles and exam preparations. The Academy conducts feedback regarding the program to obtain a clearer view of the mentor-mentee relationship.

**A Movie Screening:** The Socio-Anthro Academy held a movie screening of the Marathi movie *Natrang* on 19th September, 2019. The movie deals with gender bias in society. The highlight of the event was the illuminating discussion conducted by Mr. Ravi Jadhav, the director of *Natrang*.

**The Department Seminar:** Every year, the Department organizes an academic seminar for students who want to present research papers under the guidance of the college professors. The theme for this year was Azadi modi-fied. The seminar was conducted on 11th- 12th of December

in Vasai. Students presented their papers, participated in debates and maintained an energetic atmosphere. A student panel was in place to moderate and streamline the discussions. Students were given the opportunity to pick either an Honours Credit or a Certificate for their work.

**Guest Speakers:** We have had many guest speakers this year to cover a diverse range of topics. They have delivered lectures engaged with students, and have even advised students regarding their dissertations. Some of the guest speakers we had this year are as follows:

- **Shivali Bhagayatkar** spoke about the career prospects one can have in the field of Social Research.
- **Ketaki Hate** delivered a lecture on dissertation writing and explained the various steps of the process with regards to the topic formulation and structure. This was of great help to third-year students who are currently in the process of writing their undergraduate dissertations.
- **Rukmini Datta** gave a talk about the trajectories after graduating with a major in Sociology and Anthropology.
- **Rahela Khorakiwala** delivered a lecture on personal laws and the gender conundrum within the legal field.
- **Jerin Joseph** came in to talk about the feminist re-telling of the Bible so as to look at the Biblical narrative from a different perspective.
- **Saachi D'Souza** conducted a lecture on water scarcity and the implications it has for gender and community.
- **Suveera Venkatesh** spoke about data analysis and shared pro tips about the dissertation writing process.

**Synergy:** *Synergy* was an exhibition held for school students. Stalls were put up for all the streams portraying what one studies within each Humanities discipline and how learning is made interesting and fun.

**Professors' Activities Through the Year**

This year we bid adieu to our beloved Head of the Department, Dr. Sam Taraporewala. For his retirement, a farewell get-together was held; the staff and people close to him made it a memorable last day for him. We wish him good luck and good health. Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley took over as the new Head of Department. We welcomed our newest teacher, Professor Sahana, who has taken up the courses that Dr. Taraporewala had previously been teaching. With her different approach to teaching, Professor Sahana is precise and has clarity with the way she communicates her message to the students.

**Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley** published an article for Heras Tata Conservation post-doctoral fellowship research on the Parsis in Kanpur and Bombay. It was titled "*The Sand Is Slipping Out: The Crisis in the Parsi Zoroastrian Identity Narrations from Kanpur and Bombay in India*." It was published in the Journal of the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, dated September '19, in volume 56, p.37-52 (ISSN.0019-686X). In addition, on 11th November 2019, she had a meeting with the TRTI (Tribal Research and Training Institute, Pune) for a possible collaboration for research in the future. She is also the faculty coordinator for TedxStXaviers.

**Prof. Ankita Gujar** has been appointed as an Assistant Professor from December 2019. She conducted the Privilege Walk for second-year Sociology students in September 2019. In addition, she conducted a walk in collaboration with 'Mumbaikars For SGNP' for the students of the BMM department in June 2019. She collaborated with the XRCVC to conduct a department-centric SIP where volunteers were encouraged to make academic material more accessible through easy language and the aid of technology to visually challenged students. She also attended the 2nd Patrick Geddes Memorial lecture held on 21st January, 2020 at the Department of Sociology,

University of Mumbai, Kalina. She is the faculty coordinator for Eidos, the annual student journal for the department.

**Dr. Savio Abreu SJ**, along with Anthony da Silva and Rinald D'Souza, have edited the book *Public History of Goa: Evolving Politics, Culture and Identity*. Margao, Goa: CinnamonTeal Publishing, 2019. He published a book called, *"Heaven's Gates and Hell's Flames: A Sociological Study of New Christian Movements in Contemporary Goa"* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019. He has also published or edited articles such as, "The Goa Freedom Struggle and the VCD: Whose View and for Whom?", edited by himself along with Anthony Da Silva & Rinald D'Souza, *Public History of Goa: Evolving Politics, Culture and Identity.* Margao, Goa: CinnamonTeal Publishing, 2019, 82-86. Dr. Savio published an article called, *"*The Challenge of Stringent, Radical Nationalism to Inclusive Development"*, Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions,* Vol. 8, No. 1 [Special Issue on Inclusive Development: Africa and Asia] Jan-April, 2019, 125-140. He delivered talks during the year like 'The History of the Jesuits in India', a 2-credit Course for Jesuit Novices at XTC, Desur, March 13-19, 2019. He was a part of the 'Understanding & Responding To Institutional Communalism in India Today' Talk given to the Archbishop, & officials of the Goa Archdiocese & the major superiors of the Conference of Religious, Goa at St. Joseph Vaz Spiritual Renewal Centre, Old Goa on January 17, 2020. He organized an industrial visit for the third-year sociology students to Nashik wherein they visited Sahyadri Farms, Sula Vineyards and MPSM.

**Other Activities**

- Organised an Industrial Visit for TYBA Sociology students to Nashik from January 12-13, 2020. The students and faculty visited Sahyadri Farms, Sula Vineyards and MPSM.

There are a few activities still left to be accomplished before this academic year ends. Some of these include:

- **Career Fair:** The fair will be organised on the 27th and 28th of January 2020. This event entails a varied discussion of prospective careers after studying within the discipline of Sociology and Anthropology by experts in various fields to broaden our understanding in order to pursue aspects related to this discipline in the future.
- **FMC:** The Finding Mothers Conference will commence on the 12th and 13th of February 2020. This unique inter-collegiate conference has never been organised by the department before and is a new development. For this conference to be value and knowledge driven, we have invited students from various colleges across Mumbai to present papers on the theme, 'Finding Mothers' and present it using any art form of their choice. The conference has also invited eminent keynote speakers and has organised panel discussions along with student performances.

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GUEST ARTICLE

# THOSE UNDERGROUND RAINBOW DAYS ...

## A MEMOIR BY SRIDHAR RANGAYAN

Can you imagine a time when there was no Internet, no mobile phones, and not even computers? Can you imagine such a dark age? And in that age, can you imagine how a lonely person would have felt if they thought they were different from others?

That's exactly how I felt when I was growing up in the 70s and 80s, during and post my teenage years. I couldn't find any validation anywhere for what I was feeling from within—my attraction towards other men. The only mention of homosexuality was in the medical books, that too in a derogatory manner. The only solace I could find was in furtive sexual encounters in the dark—unnamed and unspoken.

When I came to Mumbai to study at IIT Bombay, I met Suhail who was my classmate. Little did I know that four years later I would come out to him, and I would be drawn into the whirlpool of the emerging gay movement!

As soon as I came out, I joined the team of 'Bombay Dost,' which was India's first gay magazine founded in 1990. I came on board from its second edition onwards to design and edit some of the editions. It was an eye-opener for me—my personal had become my political.

Of course, everything was hush-hush even then. No one spoke about homosexuality in the open. You would only be able to meet another gay man in one of the house parties, or accidentally while cruising. Cruising at public parks, railway stations, bus stands, and public toilets was the norm but it was also very dangerous as you never knew whom you would meet. There have been encounters with homophobic policemen and blackmailers, where people have not only lost a lot of money but their lives were put in danger as well. Fear of exposure to one's family or at the work place was a constant threat.

Bombay Dost came as a huge relief to me. Apart from feature articles and news, there was also a pen-pal column called 'Khush Khat' where people could write letters to each other. In today's day of dating apps and WhatsApp chats, you can't even imagine how anxiously we used to wait to receive a response to a letter we had written to an unknown gay guy, sometimes in the same city. It took weeks of waiting before one got a reply, and months before one could actually meet the other person. Imagine all of this in today's age of speed dating!

Perhaps that's all the more reason why we valued our flings and friendships. We kept them for a long time. Not just friends, but also the alternate family we formed—a group of gay men who bonded closely in the 90s. We are still very close to each other, even though many have moved to other cities and countries. At a time when there was no validation for our existence, we huddled together as a family, caring for each other and being there for each other—in both good and bad times.

Every weekend, we would go to Gokul's on Saturday, which was then the only bar that welcomed gay men. We partied till late at the bar, hung out at 'The Walls' next to Gateway of India, and took the last train we called 'The Maharani Express', where we would sing and dance along with our drag queen friends. On Sunday evening we would go to Maheshwari Gardens in Sion to meet other gay men from the working class, and also to distribute condoms and safe-sex pamphlets. Come Monday, we would all go back into our closets, and be typical employees in typical companies, except for those in creative fields who got to flaunt their sexuality a wee bit more openly.

In 1994, Suhail and myself, along with Ashok Row Kavi founded 'The Humsafar Trust'—India's first gay organization. Soon after, we organized India's first gay conference along with Naz Foundation in December 1994. Meeting gay men from across India, and also Indians from outside the country, was a very powerful experience. It was not only a joyful union, but also offered catharsis for many, for all the bottled up emotions from having lived lonely lives in far corners of India.

Forming networks was really important for us those

days—it helped us stay connected and also helped us stay sane. It also offered us friends in cities we travelled to. I find myself very lucky because if I need a home to stay wherever I travel to, I always have one. The LGBT community was really close knit then. With Internet and social media today, I feel people have dispersed further instead of coming closer. The close bonding we felt is no more. Earlier if we visited a city, our local friend there would gather a bunch of gay men to chat up with us, and we would immediately feel at home.

In fact, our own home has welcomed lots of visitors from India and abroad. My partner Saagar Gupta and I have played host to countless parties and sleep-ins. Our home was the *maika* for the alternate family. They could feel free and be themselves at our place. Our home was where gay men got 'married' and drag queens performed with beautiful *adaas*. All that is a thing of the past now. Our alternate family hardly meets, and even though we are in touch regularly and care for each other just as much, we don't meet a lot anymore. It's rather sad that both real and virtual distances separate us now.

However, I have been lucky to see changes happen in my lifetime. I have seen the LGBT community come out of the closet; I have seen the law change from a hopeful judgment in 2009, to a reversal in 2013, to finally being read down in 2018. I have seen the youth of today feeling freer than ever before, unshackled by the law, and more understanding families who are also networked through news on the cell phones. However, the situation in Tier 2 & 3 cities and small towns is still complicated for LGBT persons to live their life with dignity and without fear. My film *Evening Shadows*, which is now on Netflix, highlights the issue about mothers being disempowered because of patriarchy, which makes it challenging for them to accept their children's sexuality.

There are so many organizations, groups and events in the cities today where the LGBT community comes together. There are huge Pride Marches in almost all the big cities and also in most Tier 2 & Tier 3 cities. Spaces like KASHISH Mumbai International Queer Film Festival, which I founded in 2010 along with Saagar Gupta and other friends, and which celebrated its 10th anniversary this year, offers a safe space to the LGBT community to express their sexuality in the open. It also offers an opportunity to the mainstream society to mingle with the LGBT community without any prejudice. The festival uses cinema as a medium to sensitize the larger civil society.

When I look from the stage of KASHISH every year at the 1200 people gathered in the grand art deco Liberty Cinema, where we speak openly about LGBT rights and desires, my eyes usually well up—with a sense of fulfillment in knowing that we have come such a long way from those underground days when even whispering the word 'homosexual' was a taboo, and living an open life as a gay man a dream. Now that dream is a reality where I celebrate 25 years of togetherness filled with love and fulfillment with my partner Saagar. Thus, dreams do come true if you wish them to.

Yours Queerfully,
Sridhar Rangayan

IN CONVERSATION WITH

# PARMESH SHAHANI

## BASED ON A TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW WITH THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**Since you have worked extensively on the interpretations of being 'modern' and 'Indian', and your first book *Gay Bombay* had also explored among other themes, the difference in experiences of queerness in India and other places such as the US, Canada, the UK, I want to start off by asking you, what does it mean to be queer in our country today?**

I think being queer in India today means a bunch of things. First of all, it means recognizing that being queer is very natural in our country and that we belong to a long history of queerness. It is not some new or modern thing. People have always been queer in the Indian society and have also been included and accepted regardless. There has been incredible scholarship on this subject: whether you look at mythological texts, at historical documents, or books such Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai's *Same Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* which, in my opinion was a landmark in this field as it traced a long line of inclusion and acceptance right from ancient to post-colonial India. This acceptance holds true in the Mughal court, in epics like Mahabharata, in the temples of Khajuraho and Konark, and even in depictions in art and architecture. The fault line seems to be the period of colonization where the British imposed their own Victorian moral code on us, which went on to become the Indian Penal Code. I think this was the stage where Indians internalized homophobia and that is why it took us 70 years to get rid of the archaic Section 377. So the first thing about being Indian and queer is to recognize and take pride in this long history of inclusion.

Second, it is extremely important to also acknowledge how important the idea of family is to us. A lot of the people I interviewed for my book *Gay Bombay* explained to me their vision of queerness in India. None of them imagined living in a pink house in San Francisco. In their imagination, they wanted a partner, and preferably one that their parents chose for them. They wanted to live together with their families, and wanted get married in the same way say their heterosexual sister was. So it was a very family-oriented imagination, which might be different from other parts of the world where people seek to form an independent queer identity. I think a lot of this comes from the difference between Indian ideas and Western ideas where Enlightenment in the latter focused on finding one's true self. However, in India we recognize that there are always multiple selves. The challenge here is to adjust these multiple selves within all the institutions that we are a part of. Since our own sense of identity is so fixated with that of the community, or the family, we learn to negotiate these. This is where the great Indian *jugaad* comes in. We do creative *jugaad*, relationship *jugaad*, emotional *jugaad* and try to adjust our selves into our various identities.

So I think these are two deeply interesting frameworks of being queer in India, and between that deep recognition of one's own history and an acknowledgement of the fact that the institution of family is so important to us, we make our identities, we figure out our selves, and also create communities.

**Since you mentioned section 377, I want to take that forward and ask you a related question. It's been a year since the decriminalization of Section 377 now, but at the same time the regressive Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was formalized less than a week ago. Where do you think our legal policy, and consequently we as a country are headed with these alterations?**

Nothing ever moves in a straight line, especially the law. And of course, there is no 'straight' when you're talking about queerness. Even if you go back to the history of Section 377 between 2009 and 2013 and then 2018, it was a continuous back and forth. I think that the law see-saws ahead. It does move forward, but it is a see-saw. I am horrified that this regressive bill was passed, but I don't think it's over. I think we will mobilize, protest, and exercise the idea of democracy and civic action. I look at law in that context, but I also want to look beyond it. What good is a law if it's not practiced? While the law moves ahead and takes its own course, I think it's time for us in the civil society to create environments of inclusion so that the law catches up. If for example, every workplace is LGBTQ+ inclusive and treats its queer employees including trans people with respect, at some point the law will have to catch up. At some level, I also believe that the law is already on our side as we saw in the NALSA judgement, but the

Parliament needs to rectify its approach. So in my opinion, besides pushing for legal rights, we should also recognize that a lot can be done on the ground by creating atmospheres of inclusion.

**I'm going to come back to what you mentioned about the workplace in a bit, but a question before that. Even within the queer discourse in our country, Conversations regarding certain orientations—asexuality, for instance remain far away from the mainstream narrative. What do you think is the way forward in having a movement that enables the visibility of all identities?**

I think the movement is increasingly recognizing the importance of inclusion within the movement, as well as intersectionality with other movements. There is a growing understanding of these cross-roads, and also a an acknowledgement that you can't, say fight against Section 377 while remaining silent against the Trans Bill. And this extends to the Citizenship Amendment Bill, the Data Protection Act, and so on. We have to realize that all our struggles are connected in a way. This realization comes when we acknowledge that all of us are fighting for the same goal—to be accepted for who we are. I agree that this realization was slow to come with respect to the queer movement, but it has been increasing over the years. There are some projects that I really appreciate in this regard and these are initiated mostly by young people. Whether it is the 'Chinky Homo Project', or the 'Queer Muslim Project' or places such as the Equality Labs that work on Dalit feminism and Trans Rights, or NGOs such as the Solidarity Foundation in Bangalore which talk about the rights of sex workers; it is really interesting to see the new discourse around intersectionality. I agree that the queer movement hasn't been a smooth and harmonious one, and this is true on a global and not only a national scale. I also believe that had the movement been harmonious, we wouldn't have appreciated dissent and argumentativeness as much. However, I do think we can be empathetic and recognize the fact that other peoples' struggles are also our own. I am glad too see more and more of this happening.

**Coming back to your book, you had a whole chapter called 'Media Matters' where you looked at Indian press coverage in various phases, television coverage, queer Indian films and a lot more. More than a decade after the release of the book, what do you make of the journey of queer narratives on screen since the movie *Mast Kalander* which is regarded as the first film with an explicit character to now web series like *Made In Heaven* that has an openly gay protagonist?**

I think the journey has been really amazing with the opening up of various kinds of media platforms and these are not just the Netflix's of the world. For example, there is a series called *All About Section 377* which is available on YouTube. Its first season starts off in urban India, it then takes us to the rural scenario, talks about Trans Rights, and so much more. Also, there is an abundance of shows made in local languages today. During an interview I conducted for my new book, a respondent talked about a Kannada series that is about two girls falling in love and how she came out to her mother by showing her the same. There is incredible cinema in other languages like Marathi, and Tamil, and there truly is an explosion of rich and layered queer content across platforms. If we talk about Bollywood, I think *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha To Aisa Laga* was a landmark owing to the fact that you not only have a big celebrity playing a lesbian, but also because of the importance given to the understanding that needs to come from parents. This is done by someone like Anil Kapoor, whom the country loves. It is wonderful to see his journey from not understanding at first, to finally accepting his child. I am also very happy to see someone like Ayushmann Khurrana playing a gay character in the upcoming 'Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan'. I think we should not underestimate the power of media to change minds in our country. Many people don't understand the law, but they understand it when someone like Anil Kapoor accepts their child for who they are, or when Ayushmann Khurrana talks openly about homosexuality. That does make a huge difference. I am quite happy seeing the representation of queerness on screen today, and I think a huge part of this is also due to the fact that queer people are having the confidence of coming out and writing our own stories. The author of *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha To Aisa Laga* is Ghazal Dhaliwal who is a transwoman herself. Apurva Asrani wrote *Aligarh* and was also on the team for *Made In Heaven*. I think the more we tell our own stories as queer people, the more nuanced they will be.

**Coming back to the workplace, since you have relentlessly worked for making corporate India a safer place for the queer community and have even guided a white paper called *'A Manifesto for Trans Inclusion in the Indian Workplace'*, how do you propose workspaces can move beyond token allyship and be true pioneers in ensuring queer inclusion and integration?**

Well, I am writing a book about the same that comes out in April. As I explain in this book *'Queeristan'*, I think there are a bunch of things that companies need to do. First of all, each company needs to get its policies right. We need procedures such as anti-discrimination policies, same sex

partnership benefits, and sexual reassignment surgery policies to be effective in every company. We also need all gender washrooms on campus wherever possible. There is a long list that follows these, and I am glad that a lot of Indian companies have started their journey of inclusion. I also think it is important for companies to realize that they're not doing this as a favour to us, but as a favour to themselves because all data shows that employing more queer people will make the company more visible, and also make them more money. I think smart companies are recognizing that they're doing this for their own benefit. Once this recognition is complete, it is also equally important to hire more queer people.

**When you talk about hiring queer people, do you think a positive discrimination in the workplace with a reservation system for the queer community is practical and beneficial?**

I completely believe that positive discrimination is beneficial to queer people, and it is the need of the hour. Whether it is in terms of qualifications, denial of opportunities, or systemic abuse, I think queer people in general and trans people in specific have had a history of suffering. Taking this oppression into consideration, it becomes important to actively employ queer people. Until we live in a world where workplaces have so many incredible, smart, and qualified queer people at every level, we have to create systems for them to get there. If that means acknowledging that I have zero senior managers who are queer, and then going out to look for someone who's queer, then why not?

***"...Along with progressive HR policies, I'd also like for them (the next generation of corporate gay India) to have some Desi gay role models. Any takers?"*** **This is what you had said at the start of this decade. As we approach its end, do you think the next generation has found its desi gay role models?**

I don't think we have enough yet, and I am really anxious about the same. The people who are out there in the corporate world—it's people like myself, or Radhika Piramal, or Keshav Suri, all of whom come from extreme privilege and a lot of family money. There are others, of course, but there aren't enough. Also, I don't just want to see gay role models, I also want to see Dalit queer role models, Muslim queer role models, Adivasi queer role models, disabled queer role models, and I don't see that enough. Maybe I am not looking in the right places, but I don't see our corporate structures enabling these intersectionalities to flourish, and I am really concerned about that. It gives me happiness to see someone like Zainab Patel as the Head of Diversity at KPMG, but why is there only one Zainab? There are so many more talented trans people out there. Why is Radhika Piramal the only lesbian? I am sure there are more! So I believe there's a lot of work that needs to be done in terms of pushing for visibility at one level, and in terms of creating opportunities at the other. I am happy that this has begun with the projects I mentioned earlier, but there's a lot more that requires our attention, and I talk about this in detail in 'Queeristan'.

**As a researcher who has already successfully navigated the space between an autobiographical, an ethnographical, and a historical account of the gay community in modern Bombay, what can we now expect in your upcoming book?**

Oh, it's going to be *dhamakedaar*! I am just finishing writing the last chapter. I think you can expect a lot of information, and a lot of stories from this book. You can also expect a very clear and strong stance of where I stand on things. You can also expect clear steps to take in order to make your organisation more inclusive. Also, this book is a sort of memoir and I really enjoyed writing it since it looks back at the different kinds of change making I've been part of. Thus, it also takes you through my own journey as well. I think it's like a complete Bollywood blockbuster—from Hema Malini to Homi Bhabha, it has something for everyone.

**Lastly, as a successful scholar in the academic space, what is your advice to students attempting to study queerness in the academia?**

In my opinion, anyone who wants to study anything has to be very clever and resourceful. I've studied at MIT under Henry Jenkins, so I am very much in the school of applied academia. I think you should see how best you can translate your academic interest into job opportunities or similar possibilities. Besides finding a department or space that includes you, it is equally important to find patrons and benefactors for your research. These patrons might be global funds, or scholarships, or even corporates. I think it is essential to look at the long run while making decisions such as your thesis topic, or what you want base your arguments around. We have to act smart and focus on things that will help open doors for us in the future. With shrinking education budgets, it is imperative we keep our long-term goals in mind and find people who can support us in our journey.

Photography by: Gayathri Pushpanadh

# 01. QUEER EYE-DENTITY: LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF INTEGRATING THE QUEER

APEKSHA JAIN & PRIYANKA JOSHI
EDITED BY: ISHA BORKAR

*Queer*
*1. strange; odd.*
*2. INFORMAL•OFFENSIVE*
*(of a person) homosexual.*
*denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms.*

*Coincidence? We think not.*
*Language is power; it is a constantly evolving structure that can be used as a sword or a shield to oppress or include depending on one's intentions. The following article attempts to analyze the intersection between language and the queer community by emphasizing upon its ability to encourage change via inclusion of pronouns, queer slang as well as the implications that it entails.*
*We are here, we are Queer; for far too long we have lived a life of fear.*

Queer individuals have suffered a cruel fate at the hands of a heteronormative society; from being subjected to ridicule and not being acknowledged to being tortured, excluded and stigmatized for the same. The queer struggle has been a long and arduous one. Movements for decriminalization of homosexuality, marriage rights, adoption rights and so forth, have charted the course of queer history. Today, with the prevalence of the concept of gender fluidity, multiple reforms are being made judicially and changes in different aspects of social life too, are helping people in adapting to the current scenario. But, the aspect of our social life which is taken for granted the most; language, is a significant factor in bringing about such social reforms. We understand its emphasis through Durkheim.

Durkheim argued that every society functions effectively through certain *norms.* These norms enable in building social solidarity and maintaining integrity in society. They teach us what is appropriate and what is not, what is acceptable and what is not, as a member of society. Language is the greatest reinforcer of such norms. The way language is structured; it supplements the existing rules, particularly about people's gender identities. Here, we analyze the pronouns that we use in our day-to-day language that affects the way we look at each other as gendered binary members of society and what we consider as proper or not in terms of expressing our gender identities.

Languages like English and Swedish are *natural gender languages*. They may not categories as non-human nouns into gendered binaries. The non-human noun is *it* and the human nouns are either *he* or *she*. In *gendered languages* however, like Spanish, French, Hindi and German, even the non-human nouns are gendered. In a survey conducted by the Bucking the Linguistic Binary, in 2016, stated that 20% of the monolingual and transgender English speakers said that English gender-neutral language allowed them to express their identity whilst 31% denied this and 19% were of a neutral opinion (What Happens If You're Genderqueer — But Your Native Language Is Gendered?,2017). Therefore, it may be difficult for people who are queer or gender non-binary to create a space for themselves in their respective native societies or to openly express themselves. Furthermore, often times than not, the people around have a tougher time in accepting the idea of having *'gender-neutral pronouns'* than the idea of crossing the gender binaries itself. This occurs because it goes against Durkheim's

laws of *social solidarity* and *conformity*. It leads to *deviance* from the norms which creates uneasiness among the rest of the members of society.

The agency that language grants people in expressing their identities is paramount, especially in the queer community. However, some of the languages as mentioned, have constructed a life of binaries for people, restricting them to explore their identity on the gender spectrum in a confined, dichotomous manner. However, English as a language offers the use of 'they/them' pronouns so that queer individuals can express themselves without feeling the need to fit themselves into the 'he-she' ends of the gender spectrum. Yet, this spectrum exists in the first place as a norm, because of the domination of the status quo in society. Gramsci underscores this best, through his concept of *hegemony*. Hegemony in this case is when the status quo, governed by 'straight men', reinforces and reproduces the dominant heteronormative culture to the extent that it becomes a common sense notion for members of society to accept two genders and thus the two sets of pronouns in their languages and expressions of gender identities. This consequentially leaves out the queer community because they were anyway outside the common sense notion of the society, developed and maintained by this status quo.

However, things are evolving and people have now come up with newer pronouns for themselves to express their gender identities. For example, ze/zir, hir/hirs (Ze' or 'They'? A Guide to Using Gender-Neutral Pronouns,2015) are gender neutral pronouns that gender non-conforming or queer individuals prefer using. While they/them pronouns are effective as well, many queer individuals prefer using ze/zir or hir/hirs pronouns instead.

Moreover, while newer pronouns are coming up and queer individuals are able to make space for themselves to openly and fully express themselves, we could respect their choice of preferred pronouns. Respecting pronouns is not merely acknowledging their choice of pronouns, but it is acknowledging their existence and entire identity. Misgendering or misusing pronouns is demeaning to the realities of queer individuals and it shows the stubbornness of the hegemony (Gramsci) of the heteronormative society we live in today, as we discussed earlier especially with respect to the imposition of specific pronouns by the status quo.

In contrast, when an individual's preferred gender and pronouns are used correctly it can go a long way. Correct usage of gender and pronouns not only helps establish a safe space for queer individuals, but it also paves way for more accurate representation of the queer community which is extremely pertinent.

This inclusion of the queer culture can be seen at a small extent in today's society. What was once the chant of the Sons of Liberty, who emptied cartons of tea down the Boston River, is now used casually by 21st century English speakers in their daily conversations. Chants such as "spill the tea, sis" is an inclusive attempt at sounding witty. Phrases such as "Spill the tea sis", "hunty", "okurr" and "no tea, no shade" are examples of similar inclusions of the queer culture in mainstream society. They have been incorporated in common parlance recently, but are originally gifts from a linguistic phenomenon, known as queer slang. Queer slang is categorized under anti – language, which is essentially the "vernacular used by a marginalized group within society". (Paisley, 2019)

An example of queer slang would be Polari, which was a secret language used by vagrants, sailors, prostitutes and gay men in England in the 1960's. Since homosexuality was a criminal offence in England until 1967, the language was used by gay men to create a safe space while still maintaining their identity. ("A brief history of Polari: the curious after-life of the dead language for gay men", Paul Baker, 2017)

The history of the emergence of queer slang in mainstream media, is a fascinating trajectory to witness. Queer slang was first recorded through the documentation of the drag culture in the 1991 documentary "Paris is Burning". This documentary focused on drag queens in New York City, and was the first instance of queer slang such as "shade" being exposed to an audience outside of the queer community. In the documentary, the glorious Dorian Corey explains - "Shade' is I don't *tell* you you're ugly, because you *know* you're ugly." (Livingston, 2019)

Almost decades later in 2009, RuPaul's Drag Race aired for the first time, and Corey's words entered mainstream media with the show. Consequently, queer slang too gained center stage such as Raymond Holt saying "Yass queen" in The American Television show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. The representation of queer folks in these mainstream shows facilitated greater visibility for the LGBTQIA community, and perhaps allowed the transition of queer culture from counterculture to an element of mainstream media. And while this transition

had its advantages, in terms of normalization of the queer and encouraging ally ship, it had its downsides as well.

With respect to queer slang, and queer culture at large, the issue of appropriation is prominent. Appropriation is when a dominant group borrows elements of another culture, specifically a culture that has a long history of struggle and does not acknowledge or trivializes this struggle. The usage of queer slang can be seen among English speaking users. The problematic aspect of this usage comes into play when heterosexual, cis gendered individuals who make use of queer slang, are not aware of the vast and vibrant history that underlies the slang.
Appropriation then takes center stage at Pride; wherein most capitalist firms are seen releasing rainbow adorned merchandise. Clothing merchandise with the words "Yass queen" and "spill the tea" floods the market in millions. (Radin, 2019) As per a recent study, it was found that only 64% of the brands that include LGBTQIA specific products actually donate to relevant charities ("Opinion | The Guardian", 2019). This blatant hypocrisy which is also evident be explained through the Social Action theory as proposed by Erving Goffman. According to Goffman, all individuals have multiple fronts or roles. These fronts are ways of behaving that are varied by the individual depending upon the physical, social and cultural context within which they're situated at the moment. These fronts consist of a "front stage" and a "backstage", which when translated to layman's terms essentially correspond to a public and private persona respectively. ("Erving Goffman and the Social Action Theory — Exploring your mind", 2017)

With respect to appropriation of queer slang, the front stage that these capitalistic firms do, is that of complete support for the queer movement, which is showcased through their products. Yet, their backstage paints a vividly different scenario wherein the same firms either do not donate any amount of their profit to the queer movement, or furthermore commit large sums of their profits to anti – gay governments or politicians. ("Don't Let That Rainbow Logo Fool You: These 9 Corporations Donated Millions To Anti-Gay Politicians", Dawn Ennis, 2019)

Therefore, language as a social construct may be able to determine how queer individuals express themselves. Language can empower and integrate the queer into mainstream society while simultaneously appropriating and marginalizing their existence like in the case of queer slang. Understanding the agency that language provides

The Queer Lexicon
*Anthea Lobo*

the community with, and how it is essential for society to accommodate to it, thereby respecting it, is of vital importance It underscores how the mainstream cultures borrow artefacts from the queer culture and make it their own without crediting it to its original history. Queer identities and pronouns need the recognition and respect they deserve. The line between appreciating and celebrating the queer as opposed to infringing upon their freedom, must be made prominent.

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# 02. QUEER NARRATIVES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

RHEA REGO
EDITED BY: ISHA BORKAR

*This paper explores the significance of queer narratives in children's literature, stressing on stories affiliated with gender fluidity and gender non-conformity. With the help of stories that encourage an open dialogue with children on love, equality, acceptance and empathy, it is hopeful that LGBTQ+ children across the globe will find themselves in the literature that they consume someday. This paper interprets how children's story books can become agents of change by prompting conversations and raising visibility on the LGBTQ+ community whilst challenging dominant heteronormative narratives that are well established in children's literature.*

As children, we always held onto certain story books that transported us into a world beyond our imagination. We immersed ourselves in stories, identified with characters and understood emotions line after line, page after page. Undoubtedly, children have a way of absorbing almost everything that is placed before them and this makes it crucial to arm them with as much knowledge as possible while they are young. Whilst growing up, I found myself buried between pages – on some days, I hoped and prayed that a golden ticket would take me to meet Willy Wonka whereas on others, I (mentally) went on adventures with the *Famous Five*. Looking back at my foundational years, almost all protagonists of the books I read fit the standardized binary. Ever since, it has been an ongoing process of unlearning and unlearning in order to become a better ally to people who identify differently.

Story books are an integral part of most children's growing years and I believe there is no better medium to introduce children to a world that encapsulates diversity than through the pages of a book. Times, they are a changing – in today's world, queer narratives have found a place on the bookshelves. While authors and publishing houses are shedding light on various social issues for multi-generational audiences, they are attempting to normalizing gender-neutral narratives amongst children by giving such narratives the importance that they deserve.

Keeping in mind queer narratives, it is essential to understand that queer theory is a relatively new discourse with a delicate and nuanced history. Queer theory, like feminism, works to upend the pervading notion, in our contemporary culture, that gender is a natural part of one's identity (Kander, 2011). The paradigm of queer theory renegotiates identity through arguments that contest conformity and unity. One can establish that the primary focus of queer theory is centered on the socially constructed nature of sexual identity as well as the role gender plays in said constructions. These socially constructed identities create a sense of expected normality that, in turn, creates binaries in our culture between what is deemed normative (the expected norm) and identities that are labelled as deviant (in opposition to the constructed norms).

However, the use of queer theory in the field of children's literature is only in its infancy. In the past, one may have realized that the entirety of the field of literature – from authors to publishers to readers to libraries to bookstores – seemed eager to ignore queerness as a reality that needs to be addressed in literature for children and young adults. As a matter of fact, several libraries even refused to shelve literary pieces that possessed evident queer content, especially if they were intended for young readers.

I happened to interact with a few students from University of the Arts, London who co-wrote and illustrated a story book exploring gender fluidity for children titled *This Is Jamie*. The book revolves around Jamie, a non-binary child who faces a dilemma at school – whether they should use the boy's washroom or the girl's washroom. As the story progresses, Jamie happens to notice another door in the hallway with an equal sign board on it; on entering, they see multiple cubicles which are gender neutral, thus portraying acceptance and inclusivity in an educational institution.

On speaking to Kenneth Rodrigues, one of the illustrators, I was also informed that there were several aspects that were kept in mind while creating a story book that could introduce gender identity to children – it was essential to be sensitive and creative with the characters, the language used, and how the storyline should grasp themes of acceptance and love in the wider scheme of things. There are two elements in children's story books that are imperative - one, the illustrations and two, the method of storytelling. In most children's story books, one may notice how art meets storytelling. Keeping in mind the short attention span children tend to have and considering how quickly they lose interest in a matter of minutes; it is essential that story books have the right balance between appealing narratives and creative illustrations. Through illustrations, the perfect blend of color and text can often put forth the thoughts of the author more effectively. More so, illustrations can help simplify the process of comprehending a story - not only does the narrative become appealing to the eye, but it also provides visual context in a creative manner.

While talking about children's story books with queer narratives, the introduction of gender-neutral pronouns and gender sensitization through protagonists in the books should be done with care as these concepts may be difficult to comprehend at first. In this manner, story books with queer narratives can prompt open conversations with parents/teachers and children - through the help of illustrations and clear verse, children may be able to empathize with characters in the stories that they read and follow suit in the real world.
As Foucault (1976) states in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, "Repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, as affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know." Through this quote, one can comprehend how the lack of representation of queer narratives and LGBTQ+ families in children's books may have resulted in such families not feeling valued and having no recognition whatsoever. Introducing queer narratives, especially in children's literature, has managed to bridge this gap by paving the way for stories that are diverse. Such stories have helped re-affirm the importance of representation and normalize 'queerness' in our lives. Moreover, there was finally a medium that encouraged positive discussion and education for children about LGBTQ+ families.

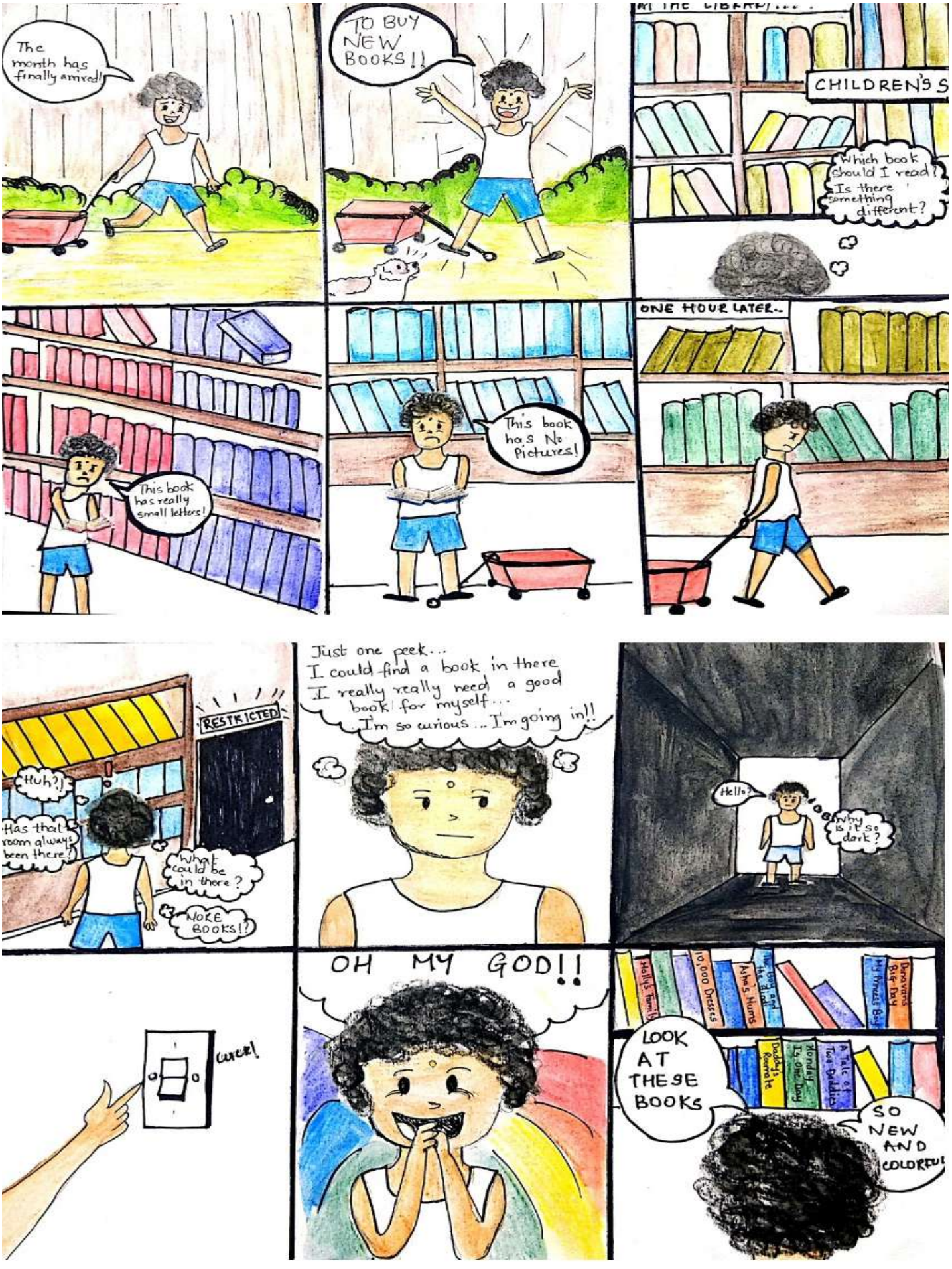
I conversed with a mother of two young boys about the significance of narratives that break gender stereotypes and paint pictures of a world that is diverse and inclusive. She reiterated how important it was to let children express themselves the way they wanted to – not only did she want to expose her children to narratives that help them normalize non-binary folk, but also found it essential to help her children find role-models in the stories that they read. The mother mentioned how the process of normalizing gender fluidity for her children became easier for her, as there were several stories that expressed themes of respect, love and care for those people who identified themselves as part of the queer community. Not only did she choose to make a conscious decision to unlearn problematic stereotypes and redundant lessons that were taught to her, but also decided to teach her children how to be inclusive and empathetic through stories that may inspire them to do so.

I came across a book that found its place on her children's book shelf titled *The Boy & The Bindi* – a beautiful picture book written by Vivek Shraya and illustrated by Rajni Pereira, which takes us through a young boy's fascination towards the *bindi* his mother wears each day.

"What's a *bindi*? What does it do?"
"My *bindi* keeps me safe and true."

As the boy admires his mother, he wonders if he too can wear a *bindi* and decides to ask her if she can spare one of hers. She gladly places a *bindi* over his nose, all the while educating him about why it is so lovely and spiritually-grounding to wear a *bindi*! This book is an important read about self-expression, to say the least. Representation for any child of color who exists anywhere on the LGBT spectrum is extremely hard to come across. Now, more than ever before, it is imperative to expose children towards positive representations of gender non-conformity, of trans folks, of non-binary people. Children who identify differently deserve to see themselves in the stories that they read; conversely, cis children need to engage with stories that normalize non-cis folks. With the rhetoric of hate soaring high up above, we must take it upon ourselves to make everyone feel represented enough in the world of literature. *The Boy & The Bindi* is a charming story that embraces children outside of the gender binary and I believe that it should have a place on every bookshelf.

LGBTQIA-positive children's books have something to offer every kind of kid and every kind of family.




Literary discoveries of the *Boy with the Bindi*
*Anthea Lobo*

Children who come from homes that don't fit traditional stereotypes can find their families in the stories, and those children who believe they don't fit traditional stereotypes can find themselves. For other youngsters, such books are a window into the diverse lives and experiences of the world around them, and they can help explain family dynamics outside of their own. Whether a book's plot is centered around LGBTQIA-related issues or it features a character who is a positive LGBTQIA role model, these books teach children to not just be tolerant, but to be loving and empathetic as well. Perhaps normalizing queer narratives could widen spectrums of imaginations amongst the minds of young readers.

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# 03. ERASING DICHOTOMIES, WILDELY

TOSHITA SAHNI
EDITED BY: PRERANA SANNAPPANAVAR

*Oscar Wilde claimed that he "summed up all systems in a phrase, and all existence in an epigram." Although often remembered only for his sparkling wit and one-liners , Wilde's writings possess layers of profound reflections on society and art that remain relevant even today. Through my article, I have briefly explored how Wilde propagated a breakdown of rigid dichotomies pertaining to social norms and personal identity, which inevitably influences gender and sexuality. Both, his puns and his philosophies, present a challenge to the absolute, to the conventional and to the ordinary; establishing a unique autonomy of the individual.*

*"Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine."* (Wilde, 1961). These words were written by Oscar Wilde, one of the most famous playwrights of late 19th century England. Wilde was no ordinary artist, for he fashioned a style of writing (and living) highly individualized, unconventional and at times, controversial. Wilde's glittering career was cut short when he was imprisoned for 'gross indecency'. Homosexuality was a criminal offence in Victorian England; and he was severely punished. He came out of prison a broken man and died within three years. But the Wildean spirit continues to live on, more than a century after his death, through fabulous wit immortalized in a panoply of plays, poems, essays and stories.

One cannot read Wilde without wondering whether his allegiance lies to 'style' or 'authenticity,' so to speak. This is just one example of an elusive Wildean dichotomy; embodied in his writings are many more, each as thought-provoking as the other. Furthermore, "the duality of Wilde in all aspects fascinates, confuses: the Anglo-Irishman with Nationalist sympathies; the Protestant with life-long Catholic leanings; the married homosexual; the musician of words and painter of language who confessed to Andre Gide that writing bored him; the artist astride not two but three cultures, an Anglo-Francophile and a Celt at heart" (Holland, 1997, p. 3). This paradoxical nature is reflected in his creations, and forms the basis of Wilde's talent.

Wilde's destabilization of binaries at multiple levels make him an interestingly relevant study in the context of queer theories. His amalgamation of contradictory entities is not only an entertaining evidence of his genius, but also reflects the deconstructive and inclusive nature of queer studies. Postcolonial ideas derived from his works can be symbolically applied to queer theory. For instance, the dilution of binary oppositions- in the context of gender studies, one can consider those of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, natural/unnatural, etc. and also the relation of a marginalized minority to a privileged majority.

At this juncture, it is crucial to understand the nexus between power, knowledge, truth and control. The majority often imposes its ideals/opinions on the minority as the 'truth' and tries its best to disavow the existence of an alternate version of reality. As Foucault (1980) posits, "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (as cited in Siddiqui, 2006, pp. 3). "This 'truth' is manifested through discourses esteemed as legitimate, reliable knowledge," (Siddiqui, 2006) and thus "power produces knowledge," (Foucault, 1995, as cited in Siddiqui 2006). The majority almost automatically denotes heteronormativity. The expressions of the minority LGBTQ community are stifled and discredited by the majoritarian heterosexual community to maintain the status quo - a power hierarchy where they are always on top. In such a situation, prejudice against the minority persists for generations and takes on new forms of oppression.

Knowledge/information, its dissemination, its interpretation and its legitimacy, is thus under the

control of those in power, who generally represent the majority. They maintain their hegemony through the stringent enforcement of binary oppositions- the civilized and the untamed, the natural and the unnatural, right and wrong, etc. The majority themselves decide what falls under these categories. These dichotomies are then propagated like a rulebook for the development of thought and language. Consequently, what emerges is a two-dimensional gaze that always paints one part of society (the 'Other') in scornful, derogatory and often, evil shades. This has been observed throughout history in the case of the LGBTQ community, which continues to battle reductional labels even today. The community still face extreme social stigma and persecution because of a lack of understanding and acceptance of those who are considered 'different' from the majority.

Talking about Wilde's treatment of these binaries, Richard Allen Cave (1997) argues, "Insofar as these categories are to do with mores, they extend their reference and, more importantly, influence from the political to the personal. As a professed individualist, Wilde's adult life was devoted to resisting such contaminating categorisation; and many of the celebrated inversions and subversions that characterised his wits are calculated to explode such absolutism" (Cave, 1997, p. 224). Wilde arrived in England, the colonial Empire, as one of the colonized- an Irishman. He stood up against the Majority, personified as the Empire, by challenging accepted cultural norms and conservative precepts through humour, satire and wit. He did so, daringly, in front of an English audience itself. "Camouflaging his own attack in the language of the enemy, he blew it up" (McCormack, 1997, p. 99). On a subtler scale, he challenged the very meaning of universal notions related to truth, art, nature, life and the felf, destabilizing anything that could be further built upon their foundation. This included the binary oppositions that the majority proclaimed as moral values, and used as weapons to suppress minorities such as homosexuals.

The meaning of truth is one of the most intriguing leitmotifs in Wilde's works. According to him, "In art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true" (Wilde, 1961). Truth, by its very nature, becomes the co-existence of contradictions. This implies that both sides of dichotomies/binaries have equal status and equal entitlement to existence and legitimacy. Thus, both heterosexuality and homosexuality can co-exist and have the same right to be regarded as the norm. Wilde attempted to unravel the inconsistencies and shallowness

Oscar Wilde's looking glass reveals a multiplicity of self-showing characters.
*Anthea Lobo*

of 'Truth'- the validity of a single definition of what morality, gender and authenticity means. He challenged this idea of Truth by worshipping 'Lies' and making it the central theme in many of his writings.

This is most obviously seen in his play, *'The Importance of Being Earnest,'* where the central characters invent another persona (that is, they lie) to get out of social obligations, while simultaneously maintaining the appearance of decorum. This comedy deals with the problems of self-assertion in a stereotypical world. Society, whether in Wilde's time or the present, has a narrow mind-set and rigorously imposes its precepts and moral 'codes,' which also included heteronormativity. In the play, Jack and Algernon seek to avert these pressures by 'Bunburying', i.e. creation of a different personality in different social contexts. Additionally, "Wilde's characters both embody and mock dramatic stereotypes: his formidable dowager, sweet ingénue, fussy clergyman and scapegrace man

about town lead double lives as parodies of themselves" (Jackson, 1997, p. 172). Many critics have pointed out shades of homoeroticism in the play, especially in the context of 'Bunburying' and double lives. In their opinion, the main characters are also escaping from the rigid imposition of sexuality by the conservative Victorian society. On one level, the characters of the play reflect the plight of homosexuals like Wilde- society cannot accept them for what they are, so they are forced to come up with artful, sometimes deceptive, ways of expressing their personality and living behind a mask of "expected normalcy'.

"Wilde held that the only way to intensify personality was to multiply it: his play, like the cracked mirror, renders multiple self, showing characters who experiment with various personalities in order to try them for size... What the play asks us to endorse in the end... is the morality of the fluid or multiple self. In particular, ratification is sought for the attempt by young people to become the opposite of all that they are by training and inheritance, to put on the anti-self" (Kiberd, 1997, p. 284). By emphasizing the significance of discovering the 'Other,' one realizes the importance of breaking free from narrow constructs of identity, whether based on gender, sexuality or any other aspect. Like lying, this exercise too has an essence of artifice, which Wilde exploits to propound new possibilities and new meanings.

For Wilde, lying didn't denote plain dishonesty. Instead, it represented liberation, hope and an expression of the self often subjugated by society. Thus, through the endorsement of what may be considered 'lies', Wilde is challenging a myopic worldview and encouraging a more pluralistic conception of reality. "With his disdain for the supposedly objective truths of science, economics, sociology, or anything not of his own making, the liar's very existence, a constant act of self-invention, is a protest against the realist's submission to nature and to social conditions that pose as natural" (Danson, 1997, p. 86). Homosexuality (and anything that is not heterosexuality) has often been scorned as 'unnatural.' This conception is one of the main driving forces of the antagonism and unceasing opposition faced by the LGBTQ community.
In his essay, *'The Decay of Lying,'* Wilde goes on to create a chillingly new perspective towards Lies, this time in relation to nature. He says, "Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation" (Wilde 1961). Thus, our existence and experience should determine the norm; our lives and personality should be protected from the hegemony of 'nature' or the majority. "In quest of the natural we spend our lives imitating an imitation, when (like art) we should 'never express anything but [ourselves]'. It suggests that whatever *is* is wrong (even, perhaps, such a 'natural' fact as normative heterosexuality), because it mindlessly repeats a prior act of imitation. What we take as natural is someone else's lie - the previously thought or the already created - which we unwittingly imitate" (Danson, 1997, p. 85-86). A supposedly stable division of the natural versus the unnatural is taken apart by Wilde and rendered fallacious. Emphasis is placed on self-actualization (through art) and in honesty to oneself rather than allegiance to an exterior authority. Lying is again elevated to a necessary activity for a fulfilling life. This also is a reflection of the disturbing state of homosexuals in Victorian England, and even now they have to lie about themselves to be accepted in society.

Wilde created himself as a 'dandy', something that is inextricably linked to his queerness. It was a pose cum a protest- tactful in its rebellion against any sort of repression and devoted to the ultimate goal of authentic self- expression. In today's polarized world, Wilde's ideals of a fluid identity and his resistance of strict categorization of ideas have become extremely significant, especially against the background of LBTQ rights. Wildean wit has not only displaced notions pertaining to the individual, but has also questioned existing narratives of power, language and the relation between them in society as a whole. This is one of the reasons for the increasing critical attention being given to his works, especially in the field of queer theory. His creations are often underscored by a surreal ambiguity that resonates with those trying to discover and uphold who they are, which is indeed a long and difficult journey. Nevertheless, to the average reader, Wilde's art remains engaging, yet elusive. Inversion, irony and inconsistency have come together in his works (and life) to create illuminated, vivid masterpieces, but they will always keep some revelations in the shadows. So, the ultimate Wildean mystery is left unsolved.

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# 04. BLURRED LINES: A SPECTRAL VIEW OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

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*This article explores the complex understanding of gender and sexuality as binary concepts and the resulting discrimination that this view is likely to create. The discrimination that non-heterosexuals face primarily comes from outside the LGBTQ+ community but is also present within this space. However, the groupism within the space acts as a contributor to labelling and discrimination based on aspects like religion, race etc. One possible re-evaluation of this concept of human sexuality involves understanding this concept as a spectrum instead. The Gender Spectrum Theory is one such view that gives a person the freedom to express themselves beyond the current, dichotomized understanding and promotes the concept of gender fluidity. In popular consumption, this interpretation is closely resembled by the term 'queer'. Further, the possibility of understanding gender and sexuality as a continuous rather than categorical concept, and in turn, its potential in reducing discrimination is examined.*

A quick glance at the state of the LGBTQ+ community today presents a scene that screams change, acceptance, and unfortunately, discrimination. People who publicly identify as non-heterosexual are often subjected to a magnitude of social problems including disconnect from the community and psychological problems like stress and anxiety when they come out in public. Their increased exposure to discrimination makes it more likely for them to experience psychological troubles (Ghabrial, 2016).

This discrimination doesn't lie outside the LGBTQ+ community alone. There is a significant amount of discrimination within the community as well. People within the LGBTQ+ community end up discriminating within themselves and shun those who might not completely conform to their idea of a sub group. Not only do people face stigma as a sexual minority but as racial, religious, political and cultural minority as well.
A prime example of this discrimination was the term "gay community" which was later changed to "gay and lesbian" but only after a power struggle that the women had to fight to gain equal representation (Flores, 2017). It can be catastrophic when the very community fighting the majority power, starts alienating the people who belong to it. When non-heterosexual people with same or similar sexual identities are discriminated on the basis of race, religion or any other characteristic, then these individuals become doubly marginalized – from the majority society for their sexuality and from the LGBTQ+ community for their race, religion or some other characteristic.

A major reason adding to this discrimination is the groupism that takes precedence within as well as outside the non-binary community. In psychology, it is at times observed that the members of the out-group are labelled, stereotyped and seen as inferiors compared to other in-group members (Ciccarelli, 2015). In real life, this outlook and the associated negative feelings are seen amongst groups based on sexual orientation. As the number of groups keep increasing, the lack of cohesion and increasing hostility become highly evident.

In order to combat this understanding of human sexuality as groups, categories and rigid boxes, one needs to reevaluate the manner in which it is defined. A person's sexuality is a multi-layered and often largely ignored aspect of human life, especially in the Indian society. An early proponent of classifying human sexuality beyond the popular binary trope was Alfred Kinsey with his Kinsey Scale (1948, 1953). The inconsistent and varying nature of sexual attraction for individuals across time was an important finding of this scale. While it did provide the foundation for further measurement and categorization of sexuality, it also played a role in changing common perception of sexuality at the time (The Kinsey Scale, n.d.).

Common interactions and romantic literature gave us a dichotomized understanding of sexuality and its expression. But years of efforts by non-conforming individuals as well as research have brought to light the hidden aspects of this hushed yet desired concept. The Gender Spectrum Theory is one such example that describes multiple forms and expressions of gender that is experienced and recognized by people. It is described as a spectrum – a non-linear one at that (Tharp, 2016). This theory explains gender from a cultural perspective based on the roles that are commonly expected of an individual. Here, gender is represented in relation with five main ideas or identities. Two of these are extremes that include the conventional male and female. The third gender and fourth gender refer to intersex individuals or those preferring the role of either the female or the male, respectively. The fifth gender represents the notion of gender fluidity.

But the Gender Spectrum Theory does not exist in isolation. Your ideas about your own sexuality as well as other peoples' sexuality and expression are going to be very much dependent on your own views and beliefs. This means that one's sexual identity will be shaped around other aspects including their biological sex, gender identity and gender expression (Cavanaugh, 2014). With the evolving definitions today, sexuality can also be seen impacted by behaviour, attraction, emotions, socio-cultural aspects and fantasy. So, every time a person tries to define their sexuality there will be several other factors that will make their definition differ in one way or the other from the categories that are popularly available for people to consume.

When multiple people feel dissatisfied by the non-applicability of a sexual identity, they tend to come up with a term that is representative of how they define themselves. It is likely that the terms pansexual, metrosexual and many other terms were a result of the lack of representation. This can be deduced from the '+' that adorns LGBTQ as a suffix and stands for a plethora of identities which appear to be close replicas of each other. I believe a probable reason for the emerging identities is the very idea that your sexuality needs to be a perfect fit for the box created by someone else.

The Gender Spectrum Theory, in a way, can help bring down the excessive number of labels that keep emerging every now and then. In essence, this scale expresses gender in a linear format with the heterosexual extremes

Read between the lines, you'll find something to be proud of.
*Rhea Vakharia*

on both ends. But the non-linear quality of this scale and the fifth gender – gender fluidity – will let you see the idea of gender and expression of sexuality as a spectrum rather than as categories. This view also allows one to flexibly move around the spectrum, thus reducing the need to create new labels for elements of sexuality that emerge over time or those that they wish to experience.

There are other theories including the Sexual Orientation Range by Epstein, McKinney, Fox, and Garcia (2012) and the Sexual Configurations Theory by van Anders (2015) that try to examine the relationship individuals have with their sexuality or how they express it. The former measures the inclinations of an individual towards same-sex or opposite-sex attraction. It expresses the score as a result of a multitude of variables and looks at sexuality as a "continuous rather than a categorical phenomenon" (Epstein & Robertson, 2014). The latter, on the other hand, takes into account not only the biological factors, but also the sociocultural aspects that design a person's sexual configuration (Valentova & Varella, 2015). These propositions prove helpful as you try to understand the spider web of notions, ideas and experiences that are described by people.

In the current state of events, an umbrella term 'queer' is seen to provide a space of respite for those still exploring the exact nature of their sexual identity. Annamarie Jagose, an LGBT academic and fictional writer, explains it well.

Queer, then, is an identity category that has no

> interest in consolidating or even stabilising itself. It maintains its critique of identity-focused movements by understanding that even the formation of its own coalitional and negotiated constituencies may well result in exclusionary and reifying effects far in excess of those intended. (Jagose, 1996)

The term 'queer', in this context, closely represents the idea of viewing gender as a spectrum instead of as categories (Piantato, 2016). Queer doesn't expect a definition and standards of its own to concretize its existence which plays out as a strength of queer theory. The result points to a reduced need for adhering to labels. It is a space that lets people experience gender fluidity without any barriers. It is only recently that the term queer is being viewed more positively. However, this space was often regarded to be a moratorium or temporary stage instead of being recognized as an identity.

The discrimination within the non-heterosexual community is further propagated by stereotypes. For instance, people who identify as bisexual are presumed to be in a dilemma before they 'turn completely gay or completely straight'. These stereotypes can push people to take strong, sometimes permanent measures like sex-change surgeries to feel a sense of belonging. However, they might not be pushed by their individual desire but the toxic and covert expectations they are subjected to. This ultimately takes a heavy toll on the psychological health of the person (Ghabrial, 2016).

A report by *The Washington Post* (2017) underlines that members of LGBTQ+ community are, in fact, seen to be more racially aware as compared to heterosexual Caucasian people. A suggested reason for more instances of recorded discrimination could be the awareness that is present within the non-heterosexual community that leads to higher reporting than seen in other communities. Yet, we see discrimination even within the more progressive spaces which promote acceptance and love.

If the Gender Spectrum Theory is more widely applied then gender and sexual identities will have more fluidity and flexibility. One could pick and drop elements that appeal to them without having to stick to a particular label and subsequently, to a particular group. I believe there is a possibility that reduced groupism will in turn result in reduced discrimination within, as well as, outside the LGBTQ+ spaces everywhere.

As for the Indian society in particular, it is slowly moving towards a relatively better future with its legal amendments as it provides opportunities for people to openly accept themselves. This, in turn, creates an urgency for people to understand the subjective and individual needs of those who feel comfortable in non-heteronormative spaces. It is these emerging needs of people that call for an understanding of gender and sexuality as a spectrum and the possible benefits of this perspective in avoiding discrimination towards, as well as within the LGBTQ+ spaces while looking out for positive amendments in practice as well.

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# 05. BEYOND THE BINARY: THE WORLD OF GENDER NONCONFORMISTS

VIENNA PEREIRA
EDITED BY: ISHA BORKAR

*As kids, we saw other children as either a girl or a boy, based on pre-determined qualities of what typical males and females are like, in terms of appearance and behavior. What is unfortunate is that for most of us even now as grownups our ideas of sex, gender and sexuality are limited to the categories of a 'boy or a girl'. This essay is about how gender could be a spectrum and to do away with notions of gender dichotomy. The prime focus here is to break the established link between gender, sex and sexual orientation while focusing on gender nonconformists and their lived reality.*

The American Psychological Association defines gender identity as, "A person's deeply-felt, inherent sense of being a boy, a man, or a male; a girl, a woman, or a female; or an alternative gender". In other words, it is one's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. However, gender identity should not be mistaken for gender expression. It may or may not be in line with one's gender identity due to societal norms and restrictions.

Gender expression is the external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine (Campaign, 2019). Gender non-conformity fits into gender expression as it is an outward form of gender expression. For some, gender non-conformity would be a phase but for many, that might not be the case. Gender non-conforming behavior can be due to a variety of reasons. There are individuals who also would identify as cisgender but reject the stereotypical gender role (Polderman, et al., 2018). Certain gender roles and expectations exists only during a particular historical timeframe, for instance, wearing a pant was meant only for men. At that time women wearing pants would be considered gender non-conforming, however it is now considered normal and for women to wear pants. It may also be culture specific. For transgendered or people with gender dysphoria being gender nonconformist is one of the ways through which they reveal their sense of self and their identity.

Like any other identity, gender identity is an important element of self that helps a person know who he is or what is expected of him. Gender nonconformists deal with many problems and may encounter physical and/or psychological harm. The focus here is on- what motivates them to perform their true sense of gender identity under these difficult circumstances and how they create a space where they feel confident and safe. The prime focus here is to break the established link between gender and sexual orientation. Gender performance is a spectrum; for example, Stephanie Burt identifies himself as gender nonconformist who likes to wear skirts and tights. Sexually however he is straight and is married to a woman. Making an assumption of gender being related to sexual orientation is reductionist. Gender expression is beautifully filled with versatility and it gives us a lot of scope to include many variations.

The period of enlightenment brought about a significant change in the outlook of people towards the happenings in the world. During this period everything found in nature was being analyzed and thought about rationally instead of just believing what was previously said. Even human emotions, behavior and body were being studied through scientific principles of objectivity. The Evolutionary theorists came with a view that there are only two sexes that is male and female and due to natural selection of the fittest- through reproduction and selection of mate with the best genetic makeup, led to specific behavioral and emotional patterns associated with male and female known as biological essentialism.

Biological essentialism assumes that these characteristics

are natural; that is, they are a fixed part of human nature and do not vary over time or across cultures (Low & Burns 2017). This theory was very restrictive as it failed to explain the differences among the people both in the case of sex and gender. Sex includes the reproductive organs, genetic makeup and hormones with which a person is born with. The evolutionary model fails to include those who do not fit into the category of either male or female. With respect to gender, there are numerous variations.

For instance, Jazz Jennings who is the youngest publicly documented transgender person, was diagnosed with gender dysphoria, a gender identity disorder, when she was four. She was born a male but always identified herself as a girl. She is a feminine as any other girl and played with stuffed toys, liked the color pink, has girls as playmates and now has a boyfriend. Evolutionary model would not be able to explain such phenomenon and Jazz Jennings would be termed as abnormal. Evolutionary model fails in its explanation by reducing the entire domain of sex, gender and sexuality comprising only that of male and female. This theory brought about a notion in the minds of common people that being a boy or a girl is what is expected and deemed to be a necessity and everything else would be abnormal.

I would opt Anti-essentialism, the view that identities are not fixed, universal or timeless, but are a product of discourses that prevail in particular times and cultures. Gender identities, like all social identities, are thus not centered on fixed properties acquired at birth and bound to remain stable for all (Low & Burns 2017). Gender identity result from 'multiple and shifting roles which people are required to play in both private and public contexts on the basis of their genders and sexualities (Low & Burns 2017). Gender identity is a complex relationship between nature and nurture, thus supporting just one claim is insufficient because we are a product of both natural makeup of our body and socialization. There has been a biological theory that attempts to explain the variations in sex, gender and sexuality. The theory suggests that individuals exposed to atypical concentrations of testosterone or other androgenic hormones prenatally, have been consistently found to show increased tendencies to engage in physically aggressive behaviour. Girls exposed to elevated androgens prenatally, because of, congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), show increased male-typical toy, play mate, and activity preferences (Hines, Constantinescu, & Spencer, 2015). Similarly, there are several theories that attempt to provide with biological explanations for the

A child doesn't have to be attuned to one colour, blue or pink, they can be any colour they wish to be.
*Rakshita Deshmukh*

variations in sex, gender and sexuality. This is an attempt to provide evidence of biological factors playing a role.

Gender socialization happens through various channels such as one's family, peers, education system, religious institutions, political ideologies, the geographical location, culture and so on. Moreover, a person's experience of gender is not a binary but a spectrum: a web like structure which comprises of complicated interconnections between the sex assigned at birth, gender identity felt by the person and sexuality. Furthermore, historical and societal factors build a role frame around gender and sexuality for performance, which defines an individual's gender identity based on their experiences. An individual also has some amount of personal agency to choose where and how to express one's identity.

An example can be seen in the case study of Stephanie Burt who identifies himself as a gender nonconformist, he is married to a woman and lives a happily married life with two children. He most often than not wears male normative outfits. Quoting him "I want a social space in which I can wear a skirt and tights and be seen as a woman, if not as a girl. I want a space where I might be addressed as "Stephanie." I don't want that space to take over the rest of my life". "When I'm done, at the end of my writing day, I will change back into my mustard-colored shorts and my button-down short-sleeved shirt

and go home, and enjoy the evening with my family, far more than I would enjoy it if I spent the whole day, or the evening, in a dress"( Burt, et al., 2012). Burt has created his own agency and space where he can perform his gender identity. He has constructed two spaces for himself. First, is where he can be alone and wear a female normative outfit and be feminine. The other, where he can be a family member, wear male normative outfits and display masculine roles and behaviors. Thus, whilst fitting in the larger society and its expectations, Burt also manages to maintain his selfhood through his expression of his real self.

Alok Vaid- Menon who came out as a transgendered person, is now expressing his identity by writing and creativity. He has his own fashion line, because according to him not many clothes are made for people like him. He makes clothes which are gender neutral. Thus, he not only expresses his identity but also asserts it and demands for equal recognition for all.

A safe space for two of my respondents was playing football. That was one place for them where they felt like they were being treated as boys and would feel that they were boys. Coming out surely is a bold step but what is more difficult is to come in terms with ones' feelings, especially during one's prime time of gender identity formation that is around the ages 2-4 years. The psychological damage that accompanies gender dysphoria severely affects the individual. The feeling of being in the wrong body and disliking one's own body may create anxiety and depression. Family tensions may arise due to differences in opinions. Changes in body during puberty may also make it difficult for them to hide their gender, making them further susceptible to hate their body. Societal and cultural ideologies as well as state policies play a very big role in the intensity of crime and various types of abuses committed against these individuals who themselves are emotionally burdened. We need to ensure that we open up the idea of multiple genders, sexuality and sex to people at large. Inculcating these ideas in their minds will not only make them more acceptable towards the community, but will also ensure better research and therapeutic care.

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# 06. THE QUEER MENTAL HEALTH

TANAYA PENDURKAR
EDITED BY: VANSHIKA JAIN

*Mental Health connotes a sense of psychological well – being with an absence of mental disorders and illnesses. It's also referred as adjusting to the surrounding stimuli and impulses, both behaviourally and emotionally. The theme of queerness and mental health covers a realm of topics; however, this article focuses on correlating the rates of anxiety and depression found in individuals with their sexual orientation, i.e., their belongingness to the LGBTQ+ or the straight community. It also briefly explores the reasons why a few homosexuals choose to marry heterosexual partners in a country like India just to confirm with the societal norms.*

> *"Everything that I ever feared happened to me,"* she told Los Angeles Times Magazine in an interview taken by Hilary De Vries, right after hitting a rock bottom in her career during the 90s due to her coming out as gay on the cover of TIME magazine. *"I lost my show, I've been attacked like hell. I went from making a lot of money on a sitcom to making no money ... When I walked out of the studio after five years of working so hard, knowing I had been treated so disrespectfully for no other reason than I was gay, I just went into this deep, deep depression."* (De Vries, 1998).
>
> - Ellen DeGeneres

What do you think when you hear the word 'queer?' What do you feel when you come across words like 'mental illness' or 'mental disorders?' What made the producers of the show terminate one of their best talk show host?

It was indeed the stigma associated with being a lesbian which barred DeGeneres of career opportunities and working to the best of her ability. Soon after her show was cancelled from her parent channel ABC network, she was viewed as a failure in her business. DeGeneres disclosed in several interviews that the constant ridicule and stereotyping by the media of her being gay in the celebrity industry, led her to suffer from depression and self-doubt. The causes for her battle with depression can be primarily traced to sexual or gender identity crisis, stigmatization and the fear that comes with being both a member of the queer community and having a mental disorder.

It is estimated that 30 - 60% of queer people experience anxiety and depression in their lives. Shockingly, this rate is 1.5 - 2.5 times higher than their straight counter – parts (Brenner, 2019). The reason for this anxiety and depression is generally sought to come from negative emotions like fear, shame, embarrassment and guilt. Many queers view themselves as being flawed, worthless and unlovable. Hence, fear of coming out and identity crisis act as additional stressors which explains the reason for them to experience anxiety, depression and substance abuse more than heterosexuals.

Why the emphasis on mental health of queer community? First, it's really important to know what mental health is; it connotes a sense of psychological well – being with an absence of mental disorders and illnesses. It's also referred as adjusting to the surrounding stimuli and impulses, both behaviourally and emotionally. An imbalance in this mental adjustment and well- being leads to various psychological disorders. Anxiety and depression are known to be the most common psychological disorders and are prevalent in large numbers amongst both heterosexuals and the queer community. Anxiety refers to an anticipation of future concern and is majorly associated with muscle tension and avoidance behavior. Depression can be defined as persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worry and self-pity. Anxiety disorders differ from normal feeling of nervousness or anxiousness and involve excessive fear or apprehensions. (American Psychiatric Association, 2019).

Here, the question that arises is, why do queers tend to experience anxiety and depression more than heterosexuals? There are two concepts known as 'minority stress' and 'concealment' which are deemed to be the underlying causes for higher anxiety and depression rates among queers. Minority stress can be defined as contextual stress dealing with constant bias and discrimination on a regular basis (Brenner, 2019).

Identification with queerness
comes with anxiety which
pours out into different realms of life.
*Rakshita Deshmukh*

This leads to negative and long-lasting impacts on mental health and well – being of this community. The lack of social support is one of the major stressors amongst the queers which leads to anxiety and depression and thus, poor mental health. This constant discrimination and public scrutiny are necessarily not experienced by heterosexuals leading to an increase in number of queer mental health patients comparatively.

According to the minority stress model, 'gender expression' is something which affects mental health to a drastic level. The term 'gender' can be described as a set of qualities which are designed to suit a social category like masculine or feminine by particular cultural standards and society. These qualities thus become the 'normalized' way of behavior and individuals falling out of these criteria are declared as deviant. Thus, women who dress or behave more masculine or on other hand men who act in effeminate ways are naturally harassed and thus face frequent discrimination and prejudice. This directly impacts the individual's social relationships and daily occupational functioning which can be observed through certain interviews which were conducted of queer people working in industrial set ups;

"My mental illness was definitely affected by my queerness as a kid. I came out at 13. But I wanted to be a normal high schooler. I wanted to fit in. I was already different, I'm mixed [race], so I didn't acknowledge my queerness publicly for a long time. I started working a 9-to-5 job as a personal banker and teller. But, I pushed to become a freelance artist and I've worked hard to stay freelance because when I have a strong bout of depression I can be out for a week. Because of my depression, I've had to function outside of normal expectations and work structures, which is why freelancing works so well for me." Says Annalisa, 31, who is a freelance artist and art director in USA. (Rimm H, 2018, healthline).
This perfectly sums up how difficult it is for queer people to make a place for themselves in society without altering their perspective. They either have to hide it from their co-workers or face the subjugation. Their suppression of feelings often adds up to their anxious and depressive mental state which disables them to perform simple tasks or even accept their cognitive conditions.

This leads us to study the second concept which is crucial to this topic: concealment. It means that in order to reduce vulnerability to victimization and persistent stigmatization; these sexual and gender minority individuals tend to 'conceal' some parts of their identities. These mainly include not coming out or trying to hide their gender non- conforming behavior. Though people try to adapt to these situations in short term, but in long run, these psychological costs are very heavy on mental health and later on physical health. Concealment can be seen in the queer community through the following interview taken by the 'healthline' magazine.

Here are few words shared by Jenn, 32, who is an art curator and is extremely passionate about her work and loves challenges as she knows it will help her grow. "My office doesn't know anything. They don't know about my issues with language. They don't know about my mental disorders. I'm not super out. My co-workers I'm friends with know that I go on dates with girls, but I've never come out. Because of this, my boss isn't prepared to pick up the slack when I'm spiralling out of control." (Rimm H, 2018, healthline). What always inhibits or slows her down is that she cannot share her queer identity or mental disorder with anyone in office. This makes her vulnerable to stress which affects her physically and emotionally.

Concealment helps 'in the closet' queer people to cope up emotionally with the stigma and prejudice which is associated with being 'abnormal'. Though it might be helpful then, people using concealment as a 'coping strategy' are prone to isolation, depressive thoughts and feeling of suffocation which adds up to panic and anxiety attacks. This leads to exhaustion due to constant running away from fear of someone finding out your true self. It also leads to substance abuse to cope with this identity crisis and fear of coming out. People generally feel guilty of not being true to themselves which throws them into a vicious circle of identity crisis and depression. Hence, once a method of coping, turns more hazardous for health and well- being of that person.

Concealment can also be linked to another interesting concept of 'marriage trap' which can be increasingly seen in traditional countries of Asia and Africa. Marriage trap is when a member of queer community marries a heterosexual out of social pressure, fear of shame or just because of gender and sexual identity confusion leading to depression, suicidal behaviors and other tragic outcomes. In a country like India, according to a 2009 survey conducted by Mumbai-based, non-governmental organization (NGO) Humsafar Trust, 70% of gay men in Mumbai and 80% in smaller cities across Maharashtra have married heterosexual women to conceal their identity and face societal pressures. This has either led

to such queer people to stick it out and continue living a life of lie or engaging in homosexual extra marital affairs or finally filing for divorce. This forceful marriage is not only detrimental for that person himself/ herself but also his/ her spouse, their families and their children. This affects mental health of not one but people surrounding them as well. Such sudden 'coming out' after marriage can be extremely traumatic to the spouse, the children and the parents too. This can lead to lifelong scars of doubts and depression and also guilt on part of the queer person.

Thus, it is extremely important for individuals identifying as queer to take their parents into confidence and come out to them before engaging into marriage talks with a heterosexual partner. In practice though this is not possible in India as majority of people are still not in favour of the concept of 'LGBTQIA+' and deem it as being stigma to their family. This leads to many youngsters to hide their sexual preferences to avoid the shame and scrutiny which is thwarted upon them. Awareness surrounding this should be created through pride walks, parades and street plays, so that no one is forced to marry anyone nor anyone has to hide from their true self their whole life.

Mental health should be taken seriously just like we care about our physical health. Just like we go to the doctor for treating physical illness, we should also normalize visiting a therapist to understand and treat our mental disorders. It is also necessary to recognize the different mental illnesses the queer community goes through and try to help them come out of it. It is necessary to openly talk about these problems. There should not be stigma associated with being queer and people should be made aware regarding it. Similarly, there should not be stigma associated with being mentally ill too. If prejudice regarding these are both reduced, life will be quite easier and happier for them. We all, straight or queer, have the right to good mental health.

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# 07. QUEE(R)EAL SELVES STAGED: IDENTITY, PERFORMANCE, AND ART

AAKANKSHA TATED
EDITED BY: SARA MARIA VARGHESE

*Identities represent dynamic tools and social constructs that embody the traits of an individual. The performance of identity allows self-exploration and fosters one's idea of the self. Queer performance is observed to remain an effective mode of expression of self to present a perspective of an identity. Queerness is, further, a means of resistance to set norms of expression of distinctive identities. The article deals with theories of performance and the performative in the representation of the queer self through art. Further, how the queer identity embodies itself through the means of poetry and film festivals in specific is also explored. We delve into the myriad representations of the queer identity through words, hues, and frames presented in art.*

Identities are perceived as characteristics and traits that are central to what we understand ourselves to be, based on our roles and functions in the larger society. They are equally a response to, and in relation with other members of our social group and surrounding environment. (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). Our identities in this world are accordingly a dynamic tool while also being a social construct in themselves. They give the power to an individual to express themselves better while defining who they are and what they stand for. It constitutes the answer to the perpetual question: Who am I? One can say we perform various roles in a lifetime, but we also perform our identities on a regular basis (Anon, 2017). As we grow and evolve in our social settings, so do our identities; with this constant evolution, our performances of self remain dynamic. Numerous theorists have debated and discussed over the years, about the parameters of identity and identification, and how it corresponds to the expression of the self. The focus of this article is on the performative aspect of the identity.

Being queer has multiple definitions; each and every one in the community and otherwise perceives it differently. While it is used to describe one's attraction towards people of many genders, it is also used to describe a sign of non-conformity to cultural norms that exist in society around sexuality and/or gender. It is also used as an umbrella term to those who identify as non-heterosexual (Vanderbilt, n.d.). While some embrace the term, as queerness represents the expression of resistance to set norms of expression of their individual identities, some feel the use of the word to be hateful owing to its derogatory usage in the past (Vanderbilt, n.d.).

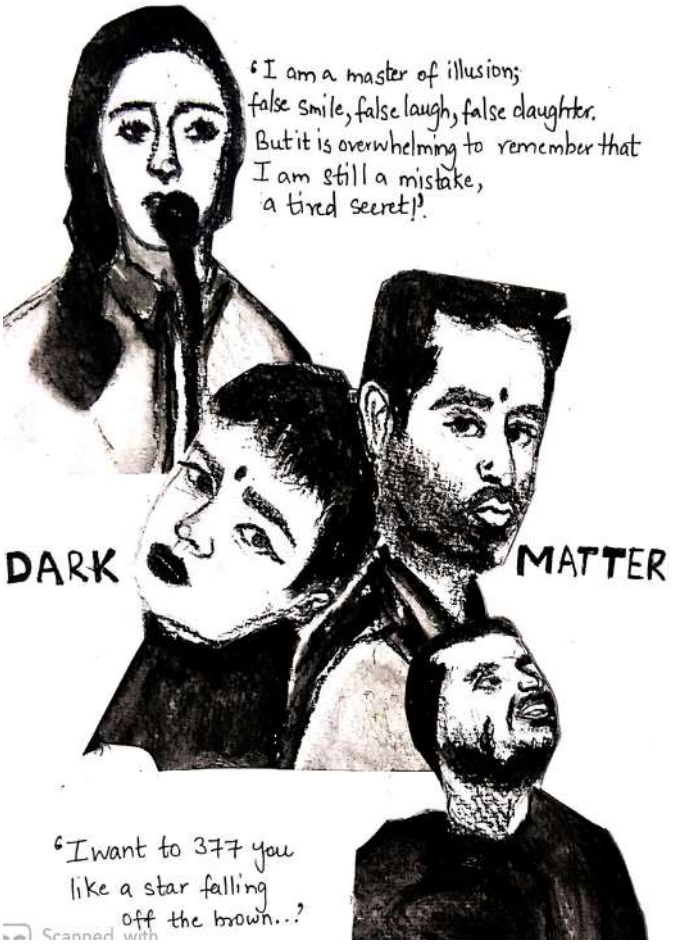
The theory of identity as performance was first developed by Goffman in 1959 wherein, he understood that the manifestation of one's identity as part of the flow of communication. This communication amongst individuals allows the construction of identity in a way that it corresponds to their surroundings. (Pearson, 2019). This theory of performance as Goffman outlines, is where each individual showcases a certain performance on this stage of society. It may be through our clothes, our food habits, our words, our likes, or our dislikes; all of this constitutes our performance within the society. Thereby, explaining our place within the social group that we belong to, or wish to belong. Butler and Derrida's theories mention that these performances that we put forth for and into the society are ways to communicate and reinforce our identities. Thus, performance theories enable us to understand peoples' actions and reactions in the society that reflects their individual and collective self.

The theory of performativity is expressed as sub-conscious notions also understood with regard to identity formation and law-making. Butler in her work highlights how our gender becomes our expression i.e. what we do rather than who we are. Thus, making the idea of performance central to the notion of identity. She further elaborates on how words often have an effect on our whole being- mental and physical. Words can thus be used to express our identities better. Often in terms

of the queer community, words become a source to reclaim our identities either through the term queer or the utilization or disowning of pronouns. Performativity also allows us to understand the cohesion between the social struggle and the cognizance of particular identities. It also elaborates on the notion of performative art. Thus, through performativity one understands how words help describe what constitutes our personal self, and thus form our identities.

While we perform our identities to represent our true or staged self through ordinary means, art is also a powerful tool that is employed by many for communication. While the debate continues if art imitates life or life imitates art – Aristotle, 330 BC (Suman, 2016) one cannot deny the effect that art has in representing the identity of a community. Art allows the representation of myriad stories, and thus brings forth the identity the artist wishes to portray. Janet Mock, a transgender rights activist notes, "I believe that telling our stories, first to ourselves and then to one another and the world, is a revolutionary act." (Mock, 2014). Art, similarly, can embody those stories and facets of identity that can subtly be put forth to an audience with the intent of self-expression and exploration. Many from the queer community have chosen various art forms to give their identities more meaning.

The works of performance artists like Alok Vaid-Menon and Janani Balasubhramanian, have created a creative space for their expression of self through art. They constitute the duo of spoken word collaboration called 'Dark Matter' based in New York City. Their work is said to have "overcome an unspoken rejection, from queer communities to racial minorities to an inherent conservatism in South Asian communities—both of which erase the existence of people like them" (Ravikumar, 2015). The use of art by them enables conversations and explores the various shades of their identity. Intersecting art and activism, they have taken up the cause of promoting equality by unraveling the nuances of oppression based on gender, class as well as race (Nichols,2017). Priyanka Aiyer's work also shows how poetry can be used by teenagers and adolescent queer to help construct and perform their identities. Offering a safe space, it allows a nuanced expression of the same (Aiyer, 2018). It is understood that no struggle personal or collective can be homogenized. However, poetry gives a medium to build a collective stance to the experiences of the queer community. The differences that exist within the community find reasons and modes




Voices of the LGBTQ+ community (top to bottom)
Arati Warrier - 'Witch Hunt'; Dark Matter (Alok Vaid Menon and Janani Balasubramanium)
Akhil Katyal - 'I want to 377 you so bad'.
*Anthea Lobo*

of celebration of their identities through poetry. Poetry with its linguistic and formal oddities gives a sense of comfort by finding commonalities amongst these differences. While poets like Walt Whitman and Oscar Wilde may not have completely accepted their identities owing to the nature of the society at their time, poetry gave them the medium to express those facets of their identity that were largely forbidden by the collective society (Barnes, 2016).

Transcending boundaries, art thereby allows the exploration of the self in a unique manner. The constant oppression that the community faces has enabled them to find subtle forms of expressing their contention. Art, a powerful tool has thus, been employed over the years to showcase the constant struggle of the community while also portraying individual expressions of their identities.

While the void of lack of representation is fulfilled by art, it also allows the rise of a community fervour. The sense of a community is built through this expression and at the same time is challenged owing to differences in the performance of a multi-dimensional identity. Film festivals across the world have taken on the onus of portraying stories made by and for the queer community. Film festivals right from their inception include strategizing and planning what best represents the queer identity thus giving a platform to showcase the multifaceted selves within the community through long narratives, fiction-based content as well as documentaries. These festivals provide safe spaces for identity performance while also giving a platform to use art to present subjective notions of what it means to be queer. Existence of such diverse and inclusive spaces gives means to creative expression while fostering a sense of community and friendship. Exemplary work has been done in India by the means of the Kashish Film festival.

The Kashish film festival in its ten years has screened a host of movies encouraging the visibility of Indian and International queer cinema as a means to nurture a deeper understanding of queer thoughts, desires and expression. The team behind Kashish believes in the usage of art as a powerful medium to bring about social change while rallying public opinion towards dignity and equality for the community. In its tenth edition, both documentaries and narratives screened here sensitized the audience about the issues faced by the LGBT+ persons while also celebrating their identities. Content is not only restricted to films but a number of panel discussions and debates allowing artists to express their journeys. The focus is not only on their individual struggles but also on collective breakthroughs. Thus, here, art allows one to question the taboo over the expression of one's identity. Art over the years, has gained a political fervour and represents the social stigma that the community faces along with notions of discrimination through political actions (Dawson & Loist, 2018).

Art thus continues to give a voice to a community that has for long been marginalized. The historic judgements in favour of the LGBTQ+ community like the amendment of Section 377 in India or the legalisation of same-sex marriages in Taiwan allows the freedom of expression of queer identities on a wholesome platform. Over the years, art for the queer community has become a medium to assert their rights and identities. It has provided a common-ground of expression for the community while inculcating a feeling of oneness. Therefore, one can understand how art enables a community to express their identities and perform what constitutes their idea of self.

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# 08. WANT TO LEAD OR FOLLOW?

SAMEEHA SABNIS
EDITED BY: VANSHIKA JAIN

*Salsa dancing community in India seems to show more acceptability of gender fluidity on the dance floor such as, men following or women leading during the dance. This article will trace the various global processes and ideologies that has contributed to a more gender-neutral 'Glocal' vision of salsa in India. However, there are certain social biases, taboos, and stigmas that are involved in these constructions of fluidity. Even then, salsa dancing has been a space to express beyond expected cultural gender norms and categories. Such platforms of gender fluidity not only create a safe and accessible space in art and culture for the LGBTQ+ community, but also for straight people who wish to challenge or do not quite fit in the binaries of femininity and masculinity.*

Social categories like gender come into being through performance which makes it an excellent site to explore the social performances of gender, as it is both a 'social' and 'performative' style of dance. India has a rich history of performing arts and dance is one of its most celebrated forms. However, the performative aspect of Salsa is different; Salsa as a social dance is spontaneous at its core, unlike a typical dance performance. Hence, staged performances do not form the core of salsa. Thus, making it more about self – expression and presentation than representation. You are not merely a carrier of somebody else's steps or costume, you are simply you.
The performative aspect then involves your performance of yourself as Goffman would say in dramaturgy (Wallace & Wolf, 1995). However, this autonomy is limited by the heteronormativity reinforced by the bio-power in the salsa community (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 2006). A single dance of salsa involves many social interactions including your negotiations of the 'I' and the 'me' as Mead would say (Wallace & Wolf, 1995) as it involves your interactions with your partner as you perform yourself in the dance, other dancer's gaze towards your performance and your interpretations of the other dancer's judgment of you. Gender in salsa is constructed in its social performance.

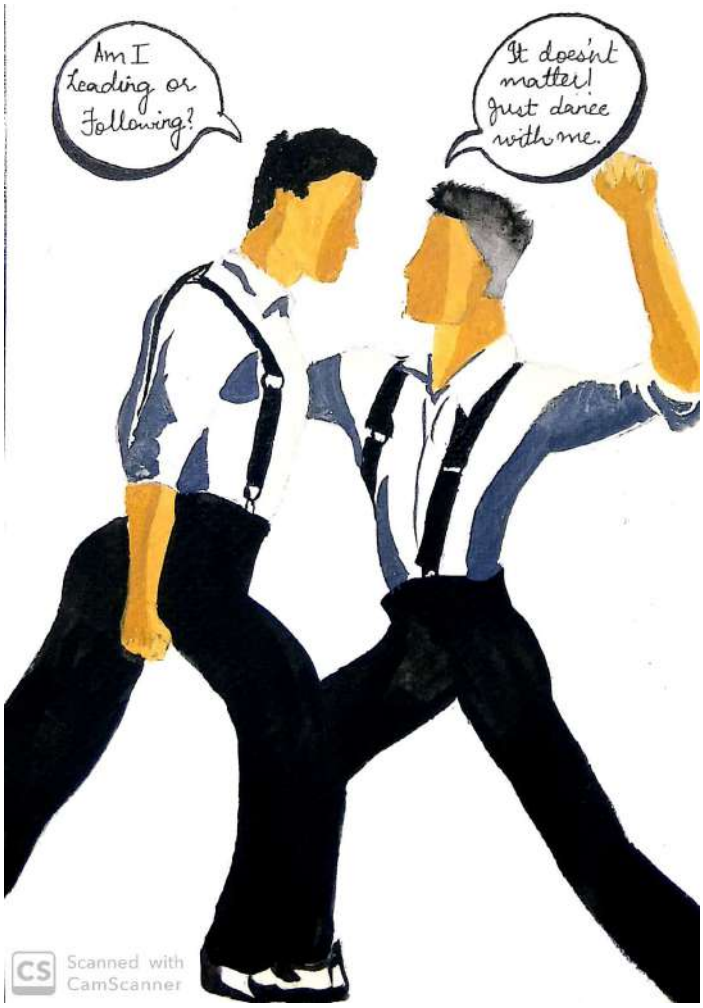
This is an ethnographic study of 'Salsa in India' which argues how this space has increasingly welcomed queer performances of the self, and challenged the heteronormativity of 'traditional salsa dancing.' Deconstruction of this 'Glocal' space may offer insights about how different transnational processes along with attitudes unique to India, often contradict the ideologies that have formulated the acceptance of gender fluidity in salsa.

**Classes and workshops: learning and teaching of gender**

*"In Salsa, we don't learn to lead or follow. We learn to man and woman."* (Copp & Fox, 2015). The gendered dichotomy that says men lead and women follow, goes beyond the structure of this dance, it is a concept well-rooted and reproduced through the way it is taught. However, in India, the impact of traditional ideologies of teaching classical Indian dances, have impacted the culture of teaching salsa, creating a certain acceptance of gender-fluidity. All seven classical dance styles of India expect both men and women to perform as men and women interchangeably. Thus, cross-gendered performances (women leading or men following) are easily accepted and appreciated in the salsa community of India. This very impact of the classical-teaching-styles has created an environment for respecting the 'root culture' of a dance style, due to which there has been an emphasis on studying the history of salsa, making dancers increasingly aware of its diverse roots and enabling them to question the traditional heteronormativity.

Salsa music has always advertised itself as an inclusive form that evolves where it travels to and knows no race and no colour (Johnson, 2011; Rondon, 2008). Theoretically, there is no reason not to qrgue why salsashould know any gender at all. Salsa is and will always be a dichotomous dance, involving two distinct spheres – leading, and following. However, the gender fluidity in salsa stems from the thought that these two spheres, while retained structurally, can be opened and occupied by all genders and need not be limited to those who are heteronormative.

Commitment to whichever role, lead or follow, should




Dancing under the stars with Pride.
*Anthea Lobo*

be based on personal preferences instead of gender. Even if it is theoretically accepted across India, I haven't experienced a single class where we've been given a choice to either to lead or follow, irrespective of our gender. If the ratio of men and women in the class is not balanced then it is very normal for men or women to lead each other. However, if say there are fewer women in the class and still two of them wish to dance together then that's considered rather rude. Similarly, it is very rare to see a woman leading a man in a class with a balanced ratio. Although if the above-mentioned anomalies occur then those dancers are very easily assumed to be queer. I have been questioned about my sexual preference simply because I chose to be led by a woman in a class with an exceeding number of men. In a classroom, the grey spaces between straight or queer do not exist. Many a times, by saying 'men' and 'women,' instead of 'leads' and 'follows,' instructors create an environment of exclusion for the queer. Accommodating the queer discourse in the language of teaching, by identifying a dancer by their chosen role, and not assuming their preference based on their assumed gender, we would create a better space for both queer and straight dancers to explore the dance freely.

**Salsa socials – performing learned gender**

Although gender-fluidity is more accessible in salsa parties, a formal salsa social is still very heteronormative in structure. One has to be efficient in the role they are 'supposed' to perform as per their gender, before others can appreciate their cross-gendered performance. If men follow and make a mistake, it can be easily laughed off, but when women lead and make mistakes, it often receives negative connotations. If the same girl further makes a mistake while following another lead, then she is ridiculed for failing in her duties. Following the Thomas Principle that says the way we define reality becomes real in its consequences (Chandler & Munday, 2019), this eventually adds into the gendered discourse that states – "girls themselves enjoy following and guys enjoy leading." Girls are instructed to limit their styling, and their self-instinct to express their musicality on the dance floor, so the man 'can lead his combinations,' and are further instructed to not deny a dance unless someone is drunk, sweaty or perverted. The most common reason given is that guys need a lot of courage to ask a woman for a dance, thus, to create a comfortable environment for the men, women must almost always say yes.

According to Foucault, social norms derive their legitimacy from discourses around them (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 2006). Thus, when a girl denies a dance without an excuse, it is assumed that the male is to blame. Though the same "don't say no" rule applies to men as well, women rarely ask for a dance compared to men. Thus, like Judith Butler suggests in her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), even though salsa in India has been accommodative towards gender-fluid performances, the structure and culture of salsa is tailored only for heteronormative expectations that have come to be considered as 'natural' simply because of their repetitive expressions (Duignan, 2019). Looking beyond the men and women categories, in a queer performance of salsa, we see how everyone is respected as a dancer and has equal agency and access to consent.

One of the best techniques to emerge out of 'Queer-salsa' is the liquid lead technique, which allows dancers to switch roles mid-song. Moreover, the fact that these performers are easily accommodated in competitive workshops and social dance championships, enables us to break through

the present gender dichotomy. I have seen women bagging the prize as the best lead, men participating in a championship as a follow; with heels, etc. In other countries, queer performance is often restricted on the grounds of straight-dancers' discomfort; as pairing up in a social championship is random. But salsa in India; to be established as a respected dance where unknown men and women dance together, had to be completely desexualized. Thus, anyone reasoning discomfort for not dancing with any gender is thought to be viewing salsa in a sexualized manner and is frowned upon. However, in regular parties with both partners' consent, salsa can be sexualized to an extent where the suppressed sexuality of both straight or queer can find its expression.

**Performance – making queer political**

I have rarely seen same-gender couples or cross-gendered stage performances in salsa-India. In a group dance, it is often the lack of a dancer that leads to an inclusion of such performances and the dancers are either friends, teacher-students or colleagues who engage in queer performance. One celebrated change is the inclusion of 'same-gender couple open' category in the Indian international dance congress, 'Asia open championship' ("India International Dance Congress 2020 | Expect the Unexpected", 2019). However, no matter how appreciated these performances are; these spaces are mostly occupied by the straight, to showcase their extraordinary talent. As a Queer-salsa dancer myself, in order to initiate the inclusion of queer salsa in a stage performance, we need to change the heteronormative visual culture of salsa that has made the audience comfortable with the display of only a certain kind of femininity or masculinity (men in suits, women in thin flashy dresses).

Queer performance in salsa has created visibility of different genders and created diversity within the gendered structures of salsa through techniques such as, the Liquid Lead (Copp & Fox, 2015). It has worked to bridge the gap between the contested categories of straight and queer, wherein both straight, and the queer can be a part of each other's emancipation, help each other to question the hegemonic heteronormative structure of salsa worlds and create a safe space for expressing sexuality freely, and creatively. I hope the day isn't far when I am asked for a dance and my partner asks not "on one or two?" but, "want to lead, or follow?"

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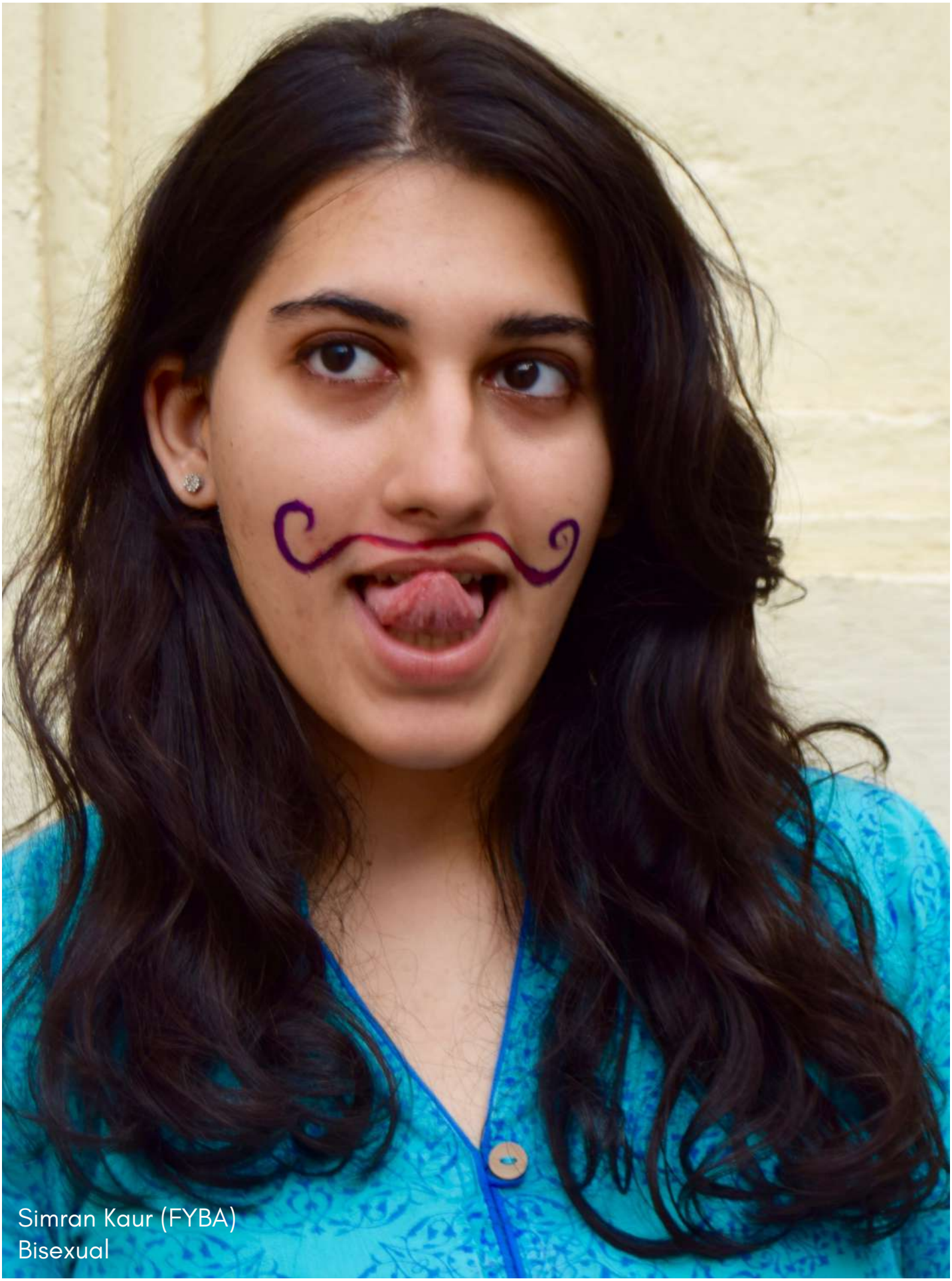

Simran Kaur (FYBA)
Bisexual

Photography by: Gayathri Pushpanadh

# 09. FASHION IN THE CLOSET

CHARUTA GHADYALPATIL
EDITED BY: VANSHIKA JAIN

*As one of the most visible symbols of a culture, clothing has for centuries been used to construct, oppress, and impose identities - from physically restraining women in Victorian England to imposing a religious and ethnic identities in Nazi Germany. At the same time, it has also equipped people to liberate their identities. The article explores this ability of fashion to liberate in terms of queer identities. It looks at traits in queer fashion, explains what makes fashion queer and, more importantly, what makes it a powerful enough tool for resistance against heteronormative ideas of gender and sexuality.*

In October 2018, to celebrate the decriminalisation of Section 377 in India, the Lotus Make-up India Fashion Week put up a show asking forty designers paying homage to queer fashion, with outfits that reinterpreted the rainbow-striped pride flag (Dey, 2018). From transgender models to genderless clothing to men wearing frills, laces, and sarees, the ramp saw mainstream Indian fashion making bold statements about perceptions of gender and sexuality through fashion. Around the same time, genderqueer clothing labels like Two Point Two, Potplant, and Bobo Calcutta came into their own, cashing in on the growth of queer identity politics (Ladha, 2019).

This growing presence of queer fashion in India is emblematic of a worldwide shift in fashion and its relationship with gender. In the last decade, fashion has become increasingly critical about its association with the LGBTQ+ culture, right from Lagerfeld's 2013 display of two brides (celebrating same-sex marriages in France) to dapperQ's show at the Brooklyn Museum (marking ten years of dapperQ, a queer magazine devoted to visual activism through fashion) to Burberry's 2018 design that added rainbow-coloured tartan to its signature collection (to show the company's support for LGBTQ+ charities). Fashion that bends gender, challenging traditional conceptions of clothing has become one of the strongest weapons of queer resistance culture (Weaver, 2017; Couto, 2018; Khatib, 2019). Based on queer theory's conceptions of gender and sexuality, this movement's power lies in its appropriation of heteronormative clothing, creating a style that lies deeply embedded within existing limits of fashion while simultaneously offering resistance to these very limits. How fashion negotiates this space makes for an intriguing story.

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Roland Barthes (2013) was one of the first people to write of fashion as a language with its own grammar and syntax. He talked of clothing as an institutional, external, and a social reality: the reserve from which individuals draw their personal choices of the dress. Looking at fashion as a language as Barthes envisioned it has three key implications.

One, like language, fashion becomes a quintessential cultural symbol. Following the symbolic interactionist paradigm, people derive meanings from said cultural symbols. The overt symbols that clothes and clothing styles are, fashion becomes a visual language, with its symbols being used by people to negotiate their own identities, along with those of others around them (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2014).

Secondly, to see fashion as a language is to recognise its duality in society, which is key to its function. It has the ability to unite those of different social classes and groups, while at the same time offering these groups ways in which they can set themselves apart from others (Simmel, 1957). For instance, in the 1950s, butch and femme styles[1] emerged as subtle expressions of the self, setting themselves apart from larger heterosexual feminine fashion, while at the same time allowing lesbian women to identify others of similar sexual orientation (Reddy-Best & Pederson, 2014). Fashion can erect social and cultural boundaries, while simultaneously offering

1 'butch' and 'femme' are adjectives used to describe masculine and feminine attributes in women respectively. A butch clothing style refers to a woman donning masculine clothing (trousers, ties, tailcoat), while a femme style has to do with conventionally feminine clothing

Personalities of the LGBTQ+ community bending heteronormative gender lines
*Anthea Lobo*

the means to transcend these boundaries. Fashion therefore, can be used to impose or deny identities, but it can also be used to liberate identities. While Victorian gowns and corsets-imposed femininity, women appropriating menswear like trousers is a strategy of resisting this hegemony. Fashion choices can thus be strategies for resistance, as is the case with drag and/or cross-dressing (de Lauretis, 1991).

Thirdly, and most importantly, by speaking a language, people acquire the right to alter it (Crystal, 2003). If we are to see fashion as a language, everyone who speaks it has the right to alter it, to tailor it to their needs and desires. The aforementioned duality of fashion plays a key role here. This malleability of fashion is what forms the bedrock of its centrality to the queer identity's socio-political discourse.

Clothing has always been prominent in the process of building identities, particularly gender-based identities. Judith Butler (1988) wrote of gender being performed through social acts. Central to this performance is the dress. If we are to believe Butler, and if we are to go by Goffman's symbolic interactionism, people make meanings out of outward physical appearances and symbols (Greaf, 2015). Clothes are the most obvious symbols of a culture and, since the 19th century, they have become increasingly malleable and fundamental to identity politics. Furthermore, given the history of oppression and othering of sexual minorities, and the resulting lack of other forms of power, clothing has time and again been the agency offering powerful yet subtle means of self-expression (Crane, 1999). Given this disenfranchisement, clothing has very often been the only agency available.

Important to note here is a fundamental difference between queer movements and gay or lesbian social movements, which translates into fashion as well. Gay and lesbian social movements have carved their identities based on a history of shared oppression and segregation, thus looking to normalise these identities. Queerness, on the other hand, builds on the instability of all identities. Unlike its gay/lesbian counterparts, queerness does not look to normalise itself but in fact revels in the difference (Gamson, 1995). Thus, while gay and lesbian fashion might look to normalise itself within the heteronormative structure, queer fashion stands for a complete revision of the relationship between gender and fashion. What unites either is their resistance to the static idea of identity as lies in the gender-binary and its propagation by heteronormative structures

and institutions. Queer fashion therefore is more of an umbrella term, including within its definition any and all kinds of clothing that looks to resist heteronormativity.
With the Industrial Revolution, fashion effectively came into its own in the modern sense of the term. For one, industrialisation allowed mass production on a scale human society had not known. Secondly, with the Industrial Revolution, new classes emerged in society – classes that had money and were willing to spend it. Together, both these factors – the sheer amount of choice available in clothing, and the willingness of people to exercise their choice – led to fashion beginning to democratise (Crane, 2000). For the first time, people could select their clothes in keeping with individual preferences; they could experiment to an extent hitherto unheard of. With this democratisation of the dress, the style became more important than the 'end product', as Barthes calls it. With the standardisation that accompanied democratisation, individual preferences and eccentricities now worked around this by personalising clothes – experimenting with combinations of outfits, putting together different sets of clothing, adding accessories and 'personal effects' (Barthes, 2013). It was at this point that clothing was appropriated by women and the homosexual community as an agent of expression.

One of ways this came to be was through the rise of dandyism – exemplified most prominently by Oscar Wilde. With its extravagant velveteen cloaks, rich materials and flamboyant colours, the dandy style became a tool of expressing the self that worked within the confines of heteronormative clothing, while simultaneously resisting them by appropriating styles from mainstream fashion. The real power of the dandy lay in the details – how the clothes were worn rather than the clothes themselves (Barthes, 2013).

During the same time, women appropriated menswear, making the latter's emphasis on ease of movement a significant chunk of the dress reform movement, and, more importantly, of the suffragette rhetoric in Victorian England. Furthermore, this appropriation of hats, ties, and trousers was as significant for lesbian women as it was for heterosexual women (Crane, 1999; Ladha, 2019). While for the latter menswear was a way to defy the patriarchy, for the former, adopting facets from feminine as well as masculine clothing was symbolic resistance to the gender-binary, which during these Victorian times was only growing more pronounced.

Queer fashion as an umbrella term today is an attempt to rework the gender binary, to portray gender as a fluid spectrum through visual reworking of how clothing and gender are tied in social structures. It is a narrative built in resistance. To borrow from another Foucauldian idea, power lies dispersed in society and hence it almost always flows both ways (Gutting & Oksala, 2018). Thus, it only makes sense for a hegemonic heteronormative discourse in clothing to be met with resistance, particularly from those very identities that heteronormative clothing oppresses.

In this context, nothing is more powerful than drag culture. Through their performances, drag artists exemplify Butler's arguments regarding gender performativity (Greaf, 2015). The ballroom becomes a safe space where fashion is used to shape different manifestations of identity. Fashion flourishes here in the instability of identity in ballrooms (Susman, 2000). What makes drag so powerful is that it forces people to clothing defy long-enforced gender norms by portraying men in feminine clothing and vice-versa. Secondly, the power of drag also lies in its appropriation of, a) high fashion (haute couture) and b) clothing from the opposite gender (Vinken, 1999; Susman, 2000).

Appropriation, customization, and personalisation is integral to queer fashion. Like drag, gay style revels in adopting existing styles and tweaking them slightly: skinny jeans, t-shirts slightly tighter than usual, or, most notably through the embellishment of otherwise plain fashion, making it 'effeminate' (Flynn, 2017). Similarly, lesbian style lies in adopting menswear along with traditionally feminine clothing.

On a more general level, however, the development of queer fashion, needs to be seen as dependent on the development of queer theory and discourse. For one, like queer theory, the entire point of queer fashion is to resist the overarching heteronormativity prevailing in clothing norms in terms of styles and colours associated with either gender in the binary structure. More importantly, however, like queer theory, queer fashion has never attempted to define itself. Structurally rooted in resistance, there are no quintessentially queer characteristics in queer fashion. Its power lies in appropriation and abrogation.

What constitutes queer fashion depends almost entirely on what the mainstream defines as normal. Due to this nature of the queer discourse, its fashion remains limited to the confines of being a reactionary rhetoric, entirely

that of resistance. As a result, it is bound to change every time the normal changes. Thus, the minute women wearing trousers became normal, it stopped being a statement made by the lesbian community. Similarly, men wearing feminine clothes stops being revolutionary and political the minute the mainstream defines it as the normal fashion. As real and as revolutionary it is, queer fashion is essentially a bricolage, and thus its potential will perpetually be determined by the extent of the mainstream.

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# 10. THROUGH THE QUEER LENS

SANIKA SAWANT
EDITED BY: PRERANA SANNAPPANAVAR

*Something unexpected lurked in the April air of 1997. It was the uneasiness and anticipation of what was to come. It had a sense of urgency and yet it was in no rush at all. On the episode titled 'The Puppy Episode' on the sitcom called 'Ellen,' the protagonist Ellen Morgan played by Ellen DeGeneres, announced her self as gay. Ellen DeGeneres herself came out saying, "Yup, I'm Gay." The news dispersed with the wind to places far and wide, because such an incident was unheard of. Many closet doors opened, but the people shuddered on coming out. Perhaps because the air outside still lacked a sense of warmth.*

Whether it is a story from 20 years ago or a story from today, the tendency of a person to focus on the disparity rather than similarities between people makes self-expression for any idiosyncratic person challenging and frightening. Various normative discourses provided by television, film, music, fashion and the internet, are well equipped with simultaneously teaching and reinforcing notions that further divide the acceptable from the unacceptable. The word queer primarily means odd, eccentric or weird. Not surprisingly, it was used as a derogatory term for anybody who didn't fit into the clean-cut groups of gender identity or sexual orientation in a heteronomous[1] society. But since then the LGBTQ+ community has flipped the word around to use it with a sense of pride with the help of media.

Media is of extreme importance in the movement of gay and lesbian representational politics and identity because it is capable of expressing the possibilities as well as the limitations of the liberal acceptance among the viewers who consider the LGBTQ+ community as the *other*. According to John Hartley in *Uses of Television,* television is a "teacher in the best sense" (Hartley, 1998). I believe that Hartley's words hold water when talking about any media platform since it is the primary way in which one views, acknowledges and understands differences among our communities. These lessons do not necessarily mean schooling, rather they stand for the 'anthropological' sense of the word, since it allows us to cohere as a society. As Hartley points out media is influential in a way that other ways of learning may not be. It can explore "the way different populations with no necessary mutual affinity produce and maintain knowledge about each other, communicate with each other, (and) stay in touch" (Hartley, 1998). It is undeniable that media has importance among the marginalised, may it be on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation, allowing them to participate freely in the media-sphere.

Our past experiences are best described by Jennifer Reed in her work *The Three Phases of Ellen: From Queer To Gay To Postgay.* (Reed, Chp. 1, 2007) She uses three distinct characterisations to represent the journey of the popular American talkshow host and comedian - Ellen DeGeneres - from her being closeted to being openly and publicly gay. And these three perspectives namely, *pregay, gay and postgay*, fit the timeline of alterations of the queer identity in popular culture and explain them quite well. So through her work Jennifer Reed has simplified and abridged the creation and re-creation of queer identities in the past 30 years.

Ellen DeGeneres has been the focus of Reed's work since Ellen made television history by coming out in 1997. Prior to her disclosing her sexual orientation before the world, Ellen DeGeneres played the lead character of Ellen Morgan on a sitcom named '*Ellen*,' who was for the majority of the seasons a character without a sexual identity. The show began to drop hints that the character Ellen Morgan might be gay in the later seasons of the show. The excitement that followed was inseparable from the rumour that Ellen DeGeneres might herself be a lesbian. Nevertheless, DeGeneres never uttered the word lesbian. Thus her and her characters' identity did

1 Heteronomous can be defined as 'subject to another's laws and rules,' according to the Collins Dictionary. It is a derivation of the word 'heteronomy' and hence, refers to the dependent nature of human society and the existence of implicit norms. 'Heteronomous' differs from the words heterogenous, heteronormative and heterosexual.

not conform to the heteronomous laws laid down by society. They remained undefined but they opened up non-straight positions.

As Reed said it herself, "operating in the liminal spaces of straight society this way created a *'queer discourse'*". As defined by Alexander Doty in *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture,* queerness "is a quality relating to any expression that can be marked as contra or non-straight." (Doty, 1993) Simply meaning that to be queer stood for standing outside any particular category. This was what Reed meant by the *pregay or queer phase*. A lot of the media representation during this time only dabbled in hinting at characters being members of the LGBTQ+ community, their identity remaining obscure and queer.

This progressed into the *gay phase* marked by Ellen and her character explicitly stating they are gay, which unarguably was the most crucial part in Jennifer Reeds fascinating theory. It was the part of the show which then had to deal with the fact that Ellen was now a lesbian. Her coming out was a momentous step in her journey, which labelled her as a "heterosexual-in-transition for the whole world to witness" (Dolan, 1993). This laid down the importance of explicitly claiming one's identity and recognising them on screen. This action worked in favour of the marginalised community by helping it to restore its dignity and also create diverse characters in the public sphere. By declaring herself a part of the long-shamed lesbian identity, Ellen asserted her power and declared her resistance towards the hegemony of heterosexuality. Similarly, the slogan '*Gay Pride*' stands against shame of homosexuality used to maintain this hegemonic power.

Ellen's coming out had a lot of implications. It marginalised her on her own show making her the *'other.'* No matter how sympathetic, and open-minded the other characters were, they now remained as a reference point for normal. By large, they reflected the sentiments of the majority of the audience. As a result the audience now viewed her as an outsider.

Since media is consumed by the whole population, there is no scope of alienating a part of the audience. Therefore, this phase had to deal with the overwhelming tension of having to portray a lesbian in a heterosexist society. 'Coming out being an othering process, the perplexing task for Ellen was to represent lesbian life in such a manner that wouldn't keep her in the '*othered'* position'.

Media representation of the community through Ellen DeGeneres who has been inspiring generations to come out since 1997.
*Rakshita Deshmukh*

As best described by Reed, Ellen was 'up against the straight mind.' Throughout the episodes after Ellen came out, the content seemed to focus on denaturalising heterosexuality. "The foregrounding of heterosexuality not as a natural state of being but as a social institution" was a "radical movement in mainstream media" (Reed, 2007, pp.13). For the Feminist writer Monique Wittig, this is what she calls the 'heterosexual contract.' In her essay she wrote: "For to live in society is to live in heterosexuality." (Wittig, 1992) Wittig thus voiced that the power of heterosexuality laid in its invisible and unquestioned normativity.

The claiming of identity in the previous stage was an awakening to the differences between those belonging to the queer community and those not. Contrastingly, the *postgay phase* focused on normalising the queer community in the heteronomous setup. *Ellen* was cancelled at the end of the first full season after Ellen came out as lesbian, but its value in the Queer movement could not be underplayed. Years later, after the failure of another sitcom with Ellen playing the lead, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* came into existence, both marking the beginning of the postgay period. It was almost like saying, 'I'm gay, but it doesn't matter.' This phase didn't wish to further challenge the dominant cultural ideologies as that was already conquered via coming out in the gay stage.

The postgay stage rather shed focus on the assimilation of the LGBTQ+ community into the heteronomous society. This in no way means going back into the closet, but more so that the journey outside the closet outside isn't a big deal.

Coming out on a public platform made everyone's focus turn to Ellen and what makes her stand out; an isolated figure representing the whole queer community. Now she wished to coexist and blend in rather than stand out in a crowd. Normalising the LGBTQ+ populace could have also possibly had a positive effect on the liberal straight audience because they would now get the 'satisfaction of knowing they are open-minded and accepting of the LGBTQ+ community without actually having to deal with the real differences that their identity could present' (Reed, 2007).

Drawing from the three phases specified by Reed, we are living in the revolutionised *postgay era.* In this era too, as Thomas Peele, the editor of the book *Queer Popular Culture* describes it, queer culture is limited by acceptance. He posits that popular sitcoms such as *F.R.I.E.N.D.S.* demonstrated this stance. The lesbian character's (Ross, a main character's ex-wife) homoerotic desires are never painted in a serious light and are presented as a result of failed masculine sexuality on Ross' part. It also promoted stereotypes (the mythic-mannish lesbian), like many other media pieces that view homosexuality as acceptable but not desirable. Luckily, a change in temperament has led to the development of films and shows such as *Love Simon, Call Me By Your Name* and *Queer Eye* that do not seek heterosexual acceptance but simply paint homosexuality as appealing and attractive.

The identification and representation of the queer community in Indian media has also evolved over the past two decades. From the stereotypical flamboyant, eccentric and flimsy characters of Rishi Kapoor in *Student Of The Year* and Abhishek Bachchan's in *Bol Bachchan*, indirectly titled as 'clowns' and used as a source of humour to ridicule the queer community, to the strong, gay protagonist Karan Mehra in *Made In Heaven* and a strong transgender women in *Sacred Games* - the change is conspicuous. The later protagonists are a more apposite and less stereotyped representation of the LGBTQ+ community, a clear indication of progress. However it also raises the question: Is *any* representation better than *no* representation?

The implication of *any* representation could be misrepresentation, similar to the fashion of painting the queer populace as lurid and jazzy so that they would stand out as the *'other'*. Rishi Kapoor and Abhishek Bachchan's characters could not be identified as queer if it wasn't for their flamboyance since they never explicitly come out as gay. Therefore colourful clothing, delicate personalities and a 'feminine' rather than a 'masculine' approach to the way they behave are used as indicators to bring out their *queerness*, and hence promote stereotypes. Fortunately, less multimedia pieces are aiming to fit the LGBTQ+ community into a single, identifiable jar and are giving such characters a scope to explore their own diverse and beautiful personalities. Karan Mehra is just one such example. He does not blend in with all other homosexual characters in *Made In Heaven* solely due to his membership to the queer community, because he now has the freedom to be an individual with a unique constitution of his own.

However, we need to advance further from the *postgay phase* to a stage where every individual is recognised without any preconceived notions or biases and is represented solely for what they are and not tainted by any assumptions or prejudices. Hopefully we will be able to overcome all the difficulties faced while representing the queer community in popular culture by the next phase. It would then be a time for jubilation since our social contract would then be transformed into a *non heterosexual contract*, where one's citizenship to society would not be governed by discrepancies in gender, race, caste or sexual orientation. It would be the utopia we all wish to achieve. And we'll get there only when we move beyond 'hetero.'

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Photography by: Gayathri Pushpanadh

# 11. QUEER HO NAA HO: THE HINDI GAY FILM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

SAHIR AVIK D'SOUZA
EDITED BY: ISHIKA CHATTERJEE

*In the last two decades, mainstream Hindi films have evolved significantly from the traditional family-values pictures of the 1990s and before. When specifically looking at LGBTQ+ representation, we find, in the twenty-first century, a growing acceptance in the first ten years or so, followed by an understanding and recognition of queer identity in the next ten years. In the years since, however, mainstream Hindi films have made "an effort to understand the cultural phenomena of the queer movement" (Joseph, 2016). This paper will examine this evolution of queer themes in Hindi films of the twenty-first century. I will discuss the films mentioned above in greater detail to understand how Hindi queer cinema, still in its nascent stages, is grappling and coming to terms with being gay in India.*

In the early 1990s, film critic B. Ruby Rich coined the term "New Queer Cinema" to describe a movement amongst independent filmmakers in North America to make films foregrounding queer people and identities. Rich first noticed (and revelled in) this new development in 1991 at the Toronto International Film Festival; she wrote in *Sight & Sound* the next year that "[m]usic was in the air in Toronto in September 1991" (Rich, 1992). Films such as Christopher Much's *The Hours and Times*, Todd Haynes's *Poison* and Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*, amongst others in those years, helped to define and give structure to this movement. Rich explains how excited she was that it was the major films, the ones that drew attention at the festival that year, that were about "the lives and ideas and deaths and challenges" of what she calls "my communities" (Xtra, 2013).

Since then, of course, queer cinema in North America has only grown and expanded in the twenty-first century. In India, on the other hand, it would not be incorrect to describe queer cinema as still in its nascent stages. Our films, especially mainstream Hindi films or Bollywood, are largely centred on heterosexual romance. Queer themes may find the occasional peripheral or tangential reference, but it is only rarely the focus of the film.

In pre-2000s Bollywood, queer themes were almost strictly taboo. When Deepa Mehta made *Fire* in 1996, its release was met with widespread protests and violence across the country by conservative groups. As India entered the new millennium, filmmakers continued to be hesitant in filming the stories of queer people. However, in the twenty-first century, India as a society is slowly coming to terms with the gay lived experience, which is therefore gradually finding expression within the erstwhile inflexibly heteronormative confines of the mainstream Hindi film.

Of course, we cannot claim to be even near the invention and liberation of the New Queer Cinema and after. But we are indeed seeing, in this first quarter of the century, a new lens for the Hindi queer film. This paper examines the evolution of gay representation in Hindi films in the last twenty-odd years. Most mainstream Hindi films that feature queer themes (and there are, of course, only a small number of these) talk about the gay/lesbian experience: we are still a ways to go before the accurate representation of the transgender experience can be achieved – although *hijras* or eunuchs have long been in negligible parts in our films.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Hindi films paid lip service to queer themes. Occasional films like *Girlfriend* (2004), which tried to portray lesbian relationships in a then-revolutionary way, depicting lovemaking by having two near-naked women roll about in bed with their arms and legs intertwined, yet never actually kissing or making any further sexual contact, or *My Brother Nikhil* (2005), which was about the life of a swimming champion who is gay and plagued by AIDS, receiving support solely from his sister and boyfriend, did make attempts to foreground gay stories. While *My*

*Brother Nikhil* continues to be referenced in conversations around queer cinema in India, *Girlfriend*, in the words of film critic Shubhra Gupta (2016), "is so crass that you cringe at its memory" (p. 143).

By and large, however, the films of the 2000s did not attempt to understand or render gay lives in any significant way. Gupta (2016) writes, "The standard stock character bunged into the plot simply to be laughed at is the 'girlish' man, who minces across the room, dangling a limp wrist, squeaking instead of speaking" (p. 141). We see this in Nikhil Advani's *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003), in which a French architect named Jean de Bon is invited to design the wedding in the film's climax. Jean de Bon is flamboyant and 'girlish', drawing looks of comical disgust from the resolutely heterosexual men around him. The film also features a running gag where the lead men, both straight, are chanced upon by the housekeeper in homo-suggestive positions, such as embracing each other while exclaiming "I love you!", or lying in bed together with their shirts unbuttoned.

It is perhaps too much to expect a Hindi film in 2003, fresh out of a decade of heteronormative family-values pictures, to treat gay ideas as anything more than stereotypes for comic relief. But as the decade progressed, mainstream Hindi filmmakers started experimenting with introducing gay themes in their films. In 2007, two films with ensemble casts explored gay experiences as sub-plots. Reema Kagti's *Honeymoon Travels Pvt Ltd* features a group of recently married couples on a joint honeymoon trip. It turns out that Madhu and Bunty, a young urban couple, have only married out of convenience. Madhu is using Bunty as a rebound to get over a bad break-up. Bunty, on the other hand, comes out as gay: he married to appease his family. Another couple, Pinky and Vicky, face problems when Vicky finds that he is attracted to Bunty. However, he does not act on his feelings and remains in his marriage, possibly hinting at his bisexuality.

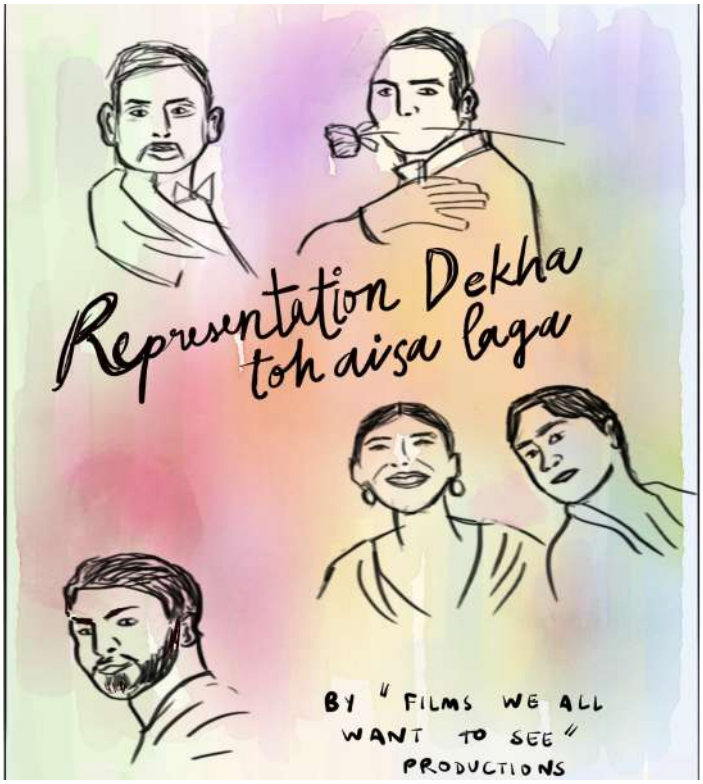
Another film released that same year, Anurag Basu's *Life in a Metro*, was a similarly structured multi-strand narrative. The story of several couples in and out of love in rainy Mumbai, the film featured a tangential gay theme. Shruti, a single young woman, starts dating a radio jockey named Rishi K. However, Shruti soon finds out that Rishi K is a closet homosexual who is using his performative relationship with her to conceal from his parents his romantic attachment to a man. Shruti is heartbroken. However, the film accords the peripheral character of Rishi K some dignity when Shruti castigates him not for being gay, but for deceiving her. She tells him that being gay or straight is his "right", but leading someone on in the way he did is "not right".

Krupa Joseph, in an article on the *Gaysi* website, writes that these and other such films of the 2000s "are examples of how the mainstream celluloid let down queer cinema" (2016). However, this might be a slight these films don't deserve. Both *Honeymoon Travels Pvt Ltd* and *Life in a Metro* encapsulated Hindi cinema's growing understanding, albeit in small ways, of homosexuality and its various manifestations. Neither film chose to make a gay story its central focus, but both dealt with gay men[1] in more mature and thoughtful ways than, say, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*.

In 2008 there came a film whose entire plot revolved around homosexual themes, yet still managed to centre itself in the mould of the heterosexual Hindi romantic comedy. This film was Tarun Mansukhani's *Dostana*. The film featured two straight men, Kunal and Sam, who pose as a gay couple in order to be able to rent a flat. The film followed their struggle to maintain this falsehood, despite both falling in love with their beautiful landlady. For the first time, a Hindi film foregrounded a gay theme. The film was not radical enough to actually show gay love; however, it did feature an editor of a fashion magazine who is "screamingly gay … [with] designs on all males within distance" (Gupta, 2016, p. 142). Another mainstream Hindi film that placed a gay man in an important supporting role was Karan Johar's *Student of the Year* (2012), in which the college dean is gay. He covets a married man, but his love remains unrequited; while his desires are openly portrayed, the audience's heteronormative equilibrium is never disturbed, because the married man remains faithful to his wife. At this point, a decade or so into the new century, filmmakers found the only way to put forth gay themes was to coat them in pleasant heteronormativity.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, however, audiences began seeing Hindi films whose focus *was* the queer experience. Slowly, filmmakers in the mainstream chose to tell stories of gay individuals. Hansal Mehta's

1 Apart from the stray *Fire* or *Girlfriend*, gay women didn't receive much attention from mainstream Hindi films. This would change in 2019, as this paper will go on to examine.




The movie posters we all want to see.
*Rhea Vakharia*

*Aligarh* (2015) was a widely acclaimed study of a professor who was discriminated against because of his homosexuality. A *Philadelphia*-esque story of a wronged man, *Aligarh* portrayed an Indian gay man with sensitivity and earnestness. Based as it was on a true story, the film could not award its tragic protagonist a happy ending, but it was a step forward for queer representation in Hindi cinema.

The next year saw the release of Shakun Batra's *Kapoor & Sons*. This was the story of the Kapoor family, whose relationships have begun to fray and crumble. A forced reunion makes them confront their various insecurities and resentments. We learn that one of the sons, Rahul, is gay. When is mother Sunita discovers his homosexuality, she is both distraught and disgusted. Rahul's story is not the sole focus of the film, but unlike in *Life in a Metro* or *Honeymoon Travels*, it is certainly one of the film's primary elements.

In an article titled "Will mainstream Indian queer cinema move on from the coming-out saga?", Kennith Rosario (2018) writes that "the primary source of conflict in the stories of gay men remains their hidden sexuality" (The Hindu). He laments that Hindi queer cinema has not moved on to exploring other aspects of the gay life, such as North American films like *Call Me By Your Name*, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* and *The Kids Are All Right* have. But Hindi films on queer themes are so few and so infrequently made still that it is too optimistic to expect them to move beyond the so-called 'coming-out saga', primarily because they themselves, much like their protagonists, are grappling with what it means to be Indian and homosexual. Rosario concludes by writing, "Indian queer cinema is still in its infancy, and one can hope that with time, it'll grow to form its own canon that captures the defiance, fragility and robustness of queer lives" (2018, The Hindu). *Kapoor & Sons* was an example of a bravely made Hindi queer film, especially since the gay man's mother comes around eventually and he is given something of a happy ending.

Quite evidently, gay cinema in Bollywood has centred on men. Hindi films have always been steeped in patriarchy and while that is a discussion for another time, it isn't surprising that Hindi filmmakers used men as a gateway to telling gay stories. As a result, lesbians suffered and rarely turned up on the Hindi screen. This changed in 2019, when what is arguably the first mainstream lesbian romantic comedy film was released: *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*. Directed by Shelly Chopra Dhar, this film was revolutionary for several reasons. For one, it was the story of a closeted lesbian woman who is forced to come out to her family, who are then forced to come to terms with her homosexuality (she actually gets a happy ending). For another, it couched this possibly tricky story in the cheerful, funny middle-class North Indian vibe that Hindi films have thrived in; as critic Mike McCahill (2019) put it, the film is "a groundbreaker in the garb of a crowdpleaser" (The Guardian).

While Indian film critics called it "pleasant" and "safe" (Rangan, 2019), they also acknowledged the fact that it was "planted right in the middle of conventional Hindi cinema" (Rangan, 2019), which made it more widely accessible than, say, *Aligarh* or even *Kapoor & Sons*. This was its significant achievement.

Interestingly, another film released in the same year also featured a lesbian woman: *Student of the Year 2*, directed by Punit Malhotra, a sequel to the 2012 film mentioned earlier. Gul Panag plays a sports coach in the high-end school the protagonists attend and in one scene we are introduced to her girlfriend. However, this is never alluded to again (unlike the relatively meaty role the gay dean had in the previous film) and Panag's character does not even appear in another full scene. Piyasree Dasgupta (2019) writes, "the makers probably hoped

we'd wokegasm in unison" (HuffPost), but the film's utter disregard for this character is emblematic not of so-called "wokeness" but of weak tokenism.

We must now ask ourselves, as we move into the third decade of the twenty-first century, will we see Hindi films tackling gay themes with greater sensitivity and awareness? I believe the answer is yes. Despite occasional tokenism like in *Student of the Year 2*, the release of mainstream films such as *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha* and the upcoming *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* (publicised as a gay love story) seem to me to signal the birth of Bollywood's own New Queer Cinema movement. How true this will be, of course, only time will tell.

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# 12. *THE OFFICE* AND *BROOKLYN NINE-NINE:* A QUEER COMPARISON

SHANIYA KARKADA
EDITED BY: STUTI NABAZZA

*Invariably consumed by the masses, pop culture in the form of entertainment shows does not just end with the last season but, translates into patterns of thinking and behaving. Elements of virtual reality are unconsciously and seamlessly interwoven into our lived reality. Popular shows like* F.R.I.E.N.D.S, The Office, The Big Bang Theory *or* Brooklyn Nine-Nine *have amassed a burgeoning fan following, so much so that they are repetitively consumed, thereby making them timeless. The queer community, like women, and religious or ethnic minorities are poorly depicted, incessantly mocked and above all, this phobia is justified under the garb of 'humour'. This paper aims at examining such depictions in the shows* The Office *and* Brooklyn Nine-Nine *and through a comparative analysis, strives to navigate the complex contours of media consumption, stereotype reinforcement ideology propagation.*

Often seamlessly interwoven with each other, the terms 'sex' and 'gender' contradictorily have connotations that distinguish them from each other. Psychologist Robert Stoller (1968), was the first to distinguish between the terms gender and sex. According to Stoller, the word 'gender' describes how much feminine and masculine behaviour an individual displays and the word 'sex' describes the biological characteristics of a person. Mikkola (2017) gives a similar definition, "Gender denotes men and women depending on social factors such as social roles, position, behaviour and identity and sex denotes the biological characteristics of someone's body." The social construction of gender and gender performativity are vital for dissecting gender representations and cultural patterns of behaviour.

The term 'queer' denotes a history that is political and academic at once. Individuals who wanted to not be constrained by labels and be fluid or inclusive in their own stated desires or those who wanted to challenge hegemonic assumptions of sexuality described themselves as queer (Doty, 1993; Jagose, 1996). The long, arduous struggle by the queer community to secure the rights they deserve and combat the discrimination they face is evident from the timeline comprising the significant milestones that guided the course of LGBTQIA+ movement in the U.S. Consequently, queer theory emerged out of the need to theoretically locate and define the community that has been recurringly deemed to be 'unnatural' and excluded by virtue of its non-conformity to a majorly heterosexual, monogamous world. While a wide range of movies and sitcoms represent the queer community, the way the community is addressed and portrayed varies extensively.

From the very first scene, *F.R.I.E.N.D.S.* is about six straight people defining themselves against a threatening queer other and is littered with anti-gay jokes. While interviewing a male nanny, Ross aggressively asks if he's gay. Joey complains about queer women not sleeping with him. Rachel makes out with a university friend, then pities her for thinking that might indicate romantic interest. "We're straight," the friends basically yell at us at every opportunity. And disturbingly, it's the characters with gay family — Chandler and Ross — who are most disgusted by queerness.

It's incredibly cruel for Ross to freak out about Ben playing with a Barbie in front of his queer co-parents, essentially telling them that he doesn't accept their identity and doesn't want his son to be like them. Even worse is Chandler's dehumanising contempt for his queer father, which mutates into a loathing of any kind of effeminacy or gender non-conformity, in himself or anyone else. Three seasons before Chandler's father plays a speaking role, 'he' is already a punchline. In other words, the show's creators decided to construct a white, heterosexual norm and to present any divergence from that norm as threatening. Airing in 1994, *F.R.I.E.N.D.S.'s* queer representation is applauded while its homophobia

and transmisogyny is excused the socio-cultural backdrop of the time. But what is it about *The Office* that makes it a strong contradiction to *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*?

*The Office*, an American television sitcom that lasted for a span of eight years from 2005 to 2013 is a series that depicts the everyday lives of office employees in the Scranton, Pennsylvania branch of the fictional Dunder Mifflin Paper Company. Punctuated by comedic situations and embellished by amusing yet distinct characters, the show attempted to portray diversity in the work environment only as endpoints for jokes and the harsher consequences of the same are also wedded to the shows' ideas surrounding comedy.

In the third season premiere of *The Office*, Oscar Martinez comes out. Oscar is a gay character incorporated into the show as a passive recipient of all homophobic jokes, as a result of which he faces discrimination in the workplace due to his sexual orientation. In season 5, Oscar is roasted by his boss Michael by simply being called "gay", but not just this one instance but a string of situations throughout the show are aimed at ridiculing Oscar for his sexual identity. Michael functions as a caricatured image of a heteronormative boss, ignorant about workplace etiquette and the day-to-day existence of gay individuals. His constant need for validation, his immaturity and his blatant remarks on sensitive issues are components residing under the garb of his misogyny and masculinity that supposedly justify his actions. Michael's attitudes ultimately create a hostile work environment for Oscar, yet he remains ignorant about their implications. Finally, Michael gives into stereotypes surrounding gay men in the working world. He states, "gay people can be businessmen…like antique dealers or hairdressers." By default, Michael only imagines gay people occupying more effeminate positions in their professions; we can clearly observe here, how gender performativity and sexual identity intermingle to create stereotypes. Similar to Michael, Dwight, given his family background and personality type, acts as a representation of people with "regressive" notions about what being homosexual entails. Upon Michael disclosing that Oscar is gay, Dwight claims that Oscar cannot be gay because "he's not wearing women's clothes." While Michael's homophobia and offensiveness gets delivered to the audience in a subtle manner, Dwight's ideas about homosexuality are more overtly ridiculous. His notions fall into the overarching claim that all gay men are effeminate and lesbian women are masculine. Later in the episode, he claims that one of his female coworkers might also be gay, "look at Phyllis…she makes no attempt to be feminine." Dwight's interpretations of homosexuality bear evidence to the fact that he views gender performativity as the sole determinant of sexual identity.

The aforementioned is just one example of the many instances in the show that are indicative of internalized homophobia. In one episode, Michael Scott declared that he chose to be straight just like Oscar chose to be gay implying that being queer is indubitably a choice. Along with Oscar, an effeminate character named Andy Bernard is accused of being "gay", given his choice of colourful clothing, acapella singing and his inability to conceal his emotions. Gender performativity, sexual identity and sexual preferences in *The Office* are ruled out against rigid yardsticks of heteronormative behaviour; deviating from the same is a shame that calls for discrimination. *The Office* hence is a reinforcement of the mistaken stereotype of gay men "naturally" being effeminate. The show moreover, attempted to base their comedic claims on ignorance, buffoonery and outright discrimination in the hope that the audience perceives it as bizarrely ridiculous and pathetic enough to be laughed at. In addition to the "playful" othering and alienation of select groups, there are no instances of their respective co-workers or even they themselves standing up against the mockery inflicted on them.

*Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, on the other hand, is also an American sitcom depicting the everyday detective lives of the detectives in the 99th precinct of the New York City Police Department in Brooklyn. It first aired in 2013 and is an ongoing show. This show, on the other hand, is a rendition of a healthy work environment with professional yet supportive relationships, equality between both genders, and acceptance of the LQBTQIA+ community as is evident from the normalization, inclusion and support given to characters like Captain Holt, his husband Kevin and Rosa Diaz who belong to this community. No instances of discrimination, alienation, or ignorance towards the issue have been noted. Instead of making homosexuality, race, ethnicity or gender the punch line, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* made the ignorance surrounding it the joke. There is no questioning Holt's authority because of his sexual orientation, no cringe-worthy "it's okay to be gay" lesson to be learned, and no big deal made about interracial same-sex marriage. Furthermore, unlike *The Office*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* has well-rounded characters, each of whom has dominant personality traits and idiosyncrasies, and their sexuality is just an additional layer to their identity and

not emphatically central to their identity.

The precinct's captain, Captain Raymond Holt, is not only a person of colour, but he also addresses his sexuality from the very first episode, revealing that he is a happily married gay man. We learn that despite his hard work and competence, Holt was held back in his career due to politics, prejudice, sexual and racial discrimination. Now that he finally has his own command, he wants to prove himself via the success of his precinct. Unlike most stereotypical representations of "effeminate" gay men, Holt is robotic, monotonous, supremely intelligent and possesses a degree of normative "masculinity". Just like Holt, detective Rosa Diaz, is introduced as a tough, intimidating, aggressive character who in the later seasons of the show comes out as bisexual. An important point here is that never was bisexuality firmly fixated on her identity and even after she declared to be bisexual, her co-workers' attitudes towards her didn't change at all nor did her personality suddenly and drastically change. In the 10th episode of season five, Rosa Diaz came out as bisexual. By allowing Rosa explicitly to identify as bisexual, the show is taking steps towards legitimizing both bisexuality and the word bisexual itself. At the end of the episode, when the squad comes together to comfort Rosa after the complicated experience with her parents, Holt tells her,

> Diaz, you should be very proud of yourself. I know things aren't exactly where you wanna be right now, but I promise you they will improve… Every time someone steps up and says who they are, the world becomes a better, more interesting place, so thank you.

Lastly, metrosexual Charles Boyle, unlike Andy Bernard is not once accused of being "gay" or mocked for being effeminate and quirky. Americans' views toward the LGBTQIA+ community have changed substantially in recent years. The legal landscape for queer people has also shifted, including a Supreme Court decision four years ago that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. For example, 63% of Americans said in 2016 that homosexuality should be accepted by society, compared with 51% in 2006. Perhaps as a result of this growing acceptance, the number of people who identify as "Queer" in surveys is also rising. Hence, by 2013, when *BrooklynNine-Nine*'s first season aired, the number of individuals who identified themselves as "Queer" across different states in the U.S. rose sharply on account of bills and laws passed in favour of the community by legalizing

Captain Holt and Rosa, characters from Brooklyn Nine Nine, accurately represent the community on television.
*Rakshita Deshmukh*

same-sex marriages and the gradually dwindling stigma associated with the community. Prior to that, roughly in the early 2000s, we observe movements and protests being carried out in certain regions without really creating a profound impact on the majorly apathetic country entrenched in discrimination and unacceptance. This is perhaps why the nasty, discriminatory humour depicted in *The Office* given its commencement in 2006 wasn't protested against. Additionally, the two shows contrast on the basis of the type of comedy they sought to present to the audience. While *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* was established on healthy comedy, acceptance of people from all strata of society and mutual respect, *The Office*, sought to portray ignorance and misconduct as a form of ridicule. The genre of comedy and an upsurge in queer audiences are dual factors contributing to the contrast between these two shows.

The collective nostalgia over *F.R.I.E.N.D.S.* is still powerful enough to coax Netflix into paying $118 million for streaming rights; consequently, it still influences cultural attitudes about queer genders and sexualities. Similarly, shows like *The Office*, given its popularity continue to perpetuate homophobia. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*

isn't a perfect show; it has transformed the American cop life into a goofy series of crime-solving while glossing over issues like police brutality. However, it doesn't run the risk of bigotry and appropriation as it's a diverse show which stands out for normalizing and accepting a community that has time and again been marginalized in reality and on the television. The careful engineering of a variety of issues including women in the workplace, sexual harassment, feminism, supportive friendships in the workplace devoid of competitiveness and consensual humour make it wholesome. While shows in the past have failed to abide by ethical and moral values in pursuit of appealing to the audience, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* has created equilibrium between the two.

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# 13. QUEER ONLINE

PALLAVI DWIVEDI
EDITED BY: VANSHIKA JAIN

*This article attempts to examine and discuss the phenomenon of young Indian LGBT people utilizing digital social media platforms as a way to create safe spaces for free expression of their gender and sexuality since such expression in real life could be dangerous for them. The internet functions as both a valuable source of information and a platform for socialization. Thus, the queer community have built their own online subcultures, that act as spaces that provide the acceptance that is unavailable to them offline. The virtual world can be a space that offers help, understanding, and a sense of community and it can also be a facilitator of endless hate and bullying.*

The inception of the Internet was a new and exciting development for the world at the time. Never in humanity's wildest dreams could we have predicted how much of a fixture it would become in our lives and our societies. Up until a few years ago, 'offline:' in real life, and 'online:' the virtual world, were distinct parts of society. Today, these parts of the human experience are slowly melding into one.

India's internet users are projected to exceed half a billion people by the end of 2019 (PTI, 2019) With the advent of Jio in India, widespread cheap access to Internet services has skyrocketed (Mathur, 2019). Young people are the first takers of social media, with sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter being wildly popular amongst these newly web-empowered Indians. Not only is internet access cheaper, more widespread and more highspeed, but the devices we use to access them have become much cheaper. The impassable paywall has been knocked down and the floodgates of the Indian Internet have been thrown open.

What does this mean for queer Indian youth? Well, for starters, we have an outlet for expression that was previously within the reach of only those who are from the upper-middle class, metropolitan cities. Young people from all over India now have unfettered access to nearly all the platforms and information the digital world has to offer. This access has enabled people to utilize digital social media platforms as a way to create safe spaces for free expression of their gender and sexuality. Such expression in real life can be dangerous for LGBTQ+ individuals. Queer folk, particularly trans women, experience violence and discrimination when they are out as themselves (offline) in the real world. They face police violence, rejection, and aggression from family and colleagues, and can even lose their livelihoods over their sexual orientation (Chawngthu, 2018).

The scrapping of Section 377, while a step in the right direction, cannot possibly erase decades of stigma and discrimination with immediate effect. The historic overturning of 377 simply removed the law that makes queer sex illegal. It does not secure other civil liberties for queer people. Same-sex marriage safeguards against homophobic discrimination at work and support systems for disowned queer folk are still basic rights that we do not have. The lived realities of most queer people, therefore, are that we are unable to express ourselves freely in real life: we are well aware that presenting the way they would like to (be it in terms of gender and/or orientation) would invite aggression and violence. Thus, the queer community has built its online subcultures, that act as spaces that provide the acceptance that is unavailable to them offline.

An interesting study that looks into the experiences of LGBT teens is the GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) Out Online, which explores how new connections online have offered new avenues for bullying and harassment, as well as new possibilities for supportive resources that promote positive well-being. According to their survey, while a lot of teens report being on the receiving end of bullying online, they still turn to the internet for resources that helped them access information about health and sexuality. This is the kind of information that is unavailable to them in their schools, homes, and communities.

The report also talks about how online spaces can be

a way for LGBT youth to gain vital social support, especially when they don't have meaningful relations with other similar people in their offline life. Queer teens are taking to the internet specifically to seek out LGBT friendships. Not only did they report having more friends online, but they also felt that their online friends were more supportive than non-LGBT friends offline.

Internet Dinosaur has finally won the race, the queer community has a voice online.
*Rakshita Deshmukh*

So, what role does social media fulfill in the lives of these young, exploring queer people? The very functions of social media are (whether the user is queer or not) primarily twofold: one, to present a version of oneself to society at large, and two, to create and maintain connections with our peers and loved ones. Additionally, social media is a platform for like-minded people to discuss and engage with each other on topics they care about. These functions that online spaces offer to all users can be the difference between life and death for a young queer person. Access to these platforms is a necessity for LGBTQ+ youth who may be isolated in their non-virtual life, as their found families and communities are made in the offline reality rather than online.

These online spaces manifest in many different ways and on multiple platforms. Instagram serves as a direct window into the lives of openly LGBTQ+ celebrities, which represents the likes of which we could never see in real life. Seeing transgender people share their transition stories can provide a great deal of comfort and solidarity for a young teen who is currently struggling with gender dysphoria. Simply being able to see other LGBTQ+ individuals online, having that sense of visibility and relatability, is a powerful force in the lives of young queer people. For example, organizations like @nazariyalgbt which is a "queer youth alliance and social justice advocacy group" and blogs like @gaysifamily which describes itself as "a safe space for desi queers to share personal stories." Queer Azadi Mumbai, which organizes the Mumbai Pride March every year, organizes their events on Facebook and raises money for the March on their Facebook page itself.

Queer-specific news organizations tend to use their social media handles as their primary engagement platforms. Outlets like *Them*, *Out Magazine*, *GayTimes* interact with their readers on Instagram and Twitter. These organizations are vital for questioning or information-parched teens who are just beginning to explore their sexual orientation. The internet can truly be the most helpful thing for a person who wants to know more about their sexuality: it has a wealth of knowledge that new queers use to educate themselves. Priya Gangwani, a regular contributor to *Gaysi*, says "I was 26 and had no vocabulary for gender and sexual minorities. I did not know any LGBTQ people, and the only queer term I was familiar with was homosexual, thanks to Virginia Woolf." The internet can truly change and save the lives of young queer people (Ramadurai, 2017).

Many may dismiss online activism as armchair activism, but for desi queers, online activism is often the only form of activism they can take part in to defend their rights without being forced to out themselves. The multiple petitions surrounding 377 all arose from online anger at real-life circumstances. This too is a benefit of queer access to the internet. The GLSEN Out Online report reflects this as well: the internet has enabled marginalized groups, like LGBT teens, to have more civic participation, as it provides opportunities for engagement that are otherwise unavailable in person.

Fandom communities, too, tend to harbor an LGBT safe space in them. This is true especially of media that is queer-adjacent or has popular LGBT icons in them. Entire communities are formed around being fans of queer celebrities, queer authors/books, and queer musicians. Lady Gaga, herself a bisexual woman and queer icon, has a significant number of queer followers who engage with each other on platforms like Twitter to rave about her music and discuss their other interests.

Social media, for queer youth, is a double-edged sword. While it can be a space that offers help, understanding, and a sense of community, it can also be a facilitator of endless hate and bullying. Queer people, who are exceptionally vulnerable to bullying both offline and online, have to deal with the repercussions of the anonymity that the internet offers to all kinds of trolls. This anonymity is both shield and shrapnel for this community. On one hand, being anonymous allows them to be "out" without actually needing to be out in a way that has economic or security repercussions for them in their offline life. On the other hand, trolling and homophobia is rampant on the internet, with the guise of anonymity enabling bullies to freely harass anyone without significant consequences (other than getting their account suspended, which can easily be fixed by just making multiple other accounts.)

Then there is the issue of censorship by these very sites. It is imperative to remember that at the end of the day, all these platforms are companies motivated by profit, and their revenue is usually made on an advertising model. To run ads on content that the advertisers deem ad-friendly, queer voices are often stifled. YouTube has come under fire for demonetizing videos that have words like “transgender” in the title or tags. There have also been several well-documented incidents of YouTube running anti-gay ads on videos by LBGT+ creators (Alexander, 2018). Instagram has been accused of shadow banning accounts that use the #gay and #lesbian in their posts, falsely marking all such posts as pornography, which then reduces engagement on those posts (Erlick, 2018). Rainbow capitalism (where a brand claims to vocally support sexual minorities in a way that helps them profit off of the community) is everywhere and is unavoidable.

For young Indian queers, the internet revolution is quite literally that: a revolution. We may not be able to be out in our daily life due to the lack of acceptance, but online, we can be who we truly want to be. That is the most freeing thing the internet has done for us. The threat of harassment might hang over our heads, but it is better than living life entirely closeted.

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# 14. SHIPPING: IS THE QUEER COMMUNITY ON BOARD?

MANSI MANDHANI & SIMONE LOBO
EDITED BY: ISHIKA CHATTERJEE

*The aim of this article is to understand and critique 'shipping' in fan culture. Fanfiction was meant as a way for the queer community to fill the chasm of queer representation in the media. However, fanfiction, is more often than, not produced and consumed by cis, teenage girls, who fetishise queer relationships. Thus, this article explores the need for fanfiction and the purpose it serves. It critiques portrayal of queer relationships, or lack thereof, in the media. It analyses the circumstances that lead to queer writers creating their own medium to represent themselves in media. It aims to understand the importance of queer creators finding freedom to create their own narrative. It also critiques the perception of fanfiction in the literary world, and its links to misogyny. It also analyses the real-life consequences of this fetishisation on real queer relationships and pop culture icons. Thus, the article weighs the importance of fanfiction in the lives of different demographics and how it affects the community it represents, and the responsibility of good representation*

As of now, if you were to Google 'Bucky Barnes and Steve Rogers', two characters in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the top searches will be of a community of people who have dedicated their time and effort, and invested high amounts of emotional stakes in a fictional romantic relationship. These searches will reveal the presence of millions of works of art and literature dedicated to the dynamics of this fictional relationship. Fictional in the sense that canonically it does not even exist in the media. These characters are not canonically queer, in fact, they have been denied to be queer by the creators of said characters. In spite of this, people around the world united to express that they interpreted these characters as queer and created the media they wanted to consume. This phenomenon has affected the queer world and community building; in this paper we will be exploring the effects of this movement.

Fan culture, as it exists on the internet, provides a space where queer consumers can collectively respond to heteronormative media, interpret interspersing queer stories in the gaps, and create art on the same. This involves activities like shipping and slashing: writing non-involved (often heteronormative) characters into (often queer) relationships (like Draco and Harry into Drarry) (Barker & Scheele, 2016).

This is not a new phenomenon: technically, fanfiction is age old - before copyright laws existed, it was common for authors to use established characters and plots for their works; a lot of Shakespeare's plays were based on relatively recent fiction by other authors, for instance. Jane Austen's popularity caused the creation of Janeites, her fan club, and in 1913 the novel *Old Friends and New Fancies: An Imaginary Sequel to the novels of Jane Austen* was published by a fan. (Morrison, 2012). Slash fiction as such, (called so because of its male-slash-male nature) officially and popularly dates as far back as the 1960s, with the emergence of *Star Trek* Fanzines and of fans' appreciation for Kirk/Spock (who have also been lovingly called Space Husbands). The internet has provided fanfiction, and slash fanfiction in particular, with a powerful medium to grow in scale, through platforms like Archive of Our Own and Tumblr that support huge fan communities and have low barriers to expression and participation.

This fan culture arguably gives queer voices a space for representation and resistance in media that has overwhelmingly been dominated by those culturally in power. Where romantic comedies have been profoundly based on the idea of a male and a female finding "the one" in each other and thus getting Happy Endings in ideas of lifelong monogamy, queer narratives get pitiful visibility in a sea of straight stories. Even when the LGBTQ community has gotten representation in media, it has either been replete with harmful stereotypes, or it has been through side characters far away from the main

Fans ship characters together regardless of their sexual orientations.
*Rakshita Deshmukh*

plot, or it has been characterized by the now heavily criticized "bury your gays" trope - where gay characters are killed off to further the plot far more often than straight characters. For example, in Season 3 of the TV Show *The 100*, shortly after the characters Lexa and Clarke make love for the first time, Lexa dies tragically because of a stray bullet meant for Clarke. When this was aired, a huge public outcry brought attention to a long history of the killing off of LGBTQ+ characters in fiction. These characters have died because of reasons ranging from shock value to protagonists' character development to the non - profitability of having homosexuality for more than a few temporary segments. The oh, so tragic death of a homosexual character provides a classic plot device that seems to be safe for large audiences. In the face of representation that is pitiful in the first place, what becomes painfully clear is that gay characters are more expendable than straight ones. Another pattern that shows its face is that characters' queerness, when it exists, exists for a purpose - casually queer characters whose queerness is not tragically centric to the plot seem to be a rare occurrence. Paralelly, fan fiction seems to have an abundance of casually queer characters whose stories are way past coming out and gayngst, thus arguably filling gaps that need to be filled in profit-oriented heteronormative narratives.

Therefore, in this context of this meagre representation, fan culture provides a powerful alternative space for stories where, say, Hermione Granger can have a crush on Luna Lovegood, or where Elsa can have a girlfriend, or where John Watson and Sherlock Holmes can fall in love in a Coffee Shop - rom-com style. Beloved characters and settings are placed in worlds where heterosexuality is not the norm; several works portray gender-bent or cross-dressing characters and polyamorous or open relationships casually in well-developed stories, portraying things that are barely considered acceptable as normal and encouraged.

The culture industry, the almost factory-like entity which mass produces media and culture, seems to recognize this. It has been seen to use queer elements almost as Unique Selling Points, centering entire plotlines and character arcs around the characters' sexuality. The industry has also been directing content to a specific group of (likely privileged) people, like in the case of boy band marketing teams targeting white teenage girls, or *Four More Shots* Please (a show branded as feminist, featuring four girls in Mumbai, one of whom is bisexual, and whose bisexuality is emphasized at every point possible) targeting the urban 'woke' elite in India. In these cases, the Culture Industry capitalizes on its LGBTQIA+ representation and on the fan interaction that is expected to come with it. In this context, the concept of "fan-service" has also developed in k-pop and J-pop (elaborated on further below in this article), where agencies instruct their idols to behave in an overly affectionate manner to their team members of the same sex, in order to appeal to shippers. Not all of this affection is manufactured, but it can't be denied that traction gained by the LGBTQ fandom is used to fuel the self-interest of agencies.

In the context of capitalizing on representation and queer fan interaction, tokenistic, bare boned representation of the LGBTQ community also shows its face - like it arguably did when J K Rowling declared Dumbledore to be gay to her Twitter fans, but did not actually include

his queerness in the main, canon narrative: accurately summed up in a tweet that says "*J. K. Rowling Confirms Some Characters in Her Books and Movies Are Gay Everywhere Except in the Books or the Movies*". This representation actually caused a big amount of fan backlash, with many calling the author out on performative activism.

Along these lines, there also has been a growing criticism of "queerbaiting", a phenomenon where producers of TV shows incorporate slash themes and show homosexual subtext to expand their audiences and invite slash fans and queer folk, while at the same time refraining from showing openly queer characters so as to not alienate viewers who would oppose them, thus keeping queer fans interested while sticking to the status quo. For example, for the TV Show *Supernatural*, fans maintain that the show has constantly shown the relationship between characters Dean and Castiel to be full of slash tropes and subtextual tension, them having met when Castiel saves Dean from hell (arguably an endearing meet-cute) but it has no intention of making the characters openly be in a relationship. While the show is full of suggestions and jokes about queerness, the creaters have banned mentions of homosexual subtexts at panels and comic cons at times, and have also derided female fans for wanting the ship to exist. (Collier, 2015).

Even so, shipping and fan culture serve as a powerful means of creating a community for the LGBTQIA+ folk, which is especially helpful for the section of the community that only finds open expression of sexual identity on the internet. There is a high level of engagement, with a lot of queer fans finding friends and support through fanfiction communities. This fan culture also provides a platform where almost anyone on the internet can put up their artwork or writing, creating a space not governed by barriers of profit creation or the like.

Yet, fan culture and shipping are controversial subjects: while some argue that they encourage engagement with media and not just passive consumption of it, others look down at it as "low culture", devaluing all fanworks in spite of the quality they may have.

Why is there so much criticism surrounding queer fan culture? One explanation is that its queer nature itself invites criticism: queer narratives are subject to harsher judgement than established normative straight ones. Another one is that because fan artwork or writing is not officially recognized or curated work, it tends to be of sub-par quality most of the times. Another is that it is limited to privileged cultures and depicts largely white people that conform to popular beauty standards. Yet another line of criticism stems when one considers the intensity and fanaticism of fan culture, especially in the case of fan fiction involving real people. Not to stray too far from the familiar, even One Direction (Larry) and Fifth Harmony (Carmen) had such rabid shippers that it really affected the members' friendship in real life and made them super uncomfortable. Even after Louis from One Direction had a partner and a kid, people are shoving conspiracy theories about Larry (Louis/Harry) down his throat, and have even implied that the baby is fake and a cover-up for his secret relationship with Harry. The lengths to which fans go to find representation has been criticized, where for instance shippers also make montage videos, where they use every little, normal interaction between two people, and play them with romantic music and slow-motion to make something out that isn't there at all.

A major line of criticism also develops when considering who the art form is catered to. A majority of these works are created by and for straight, cis teenage girls. Thus this representation of queer relationships is painted by their perception of queer relationships. The fetishization of queer women has been a topic of wide discussion. However, the rise of fanfiction and specifically gay fanfiction has created a medium for fetishization of gay men. Fetishization is usually defined as the sexual fascination with things that are not inherently sexual. However, in this case fetishization is not just limited to sexual fascination. It could also be a fascination with the romantic and emotional aspect of the relationship.

If we were to reflect on these works, we can analyse the clear problematic aspects of these works. The gay relationships in these works are always written to mimic heterosexual relationships. The dynamics between the two characters are created to fulfil the heteronormative idea of one person, the man being more dominant than the other, the woman. This leads to one of the characters always being feminized. This is almost never the canon characteristic of the character and is written in this way only to fit the heteronormative expectations of a relationship. It perpetuates stereotypes of gay men. The ideal gay relationship in the eyes of these writers is to mimic their idea of what the dynamic of a relationship is, which is heteronormative.

The reason for this is, those writing and consuming this

content are straight women who project themselves on these characters. A study of women consuming gay porn showed that women consuming this did so because the women felt safer and less violated in consuming porn they didn't feel directly affected by. (Neville, 2015) According to a psychological study, young girls are more attracted to men who they do not perceive to be a threat. From this ,we can hypothesise that this affinity for gay relationships and projecting oneself on these relationships stems from a young girl's need for consuming romance but in a safe way. Thus, it is incorrect to shame these young girls for these preferences as they are creating an outlet to express their sexuality. However, this comes at a cost of gay couples being represented in a way that is harmful to the community.

Take for example real-life cases of Youtuber Dan Howell. He and partner Phil Lester were shipped by their fans. Their sexuality was constantly speculated about and they were tirelessly harassed by fans about the status of their relationship. The fanfiction written about them was objectifying and dehumanising. These were not characters created in a piece of media. These were real queer people with real queer struggles. Fetishising their relationship trivialised their genuine issues with identity that affect queer people everywhere. When both Howell and Phil came out in their respective YouTube videos in 2019 they stated that the hyper fixation on their sexuality and relationship, however well-intentioned it may have seemed, to them, it seemed like pressure to label themselves and preconceived notions of the status of their relationship made them insecure in their relationship. We see that shipping may start as harmless but could proceed to affect real queer people. A lot of these shippers claimed to be allies and said they only wished for them to come out and were only creating a safe space for them. With the creation of a space so detached from reality, one could lose sight of the real-life struggles queer people have to face.

These fans claim to be allies but, in some cases, it's clear that their allyship is limited only to the couple they have so ardently shipped. This can be observed in the case of the BBC TV show, *Sherlock*. The TV series had gained a strong following where a majority shipped the main characters, Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. However, when these characters did not show any affection for each other beyond platonic, the fans labelled the creators of the show homophobic. However, the co-creator of the show Mark Gattis is a gay man himself. Clearly, this movement of the fans is not for a moral or social reason but rather to weaponize a movement for their personal gain of seeing their ship being canon.

But this idealization of gay relationships can also be chalked up to exoticisation. The popularity of K-Pop bands in today's pop music landscape has been likened to mania. K-pop is South Korean popular music. It is an extremely commercialised industry (no more so than American pop music), however South Korea as a country has a form of celebrity culture which distinguishes it from American Pop music. The artists are trained to fit into an image created by a record label. Groups are much more marketable than solo acts. Thus, these young artists are made to form 'boybands'. And they are called 'idols' - a form of being a celebrity that celebrates them being not only an artist but also a symbol held in reverence. Their global popularity leads fans to fetishise and alienate them as they would any other product. K-pop bands like BTS and EXO have a large female following. Their fans are spread across the globe. Their non- Asian fans are known to fetishise their culture by being "koreaboos". These rely on practising stereotypes of Korean culture. These fans exoticise Korean culture and reduce them to western ideas of Asian culture, namely 'being cute and fascinating' .They idealise these Asian men. These may seem harmless and could be rationalised as normal teen obsession with celebrities, however these desirable traits are linked to stereotypes of their culture. This could lead to an intersection of race and sexuality wherein Asian gay men are exoticised and fetishised. However, this could be due to the way they are marketed too. As record label executives need to market the sexuality of these young men around the globe, they create an expression of masculinity easily palatable to young girls. Sun Jung highlights a discussion of hybridity - she argues that hybridization of Korean traditional masculinities and global masculinities allows various sets of "regional viewers" to embrace such representations. When looking at idol boy bands, she calls this result "manufactured versatile masculinity," which simultaneously "Asianizes" band members and diminishes their "Korean-ness" while also actively retaining a kind of national specificity. It seems paradoxical, but it is this constant construction, reconstruction, and flexibility of K-Pop culture that Jung says allows it to traverse various globalized and localized contexts (Leung,2012).

This detached sense of autonomy and identity along with an accessible brand of masculinity, makes it easy to speculate about their sexuality. They could be perceived as their ideal man or just as easily be considered as an ideal

partner for their other idols! Capitalism and orientalism put these young artists in a position where they can be used as blank slates of idealisation and projection and can be consumed just like any other manufactured piece of art in media. And as stated earlier, young girls project themselves on these relationships but now with racist undertones. So fanfiction that fetishises gay men, now intersects with Orientalism.

In this way we can infer, the practice of shipping and creating fanfiction and fan-art can have harmful real-life repercussions. While it could start as a harmless way for young women to contribute to the media they enjoy, it could lead to actions with grave implications. It is necessary for young straight cis women to understand that only shipping does not warrant as activism. Those creating fanfiction must engage more with the LGBTQIA+ community. This is because the standards of representation of minorities should apply to all forms of media. The representation of minorities is already limited. No matter how well-intentioned, perpetuating stereotypes causes damage to the real-life perception of those a part of the community.

Fanfiction should be critiqued, but it deserves to be critiqued as an art form. The criticism for fanfiction in the mainstream very often stems from misogyny, due to female writers writing for female consumers, or worse even, homophobia. Thus, fanfiction should be critiqued for its quality. Fanfiction should be held responsible for healthy representation like any other respectable form of media.

The criticism for fanfiction as a medium, however, requires more nuance. Fanfiction being used an umbrella term for indulgent wish - fulfilment, is unfair to artists who essentially share their labour for free on a public platform. They gain a platform to showcase their talent and also to get (often constructive) feedback and support for this talent, not to mention the boost they get in their careers. This includes LGBTQIA+ writers too. Fan literature shouldn't be dismissed without thought as irrelevant, and biases towards these forms of work should be questioned and reflected upon.

Generalising and deriding an entire medium is unfair to creators whose voices have been marginalised. Queer voices deserve to be heard. This does not negate the fact that young, straight, cis women writers deserve to be heard too. They regurgitate ideas of queer relationships they have absorbed from existing media. They create these works because the stories that resonate with them are not created. So even though they should be held accountable for lack lustre representation, the onus of representing queer relationships and its complexities should not rest on their shoulders. Instead queer writers and artists should be encouraged. Their perspectives should be highlighted.

Good representation could solve issues entirely. Say, if a gay couple in mainstream media gets a RomCom style meet-cute in a way that is respectful of the characters' identities, representation would be healthier, and fan fiction will have a more recognized ground to stand on. This is gaining motion now and progress has been made with good, original content for the LGBT+ community like *Love, Simon*, *Euphoria* and *Atypical* releasing in mainstream media. In these, their queerness is normalised, and not exploited to drive the plot forward. Fan fiction, and fan culture in general, has arguably played a role in this, since its existence itself declares a demand for more representation.

While problematic at times, fan culture is a growing and dynamic entity, running parallel to the media it is based on, and it needs to be recognized and reflected upon as such.

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# 15. HOMOSEXUALITY IN ANCIENT INDIA

RACHEL CHITTILAPILLY
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*Ancient India has been used and misused by all kinds of people for all kinds of purposes and it is certainly easy to do so owing to the lack of clarity in dating and sources and the intermingling of religion and mythology. This article aims to understand the societal norms and laws regarding homosexuality through a reading of the socio-political texts that existed in the society between the second millenia BCE to the sixth century CE.*

**Introduction**

There exists a close relationship between history and identity. The past has, therefore, always been a contested terrain. In contemporary India, the ancient past is invoked in different ways in the political discourse, including propaganda with chauvinistic or divisive agendas. Therefore, in a world of post-truth and intolerance, where ever-present is the danger of deliberate manipulation and distortion of the past, it becomes all the more necessary to undertake an impartial examination of the information available to us without giving in to sentiments and emotional frenzies. That being said, the past, like the present, is daedal and there are a plethora of ways to look at history. There can never be an exclusive, fixed, absolute history. The task of any individual attempting to delve into history is to reach as close as possible to an exact picture of what happened in the past. A task which when attached to ancient India is herculean owing to the lack of sufficient archaeological sources and exact dating of literary sources.

On visiting India a thousand years ago, the Islamic scholar Al Beruni pointed out that while the philosophy acknowledges the essential equality of all human beings as containers of the divine spark, society establishes itself through a rigid caste hierarchy, with caste—that is determined by birth— defining one's social status. While the philosophy of the land accepts the boundless possibilities within the universe, society binds every man and woman with duties as it transforms itself into a rigid patriarchal construct.[1]

**Time, Place and other Modern Boundaries**

This paper seeks to understand the society of ancient India which is quite different from the ethos and the culture of modern-day India. Before delving into a reading and understanding of homosexuality in ancient times, the geographical boundaries of the land, as well as the period that this study associates itself with, must be clarified. Only then is an impartial and unambiguous reading possible.

The term 'ancient India' does not allude to the same geographical boundaries as present-day or post-Independence India does. Ancient sources refer to the land of India without any of the distinctions that exist in modern times. For Megasthenes, the Greek historian, who visited the court of Chandragupta Maurya in the 4th century BCE, 'India' meant the entire subcontinent (consisting mainly of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). This paper will, therefore, use the term 'India' or 'ancient India' to mean the Indian subcontinent as was understood by those that wrote the texts which will be referred to in the paper to maintain the integrity of the texts and the research.

The period can be understood as pertaining to olden times, considering the usage of the term 'ancient India'. However, it is essential to clarify time in terms of the modern dating system. The ancient period is considered as that stretching from the earliest times (here about second millennium BCE) to the 6th century CE. It must also be mentioned here that most of the texts do not have an exact date and the period of writing may span across years.

1 Flood, G. D. (2009). *An Introduction to Hinduism*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India.

**Definition and Understanding of the Term 'Homosexuality'**

The aim is to understand 'homosexuality' in the ancient Indian subcontinent. The word homosexual means as 'of the same sex, being a hybrid of the Greek prefix homo- meaning 'same' and Latin root meaning 'sex'.[2] Homosexuality is a sexual orientation characterized by sexual attraction or romantic love for people who are identified as being of the same sex. The term 'homosexuality' in this paper is used to describe same-sex attraction that is sexual. It must be understood that the terms 'homosexual' or 'homosexuality' do not refer to exclusive relationships or homosexual desires. This research paper does not use the term 'homosexual' to mean that the individual was sexually inclined only to people of the same sex or that they persisted only in same-sex relations. The author does not attempt to study the entire spectrum of identities and colors in the rainbow as it would be beyond the scope. The author has hence consciously avoided the use of the term 'queer' owing to the sheer broadness of the term.

**Societal Norms**

Ancient Indian society emphasised on the attainment of *moksha* (salvation/redemption). Marriage even in ancient India was considered sacred and a means to attain *moksha*. Marriage brought about an acceptable compromise between the twin goals of procreation (for *dharma*) and renunciation (for *moksha*). Homosexual unions, however, as per the ancient Indian social understanding, brought about two ritually polluting factors: sterility and lust.[3] Research shows that even when love between men or between women was not trivialized, viewed as inferior to love between men and women, or ignored (and it often was treated in all these ways), even when it was romanticized and to some degree encouraged, society rarely provided institutions that allowed it to be chosen and lived out as primary, in refusal of marriage.[4] A study suggests that at most times and places in pre-nineteenth-century India, love and relations between women and between men have faced disapproval.

**Laws regarding Homosexuality in Ancient India**

After major work by historians and LGBTQIA activists, it is now widely accepted by the people that homosexuality is not a 'Western' import as it was previously claimed. Those asserting themselves as staunch upholders and

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protectors of Indian tradition and *sanskaar* have often in the past declared that the idea and practice of same-sex love and relations were brought in by 'foreigners' - Muslim invaders, European conquerors or American capitalists. The evidence above clearly shows that this is untrue. The exact opposite of the argument claims that the disapproval of homosexuality and the laws criminalising or penalising homosexuality is a colonial imposition and the result of 'Victorian prudishness'. An understanding of the legal frameworks of post-independence India does show that the laws regarding homosexual acts are borrowed from British laws which make the argument that these laws are purely a colonial construct seemingly true. While the author does not dispute the fact that present-day laws are based on colonial laws, it is untrue that there existed no laws or texts disapproving homosexual acts.

Of the *Smriti* literature - a body of sacred Hindu texts - the most well known is undoubtedly the *Manusmriti*. Manusmriti lays down punishments for women having sex with other women, which indicates that lesbianism did exist in ancient India and was perceived as a problem by the lawmakers. According to the law-giver *Manu* (believed to be the first man and the harbinger of civilization in orthodox traditions), if a woman was caught having sex with a maiden, the maiden would be fined and whipped, while the woman would have her head shaved, her fingers cut off, and be made to ride on a donkey. [5]

2 Parasar, A. (2007). *Homosexuality in India: The invisible conflict.*
3 Pattanaik, D. (2014). *The man who was a woman and other queer tales from Hindu lore*. Routledge.
4 Vanita, R. (2013). *Queering India: Same-sex love and eroticism in Indian culture and society*. Routledge.
5 Bühler, G. (Ed.). (1886). *The laws of Manu* (Vol. 25).p.191. Clarendon Press.

In the *Puranas* (c. 500 to 1500 C.E.), it is said that the breaking of caste rules as well as discharging semen in anything but the vagina lands a man in one of the many nether regions of the Hindu universe, where he has to suffer for seven years before he is reborn as a lesser being on earth when the cosmos are recreated. The *Narada Purana* (15:93-95) states: "The great sinner who discharges semen in non-vaginas, in those who are destitute of vulva, and wombs of animals shall fall into the nether realms where he shall subsist on semen and where he will remain for seven divine years before being reborn as a lowly man."[6]

**Conclusion**

History helps us realise that our human experiences are complex and diverse. It makes us aware of the many entangled threads of continuity and change that connect the present to the past. The ancient Indian subcontinent is a huge canvas to even attempt a study. However, when probed and looked at, it reveals a lot about the present that has its roots in the past. When reread, the existence of homosexual desires and acts are highlighted as opposed to previously being brushed underneath the carpet. Homosexual acts and desires did indeed exist in ancient India and were never a 'foreign' import. While there is no mention of any kind of oppression, one does find staunch disapproval in the legal texts. This paper aimed to unearth the threads of homosexuality in the ancient texts and can never claim to have answered all the questions or analysed all perspectives and yet, some truths are self evident.

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6 Translation circulated in Web pages by the Association Against Religious Vilification and World Vaishnava Association following the outcry against the "Homosutra" Mardi Gars in Sydney, 1999, where Hindu imagery was used rather irreverently.

Photography by: Gayathri Pushpanadh

# 16. CHRISTIANITY AND QUEERNESS

MAHIMA NOELLE MOSES
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*The Christian Church's views on homosexuality are infamously known by most - anything non-heterosexual is considered equivalent to sinning. Despite this, there are many who reject this belief that one cannot be both queer and Christian at the same time. The aim of this paper is thus, to explore both of these polarizing narratives, from the various arguments made by those within the field to the presence of a marginalized yet resilient community of queer Christians who have managed to occupy safe spaces within larger structures ultimately culminating in the founding of an entire discipline for the subaltern - of 'Queer Theology'.*

The Bible, the sacred book of Christians, is used as a moral guide that governs every aspect of not only the religious but socio-cultural, political, economic and other realms of a staunch believer's life. Every Christian, young and old, is expected to live life by the standards and rules established in the Bible, one of which is in fact, heterosexuality- something only a few books in the Bible explicitly state, while the rest merely convey. The Christian faith has been founded on the belief in strict gender binaries of male and female, whether through Adam and Eve, the first human inhabitants of the world, their offspring's and their subsequent heterosexual carnal relations, to the gender of God 'Himself as the all-powerful 'male'. Only the male and the female with heterosexual relations between them with the intent of reproduction was and in many places, continues to be viewed as 'right' by the omnipresent male God.

The Christian Church and its members often cites 'cherry picked' verses, also known as 'clobber passages', from the Bible as evidence to back their homophobic perspectives. Verses such as-

> You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Leviticus 18:22)

and

> Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

and then most recently owing to pop culture -

> God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.

are but a few verses and phrases that almost every Christian is sure to have heard in their lifetime.

Any conversation on gender and sexual orientation are mostly taboo in Christian spaces. But whenever spoken about, it is clearly conveyed to all hearing that alternative choices from what 'God intended' are strictly undesirable and equivalent to sinning. The Creation Story, the story of Noah's ark and God specifically sending a male and female pair of animals to repopulate the Earth, the visible discomfort on teachers' faces when curious children ask about Lot, Sodom and Gomorrah and the subsequent, if any, explanation that mildly but powerfully establishes that unnatural same-sex attraction is ultimately a sin, a deviant choice made by the sinner to disobey God's word just as Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit. Church sermons freely use quotes from the Bible as hate spews from the pulpit while congregation members shift in their seats , the same congregation members who are then equally vocal about their condemnation of this 'lifestyle' in informal Bible discussion groups and gatherings, mocking their young children who are allies of the LGBTQ movement. This belief, a powerful ideology really, is instilled and imposed on all those seeking to identify with this faith. The Church is notorious for its beliefs and practices related to homosexuality, some of which explicitly opposing such as conversion camps, ostracization of homosexuals, influence on laws and

denial of same-sex marriage, etc. (Walker,2018).

But there are other more, subtle but powerfully pervasive ways through which heterosexuality is further institutionalized and reinforced in the minds of believers of the faith where homosexuality is made the enemy - the Devil, the sin, the 'deviant'. Each of these seemingly simple, superficial words, beliefs and practices are actually laden with powerful values and attitudes of hate towards the 'other' all in the name of God.

Most believe in a dichotomous relationship between faith and sexual orientation. You are either Christian and straight or, queer and rejected/rejectinging from/ of the Christian faith. Many young Christians struggling with their identities internalize this binary, believing that they are sinners, false Christians displeasing God by being unable to conform to this heteronormative way of life. Many even experience a 'double consciousness' (Dubois, 1994) of sort with these two seemingly polarizing identities at play within them- Christian and/ or queer. There are very few safe spaces for frightened and ashamed young LGBTQ Christians in this Church, which is why many wean themselves off this organized religion and seek God individually, on their own terms, without any of the rituals and rigidity that the Church imposes on who is allowed to worship and how they must engage with this worship.

The heteronormativity through the stories of creation and reported sexual relationships of the time are often used as ammunition to justify the discrimination of homosexual individuals by Christians. But, if we were to apply Roland Barthes' study of myths to this context of religious text, we would come up with certain key phenomena in the creation and reproduction of literature over time. Barthes brings a political dimension to the analysis of myths, forcing us to identify the hegemony of certain groups and underlying power structures in myths.

In the Bible, we see the power of alienation through language and the justification of the same where this ancient text disguised under the veil of connecting once again with the tales and lives of our religious ancestors, reinforce certain ways of living that for centuries now, serve and benefit only a section of society while actively marginalizing every member that does not fall under this set structure. Barthes rejected the idea of 'naturalness' of certain phenomena simply due to the history of its

Typography by Rhea Vakharia

prevalence- in this case, heterosexuality and the gender binary, and instead urges readers to identify underlying power dynamics in these structures of literature that try to pass off as normative (Cuff, Sharrock & Francis, 2005).

The first question in identifying these structures is to ask ourselves who wrote the Bible? And secondly, why do we follow the words these 'humans' wrote as the word of God? An in-depth analysis into the books of the Bible all reveal that each and every book present in the Old and New Testament was written by powerful, religious men of their time like Moses, the prophet Isaiah, the King - David, Jesus' many disciples - Matthew, Mark, Luke John and of course, most famously, Paul. Each of these individuals occupied positions of either economic, religious or political power as money-lenders, prophets, kings, etc. (Stockton,2018; Kranz,2018) This perfectly explains the lack of a female narrative in the books, the automatic, unquestionable attribution of the male gender to God as well as their stances on a non- cisgender, non-heterosexual lifestyle as moral, punishable sins.

This practice of following the 'Word' (a name or title of Jesus Christ, derived from the prologue to the Gospel of John) despite the lack of knowledge of the authors of this book also represent Barthes, theory on the 'Death of the Author' and writerly texts. Regardless of the intentions of the authors of books, as the stories are retold through generations, the initial intentions of the authors become less important while the story-teller's understandings and interpretations of these words gain precedence. In writerly texts as the Bible especially, individuals consuming these texts tend to impose their own experiences and interpretations on these words, while the author's presence, intentions and personal influencing factors in the creation and perpetuation of the text diminishes. The Bible is consumed by a truly diverse audience, and it is interesting to note that each

group consuming it attributes meanings to the passages consistent with their own views and beliefs- whether conservative anti-queer Christians using the words of the Bible as weapons or queer Christians themselves, recognizing flaws in this system of knowledge through its creation and misinterpretation followed by its institutionalization as the moral 'truth' all Christians must abide by. There are in fact, many in the world of religion who reject this binary of being either queer or Christian and instead truly believe that they can be both and that God continues to love them because of their queerness and not in spite of it (them, 2018). These voices represent the present changing nature of religious spaces and viewpoints within the community (MSNBC, 2015).

Inspired by the 'Queer Theory' sub-discipline within Sociology and Anthropology with scholars as celebrated as Foucault and Butler at the helm, the 'Queer Theology' movement is also gaining popularity and prominence within the over-arching umbrella of Christianity. It rejects the belief that heterosexuality is the path to salvation and instead, critically analyses and reviews the 'cherry-picked' verses and parables from the Bible used to justify homophobia, through a lens which affirms that homosexuality and gender nonconformity have existed even in the ancient times of the Bible. Queer theologists focus more on the teachings of Jesus, a champion of the marginalized 'sinners' rather than those of his disciples highlighting the saying that it is these very 'sinners' that are "the most welcome in God's kingdom" (Massey, 2019). Most queer Christians thus believe that when paradoxical parts of identity come together, the world itself changes. All major social movements and changes are contingent on this. In addition to this, it is the mission of the queer Christian community, containing clergy members, believers and allies that have founded inclusive churches, support groups and organizations and a culture of support and community, to replace internalized guilt and shame with the notion that God is not 'mad' at those who are queer. Why would He be when He was the one who 'made' you?

From a personal point of view, I believe that religion, Christianity in particular, has become more about sin, ultimatums and punishment, and less about what it originally set out to minister, which is love, acceptance and kindness to all. Most of us experience or desire a need for belonging that religion often satiates. However, members of the queer community are ex-communicated and rejected, humiliated and shamed by communities that most have grown up in, depend on and are sometimes, the only sense of family and belonging they have come in contact with before 'coming out'. Jesus believed in and advocated love and non-discrimination. Those who selectively ignore his teachings and continue to quote the Scripture are in my opinion, bearing a strong resemblance to the corrupt Pharisees in the New Testament that used religion to sustain their power and influence. Speaking of positions of power, if marriage was to be between one man and one woman, why was it then permissible for celebrated kings such as David (Astle, 2019) and Solomon (Gill, 2018) to have more than one wife, as well as a harem of concubines? (Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines!) Furthermore, it baffles me that Christians believe that God through all his centuries of existence, remains unchanging. The Bible itself is living proof of a vengeful, punishing, authoritarian God to the loving, welcoming and wise Jesus from the Old to the New Testament. Is it not possible then that God continues to be accepting and accommodative of his queer believers? As a response to those who preach the Scriptures as justification for their hate, queer theologists and queer believers firmly respond with Jesus' two most important commandments- Love thy God and love thy neighbour as thyself, and that there is absolutely no other commandment greater than these two.

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# 17. ISLAM AND QUEERNESS

AFREEN KHAN
EDITED BY: ISHA BORKAR

*A fact not known by many is that the concept of love in Islam is very fluid. After reading the Quran, an interpretation of it could be that one can love whomever they want. That includes same sex members. It is not a sin, to love someone emotionally and mentally. It's the physical manifestation of this love, which Islam forbids. As is the case with most of the Religions, homosexuality defeats the purpose of the natural order in human beings. But could that be the reality we live in now?*

> *And Allah never changes the condition of a people unless they strive to change themselves.* (The Holy Quran 13.11)

Homosexuality is a concept which is still tabooed, in many orthodox societies. Belonging to a traditional Muslim family, I am well aware of the scowls, shocks and awe, that accompany my fellow followers of the religion, every time the word "Homosexuality" is used. But before we dwell further into this topic, we need to first explore the reason behind why homosexuality is perceived as a threat by most orthodox societies, including Islam.

It could be argued that the three fundamental duties that Man and all living creatures have to pursue are a pursuit of self-preservation, a hunt for food and finally a drive for reproduction. In the animal kingdom, any action which does not support these three fundamentals is considered to be a waste of energy. In Human beings too, these three play a very crucial role. In earlier times, throughout history, a world affected by plagues, war and uncontrollable natural terrors (floods, earthquakes), the need to preserve human kind was all the more a necessity. Religious powers have exploited this human sexuality, attaching shame and guilt to the natural responses of the body, on the basis of outdated ideologies. Till date, people from developed countries have similar feelings. Look at this extract for example,

"Concerns about how their children should be treated in a homophobic society were frequently voiced by women in the earlier research on lesbian motherhood and donor conception by highlighting the women's efforts to protect the integrity of their families" (e.g., Donovan & Wilson,2008; Haimes & Weiner,2000). These efforts usually involved difficult decisions relating to sperm donors, which posed various ethical dilemmas. For example, studying lesbian mothers in Sweden, Ryan-Flood (2005) reported that the women, "felt a strong moral obligation" to provide their children with knowledge about paternal lineage and "a sense of guilt "deterred them from choosing an unknown donor." (Almack, 2006, p.21-22)

What was this strong sense of guilt that these women experienced? It could be seen as a threatened society that is trying to safeguard itself via opinions that have been mobilized by religion. But as human kind is entering a new era of consciousness, it is losing its primal instinct of hunting and reproduction, and is evolving into something which focuses on spiritual and mental intellect. Therefore, the concept of love has become much more than a reaction of complex chemicals and primal urges. It has turned into something which transcends all physical apparitions. Here Islam sweeps in, especially with Sufism.

While Islam does condemn homosexuality (open to various interpretations), it does not condemn the art of love. Hence, falling in love with someone of the same gender is not a crime in this religion. It's only the physical expression of this love which is looked down upon. It also challenges the very fundamental base of Orthodox Islamic societies, especially because of the extreme religious interference whilst expressing the fluid concept of love. Anything outside the narrow spectrum offered by this society is considered to be a threat. In the book, *Fifth Mountain* by Paolo Coehlo, the story of prophet Elijah (a prophet who is religiously followed by Muslims), is written in a very fluid manner. When Elijah falls in love with a widowed woman, he punishes himself out of guilt, by whiplashing his own body. But later, an angel comes to him and says,

> The Lord heareth the prayers of those who ask to put hatred aside. But He is deaf to those who flee from love. (Paolo Coehlo, 2006, p. 55)

From this sentence one does realize that God might not be homophobic or patriarchal. But rather an entity that loves and embraces all. In fact, God lives on through love, its identity is love. Then it doesn't matter in which manner it is expressed and to whom.

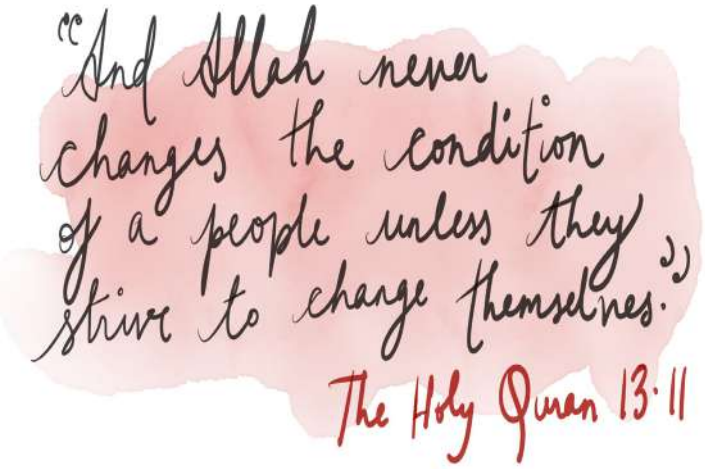
Often in mainstream Islam, the idea of Homosexuality is associated with a deep-rooted sense of guilt and disgust. In an Islamic community, it may be hard to declare oneself as a Homosexual, due to the associations of it with mental illnesses, or a curse by the Unknown. Often in many orthodox societies, a homosexual is perceived to be a rebel, going against the order of the society and not morally upright. Islam is a religion which has been distorted to a large extent by theologians and the Maulanas, that control every aspect of an individual's life, without being questioned. The sort of stigma revolving around Homosexuality, and the sense of dread against it is often a product of these interpretations of the Quran, who refuse to acknowledge a different point of view regarding this concept.

Yet, Sufism does offer an alternative idea. It urges the Individual to stop feeling guilty about who they are and embrace themselves in their truest essence. Sufism persistently persuades its followers, to not feel ashamed or to not blame themselves no matter what the society tells them. In Sufism, God or Allah, loves you, just the way you are and no matter what society tells you, God will still continue loving you and will accept you, as long as you love yourself.

A famous Turkish writer, Elif Shafak, has written a book on the famous Sufi Saints, Rumi and Shams e Tabrizi. The book is called *The Forty Rules Of Love*. In an attempt to address the sense of shame and guilt that a Muslim Homosexual might feel, parallels can be drawn between the two. In this incident, Shams-e- Tabrizi saves a prostitute from a bloodthirsty mob which had found the harlot listening to a sermon in the mosque. Shams-e-Tabrizi confronts this mob and saves the woman, the following is a narrative of the woman as she tries to thank Shams for saving her,

> I should have never gone there, they are right, a harlot has no place in a mosque. I had taken one step towards God and this is how he has responded!
>
> "Please don't", said the dervish. He introduced himself as Shams and then said the strangest thing ever; "Some people start life with a perfectly glowing aura but then lose color and fade. You seem to be one of them. Once your aura was whiter than lilies with specks of yellow and pink, but it faded over time. Now it is a pale brown. Don't you miss your original colors? Wouldn't you like to unite with your essence?".
>
> "Your aura," continued Shams, "Your aura has lost its shine because all these years you have convinced yourself that you are dirty inside out. Besides, what makes you think any of those men who pushed you out of the mosque today are closer to God?"
> (Elif Shafak,2010, p. 93)

From this extract, it's apparent that the Sufi philosophy is to look within oneself and not for others to dictate your self-image. Here Shams is focusing on the inherent innocence of the human soul. It can also be applied to the fact that one's sexual orientation does not determine the degree of love and closeness that individual has with Allah. So, it basically may invalidate all accusations that




Typography by Rhea Vakharia

are/could be thrown at a Muslim Homosexual. All that matters is what you think of yourself, and that's exactly what Allah will think of you as well.

Sufism is very fluid when it comes to Homosexuality. Sufism is not defined by rules and regulations, but in fact encourages spiritual discovery through freedom. Here, one is free to explore their sexuality as well. In Coleman's book, *The Essential Rumi*, it says,

> "That's why you see things in two ways.

Sometimes you look at a person
And see a cynical snake.
Someone else sees a joyful lover,
And you are both right!
Everyone is half and half,
Like the black and white ox.
Joseph looked ugly to his brothers,
And most handsome to his father!" (Barks,1997, p. 74)

Even here Rumi says that everything is black and white, but there are various shades of grey in between. So, the way you look at one thing, may completely differ from what the other. That doesn't mean that you are wrong or the other person is right. Sufism had always challenged mainstream Islam, and here too it is challenging the orthodoxy of Muslims by proving the duality and fickleness of human nature.

Another famous poem by Rumi, found in the same book, says,

'There are those that say, "Nothing lasts forever"
They're wrong. Every moment they say,
"If there were some other reality,
I would have seen it. I would know about it."
Because a child doesn't understand a chain of reasoning,
If reasonable people don't feel the presence of love within the universe,
That doesn't mean it's not there.' (Barks.1997, p. 58)

A favorite classic from Rumi's collection, these lines are proof that not everyone can understand the intricacies of love. The form of love is shapeless, it can't be hammered down to just one concept or one ideology. It's nearly as vast as the expanse of this universe. The perception of love differs from person to person, if there are 7.7 Billion people in this world, then there are 7.7 Billion perceptions of Love! Where does that leave us? It means that we have to accept all these definitions of Love. Not all forms of love need to have rationality behind them. Not all its forms can be expected to be comprehended by the Human mind. The same logic can be applied in the concept of Homosexuality as well. Even if homosexuality cannot be accepted by mainstream fundamentalist religions like Islam, it doesn't mean that Homosexuality is not one form of the wide spectrum of Love that Rumi talks of.

In conclusion, homosexuality is a very diverse and fluid concept, that cannot be defined just by the physical attributes or orientation of an individual. It could be seen as an ideology which influences the spirit, as well as the human consciousness. Finally, in my opinion, Islam does embrace Homosexuality with open arms, even if it's through the Sufi tradition. Islam, in its purest form is the religion of Love, unchallenged and un-influenced. As one dwells into the intricacies of Islam, a flower of Truth unfurls, an essence of acceptance embraces one, and it's at that moment when one realizes that all actions of Love are an act of worship to The Beloved. It doesn't really matter what those actions are, as long as they help one in achieving the Love that each individual deserves.

As Elif Shafak says,

"Love has no labels, no definition.
It is what it is, pure and simple.
Love is the water of life, and a lover is a soul of fire!
The universe turns differently when fire loves water" (Shafak,2010, p. 230)

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# 18. HOMOSEXUALITY AND DECOLONISATION

TIMIHA KUNJ
EDITED BY: ISHIKA CHATTERJEE

*It has been more than 70 years since India gained independence from the British rule. However, its influence still lives on through laws such as Section 377 that criminalise homosexuality. It was only recently deemed unconstitutional. Ancient India embraced homosexuality but took a new meaning after the arrival of the British who used their values as a yardstick to understand other cultures and assimilate them into British culture. These values were enforced through the creation of laws like Section 377 and the introduction of the English language to create a class Indian in blood but British in intellect. We are unable to decolonise our minds of the values we were subjected to. Decolonising the mind is a way of healing the mind, body and spirit from colonial exploitation. Through the years we have tried to sensitise the public to homosexuality through famous personalities, journals and movements. The article explores the afterlife of the British Raj and its effect on the queer*

"The sun may have set on the British Empire, but the Empire lives on." ( Gupta, 2008). It has been 72 years since India gained its independence from the British Raj but its values continue to live through our laws. One such value that the former colonies of the British have inherited is the mistreatment of the Queer. This conception, or rather misconception, in society of viewing gender as solely binary was the work of the British Raj in India. The British Christian values preached sodomy as a sin and considered it to be unnatural. This value system soon shaped the Indian Penal Code (IPC) by British colonials and formed Section 377. It pollutes people's most intimate feelings as unnatural. It took 157 years for the people of India to decolonise their mind and declare this notorious Section unconstitutional. The colonial mentality is the internalized attitude of ethnic or cultural inferiority felt by people as a result of colonization and decolonisation attempts to change this. However, India's history prior to colonial rule was rich with literature and art embracing homosexuality.

Homosexuality was not a Western import. Frank Mugisha, a human rights activist once said, "Homosexuality is African; homophobia is not" (Tripathi, 2018). The same can be said with regards to India. The country acquired homophobia from the colonisers but before becoming a colony it was a country that embraced homosexuality. Hindu mythology itself contains allusions to LGBT figures playing crucial parts in revered sacred narratives. Consider Shikhandi, who was key to ensuring the victory of the Pandavas in the Kurukshetra War of the Mahabharata (Pillay, 2016). Hazrat Amir Khusro (1253–1325) known for his famous mystical Hindvi poetry was a courtier poet in Mughal India. His love for Hindvi poetry had developed out of his love for Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia. One of his poems has the following lines - "His beautiful face, his charming form I absorbed into my innermost heart. Khusro has given himself to Nizam" (Ansari, 1986). Contrary to the mores of the day, homosexuals had jobs in the Mughal empire. Homosexuality took a new meaning only after the arrival of the British who used their values as a yardstick to understand other cultures and assimilate them into British culture.

Once the British asserted their dominance in India, perceptions began to change about homosexuality. Thomas Babbington Macaulay, the president of the Indian Law Commission in 1835, was charged with the task of drafting the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Section 377's predecessor in Macaulay's first draft of the Penal Code was Clause 361, which defined a severe punishment for 'going against the order of nature and indulging in carnal intercourse' (Gupta, 2006). Macaulay considered this a "heinous crime". The practice of polygamy and sodomy were against British Christian ethics and thus enforced those values upon their subjects too. Section 377 of the IPC was drafted along the lines of the 1553 Buggery Act that had been implemented in England to criminalise homosexuality. In British Colonialism and the Criminalization of Homosexuality, Enze Han and Joseph O'Mahonee write that it was introduced to safeguard soldiers and colonial administrators who were away from their wives and home against indulging

in homosexual behaviour (O'Mahoney, 2018). This law was retained after the British left and led to India criminalising homosexuality itself; thus, making anyone who is homosexual 'prisoners of conscience'. This was a term coined by Peter Beneson to illustrate the predicament of being imprisoned and prosecuted on the grounds of holding certain views or belonging to a race, religion and sexual orientation (Balasubramanayan, 1996). The law invades people's privacy and perpetuates inequality. Through Section 377, homosexual acts become abominable activities lacking the equivalent of consensual heterosexual activities (Gupta, 2006).

This lack of consent-based difference makes homosexuality seem as perverse behaviour and forces the Queer to live in invisibility. In 2008 when petitions were made to do away with the archaic law, India's Ministry of Home Affairs supported the Section 377 and claimed that, "The law does not run separately from society. It only reflects the perception of the society…. When Section 377 was brought under the statute as an act of criminality, it responded to the values and mores of the time in the Indian society" ( Gupta, 2008). However, Section 377 did not respond to the mores and values of not the Indian society but of the British. On the 61st anniversary of India's independence, people who opposed the law organised a march to reflect on the issue that while India gained independence in 1947, the Queer were still bound by the colonial rule. During the march there was a demand for UK to apologise for the suffering caused by the imposition of Section 377. Although India did not get the apology it wanted, Theresa May announced at a Commonwealth conference that she regrets Britain's legacy of imposing anti-gay laws and claimed that it is the duty of Britain to undo what it has done and change perceptions on anti-gay laws (Crerar, 2018). More than 80 countries that were former colonies continue to practice this law ( Gupta, 2008). Similar to the response given by India's Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore's government refused to rid itself of its colonial law against homosexual conduct in 2007. The supporters of this stance claimed that, "a reflection of the sentiments of the majority of society. … Repealing [it] is a vehicle to force homosexuality on a conservative population that is not ready for homosexuality" ( Gupta, 2008). Another country is Pakistan which unlike its neighbour India has not yet repealed it. These two countries were once part of a single mass of land and both resisted the British occupation but differ in the rate at which they attempt to get rid of this colonial influence.

The British not only enforced their values through laws but also through education. This is evident through the rise of the Indian middle class. Macaulay introduced English education to India to create a class that was Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, opinions and intellect (Chandhoke, 2009). This class was created to "civilise" Indian society. An example is of the new Bengali class of Bhadra Lok or gentlefolk. They emphasised the role of the woman as the caretaker of the home and what a model family should look like. It showed that heterosexual or being "straight" is what is ideal. A family consisting of a homosexual parent was not part of the "ideal". This yardstick of an ideal couple and family

Typography by Rhea Vakharia

revolves around a heterosexual couple and continues to persist in present day. This leads to a battle with accepting their identity and an intense feeling of isolation. They suffer from alienation as identified by Karl Marx. They face alienation from their species as the prejudice they face does not let them have an essence of humanness in their life. They are made to seem as something abnormal and harmful. In addition to this they were also alienated from society by portraying them as criminals through laws such as Section 377.

Social constructionist theory points out that individuals interpret their personal experiences through the social world (Joseph, 1996). Homosexuality in India can be studied through this theory. Colonials changed the Indian social framework by creating the Indian Middle class and they made sure to make homosexuality a social stigma by imposing Section 377 on the Indian subcontinent. Thus, people interpret their identity as a sin, a shame if not heterosexual. They resort to going underground and rather than accepting their identity

they get forced to adopt one accepted by society. This led to the queer feeling trapped by the sexual orientation.

Post-independence India began recreating its identity by expelling colonial influence. It was the rebirth of the subcontinent. Through independence we experienced decolonisation. It is the act of withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent. However, despite being independent we could not decolonise our mind of the stigma against homosexuality. The reclaiming of Indian culture post-independence had no place for homosexuality despite it being a part of the culture. This difficulty stems from the fact that due to British Raj we have been misled through their education and laws. After continuous practice of the British ways some things that were not normal become normal. This new normal is created due to continuous surveillance by British authorities. According to Marcelo Dascal "the purpose of colonisation was to introduce new forms of seeing reality and unconsciously or consciously relinquishing one's cultural norms and adopting new ones" (Dascal, 2007). While it may be easy to strip a city of its colonial name of 'Bombay' and change it to 'Mumbai', it is much more difficult to change a mindset that has been developed over the years. However, over the years we have attempted to decolonise our minds from the colonial perceptions. Decolonising the mind is a way of healing the mind, body and spirit from colonial exploitation. One important feature of decolonising is to let go of fear. The fear of being ridiculed, being in pain or meeting with resistance are impediments to achieving emancipation from colonial entrapment (Hadfield, 2017). This can be seen through the many marches, pride parades, media representation of the Queer and influential personalities speaking for LGBTQ rights.

A way to destigmatise homosexuality is to bring into the limelight eminent gay personalities who were open about their sexuality. One such is Ashok Row Kavi who was a vocal supporter of homosexual rights. In 1986, Kavi published an article about himself for Savvy Magazine, which became the first 'coming out' story from India. In this article, he explained the word "gay" for the first time. He published the first LGBTQ journal in India and is often considered in gay circles to be the father of the gay movement in India. Ironically, Kavi is a supporter of Bhartiya Janta Party who are against the idea of homosexuality. He believes that Hindu ideology which the party claims to preserve is the way to free homosexuality from being oppressed. Today we have a lot more personalities opening up to public and showing people that being gay is normal. The representation of lesbian personalities however is far less. One argument for this by Sherry Joseph is that "lesbianism cannot be understood alongside male homosexuality because the two are entirely different, partly because women are oppressed and men are part of the dominant culture" (Joseph, 1996). Apart from personalities, print media was effective in representing the Queer community and denounce them from their classification of being considered unnatural and shameful. There was an emergence of LGBTQ publications around the 1980's. The first one was by Ashok Row Kavi called Bombay Dost (Saxena, 2016). In 1990, Row wanted to build a support network through the journal to shed light upon pressing issues like HIV/AIDs, STIs, discrimination. A number of journals soon got published such as Gay Scene (Calcutta), Freedom (Gulbarga), Men India Movement (Cochin), (Joseph, 1996). These journals helped represent the Queer communities and provide an outlet for their thoughts and opinions which are suppressed. Furthermore, it explained what being gay is like and answering questions about homosexuality and issues that the community faces. It gave way to bring the Queer community in solidarity and make people realise they're not alone. The '90s saw a huge surge in written correspondences by lesbian women. This effort is accredited to the organization Sakhi, that provided a hotline was a way of finding other women or single women. It was an initiative by activist Gita Thadani (Saxena, 2016). Today we have a more digitised platform of this initiative with the release of apps like Bumble, Grinder that cater to the Queer as well as straight/ heterosexual individuals.

Queer themes soon entered silver screens. *Fire* by Deepa features a lesbian romance. However, this led to uproar and protest by many political parties such as Shiv Sena and BJP. Attackers attempted to shut down screenings and BJP supporters vandalised posters. The larger problem against the film was not only the theme but the fact that the two lesbian protagonists were named after Indian mythical Hindu entities Sita and Radha who are the epitome of what a Hindu woman should be. Making a woman named Sita engage in a lesbian relationship violates the idea of a heterosexual family and thus the sanctity of marriage. Shiv Sena's repugnance towards the idea of homosexuality is rather ironic as it is one of the strongest critics of the British rule. Hence, we see political parties such as this in conflict with their own ideology of recreating the image of India and getting back its cultural values and practices. BJP for instance, despite evidence

of acceptance of homosexuality in Hindu mythology, does not consider it as part of its "Sangh parivaar". Here we notice how the Queer community are the subaltern of society as they are politically and socially alienated by the Indian society. The "sexual subaltern" is a term coined by Indian feminist legal scholar Ratna Kapur and includes all people marginalised by mainstream society on account of their sexual identities and/or practices.

Colonization of the mind blurred what we think is part of our culture and what is not. Hence, decolonizing homosexuality through people like Ashok Row Kavi, Movements like Sakhi and journals create a community and provide integration into society by making public more sensitised towards the Queer. The strange afterlife of British Raj is seen through repressive laws such as the Section 377. As the largest country in the Commonwealth, India's landmark decision on the repeal of the Section 377 sends a message to other former British colonies that are still ensnared in draconian laws against homosexuality. It is surprising how politicians and governments defend the laws as cultural authenticity. There exists a paradox in society as democratic governments and politicians who abhor colonial rule promote despotic anti-homosexual views and laws despite it supporting the undemocratic way it was imposed and the colonial values.

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# 19. QUEERNESS IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

SURYA SUNDHARAN
EDITED BY: STUTI NABAZZA

*Societal attitudes towards LGBTQI+ relationships have varied over time and place. Considering the widespread discrimination and prejudiced attitude of people towards queerness, it is imperative to know the roots or origins of prejudice in order to bring about a change in the mindset of the people. The existence of communities/societies wherein homosexuality has always been accepted and not considered as a taboo provides an interesting arena to study. This research article aims to explore various intricacies and layers of queer practices that exist in tribal societies while highlighting the problems of infiltration of mainstream notions of sexuality into the tribal societies in the form of colonization and developmental programs.*

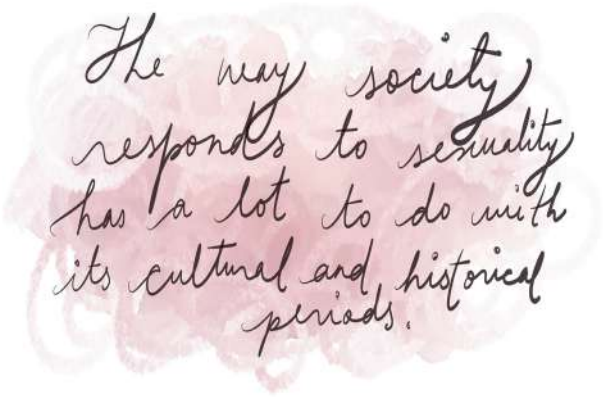
The way society responds toward sexuality has a lot to do with its cultural and historical periods. All cultures have their own values regarding appropriate and inappropriate sexuality; some sanction same-sex love and sexuality, while others may disapprove of such activities in part (Murray, Stephen O., 2000). Robert Endleman, in his research on 'Homosexuality in Tribal Societies', has mentioned that homosexual practices are not only accepted but widely approved in many other societies. Homosexual practices have been profoundly found in tribal societies in various forms like initiation rites, the role of shaman, third-gender, etc.

There are some tribal societies where most or all males during adolescence engage in homosexual relations, then later marry, heterosexually, while continuing to have homosexual relations as well (Endleman, 1986). In the year 1981, Gilbert Herdt contributed to the study of homosexuality in tribal societies which is considered to be the most important work on this field. He dealt with ritualized homosexuality in a New Guinea culture, which is also called the 'Sambia'. In this tribal culture, from about age seven to fifteen, all boys and young men experience homosexual fellatio (oral stimulation of a man's penis). This is a part of the ritual initiation of all males. Later on, they marry heterosexually and in time abandon almost all homosexual activity. Here, we notice how homosexuality is not considered as a sexual orientation but rather homosexual activities are considered as an absolute necessity to masculinize the boys. Fellatio is sacredly sanctioned as an absolute necessity to transform them into ideal Sambian males, strong and courageous warriors (Endleman, 1986). They have different worldviews associated with homosexual practices other than sexual orientation, due to which they marry heterosexually and cease homosexual practices. Similar cultural patterns like the homosexual rituals imposed on all developing males believing that it creates powerful male warriors can be seen in a number of other New Guinea societies and at least one in the New Hebrides.

In some areas, especially in Siberia and among many Amerindian groups, shamanism is associated with homosexuality (Endleman, 1986). Shamanism is a spiritual practice upon which the practitioner reaches an altered state of consciousness wherein they interact with the spirit world and channel the energies into this world. It has been noted that gender-crossing (an anatomical male takes on the occupations and attire of the woman and engages in homosexual intercourse with another male, usually in the feminine role) and associated homosexual practices are not merely incidental but an important aspect of the shaman's personality and adaptation (Ducey, 1976). Other than gender-crossing, the embodiment of homosexuality in tribal societies occurs seldom through modes different than that of queer individuals in the mainstream, if any. This is because homosexual practices are not considered as taboo by them but rather an essential component to become masculine and reach adulthood which does not make them feel the need to embody homosexual practices in a certain way or form. However, deviance to the heterosexual normal is embodied through the cultural norm of adherence to male homosexuality as a rite of passage. The Siwans of Libya have a conventionalized older-man-younger-boy homosexual relationship pattern, with fathers giving their young sons as partners to trusted men of the

father's generation (Cline, 1936). The Etoro tribe in New Guinea is known for its belief that each man's 'life force' is contained in semen due to which they commonly have boys perform ritualized fellatio (oral stimulation of a man's penis) on older men, thereby passing on the life force from one generation to the next. Berdaches (two-spirit or third gender) were common among the Arapaho, the Blackfoot, the Cheyenne, the Comanche, and many other Native American tribes of the Great Plains region. We notice that homosexual practices in tribal societies are more cultural in nature than religious because these practices are very rooted in their way of life and is considered as an important phase to reach adulthood.

Robert Endleman reports in his ethnographic research that the evidence of female homosexuality is sparser than male homosexuality. Also, the puberty ceremonies for females are less well known than puberty ceremonies




Typography by Rhea Vakharia

for males. One of the reasons that underlie this difference is the associated belief that women just naturally grow and become women; whereas men require help from older males to become men (Mead, 1949). Given that ethnography is a field dominated by men, the lesser availability of the information on female homosexuality can be due to the gender of the ethnographer as it is easier for the male anthropologist to find out about male sexual activities than female sexual activities (Endleman, 1986). However, Evans Pritchard (1970) notes that female homosexuality was common among cowives in a polygynous marriage among the Azande of Sudan (Kanazawa, Satoshi, 2017).

On the basis of studies being conducted on the topic of homosexuality in tribal societies, we learn that in most of the tribal societies in New Guinea and the circum-Mediterranean area, exclusive homosexuality is a rare phenomenon. This might have to do with the perception of men as 'masculine' and not homosexual if they have intercourse with both the genders. Also, for boys to be the passive recipients for an older man is acceptable as a transitional phase, but strongly stigmatized in an adult male (Endleman, 1986). Hence, we find that though there are homosexual ritual practices that exist in tribal societies, many of them preferred heterosexual as opposed to homosexual intercourse, from which we can infer how people belonging to such cultures maintain an exclusively heterosexual relationship after marriage. Undoubtedly, there are homosexual ritual practices in tribal societies but homosexuality has not been exclusively accepted. Homosexual cultural practices were not considered as a sexual orientation (homosexuality) but an integral aspect of masculinity. However, there are some tribes wherein homosexuality has been accepted. For instance, casual male homosexual behavior is reported for many Polynesian societies with little or no negative sanction. Cubeo males have adolescent homosexual activity, and some other occasional homosexual experimentation, not negatively sanctioned (Endleman, 1981; Opler,1965). In recent findings, we note that among the Ho tribe of Jharkhand (a state in Eastern India), male homosexuality has always been socially accepted. The Ho tribe of Jharkhand is an ethnic group where there is no limitation on one's sexuality when it comes to males. This warrior tribe from Jharkhand is the fourth largest tribe after Santhals, Oraons and Mundas. Homosexual men are called Kothi Panthis in the region and there is no shame attached to being one. The men are reported to have their own social network and meet in the evening at ten different gathering places to gossip and tell stories. According to the Times, reportedly there are two couples who got married to their partners (Murty, 2009). The number of Kothi Panthis has been constantly increasing and some attribute this to the near-total absence of women in and around the numerous mines in the area, where a large number of males are at work all day and night. Here, male homosexuals embrace all professions and they face no social censure. Homosexuality is treated as a separate form of relationship from the heterosexual one wherein it is recognized and respected.

One of the most important reasons for the acceptance of homosexuality in the Ho tribe is that they have been excluded and divorced from the infiltration of organized religions like Christianity or from mainstream society.

Most of the tribal societies do not have an organized religion like the mainstream developed societies. This indicates that there is no record of written rules regarding the do's and don'ts for an individual. Lack of organized religion can be taken as one of the reasons behind their fluid and flexible understanding of gender. Hence, while norms, value systems and patterns of behavior exist inhibiting queerness, they don't necessarily derive from the institution of religion, as in instances of the mainstream society.

However, due to colonization, many of the tribes left behind their liberal views on homosexuality. For instance, the 'Two-spirited' (third gender) American Indians once recognized as healers, caregivers, are now unseen as they have been displaced by Western Christianity, which was a product of colonialism (Laframboise and Anhorn, 2008). Western quests to gain economic superiority and other motives diluted the sacred belief of the 'Two-Spirited'. Therefore, we notice that due to colonialism and the encroachment of western or mainstream beliefs, many of the tribes wherein homosexuality was practiced and was considered a separate form of the relationship left their traditional beliefs. The fluid understanding of gender in tribal societies was successfully eradicated by Euro-American domination. For instance, a large proportion of Native American tribes acknowledged the gender role of berdache (Two- Spirited) which came as a shock for Europeans and Americans as gender fluidity was alien to them. Hence, European settlers and their American successors made a persistent effort to eradicate the berdache (Gilden, 2007).

It is important to note that while European colonialism had adverse consequences on the colonized countries in terms of wealth and resource exploitation, it also had another more subtle form of enslavement that has persisted into the present, that is, the gender binary system. The gender binary system which is emerged from western thought implies the classification of sex and gender into two very specific and opposing forms, masculine and feminine. The 'Western Gender Binary' causes and creates prejudices against people who belong to the 'other' category of a gender other than man or woman. This concept affected the way the tribals saw themselves in terms of gender fluidity. For example, prior to the colonization of Africa, Youruba society was not structured with gender as a category that determined what human beings could and could not do (Endleman, 1981). Considering the Western philosophy and beliefs as superior and civilized, many of the tribes happen to distance themselves from their traditional notions of gender which were more liberal and fluid.

Furthermore, while many policies and steps have been adopted for the development of tribal areas since colonization, the developmental policies adopted by the country for the tribals can be problematic in many aspects. For instance, biases against the practise of homosexuality among the Ho tribe emerged at the fore of the programs initiated by the Government and the Citizen Foundation to counter the increasing cases of AIDS among the community in a manner that the Project manager of the Citizen Foundation was found saying, "it is tough convincing them to stop practicing homosexuality" (Murty, 2009). The National Policy on Tribals by the Government of India sought to bring Scheduled Tribes into the mainstream of society through a multi-pronged approach for their all-round development without disturbing their distinct culture. I believe that when developmental policies are framed by a handful of people who are alien to the tribe's culture and system, it can do more harm rather than benefiting the tribal societies as there is a chance of infiltration of mainstream beliefs into the target communities. As the theory of cultural relativism goes, one should first understand a society's beliefs, values, and practices in line with their culture in order to have a more holistic developmental framework.
Understanding the queerness that exists in Tribal societies, we note how the conceptualization of sexuality varies from culture to culture.

It is interesting to find how certain tribes like Sambia have the notion of 'masculinity' attached to homosexual practices whereas Cubeo males regard it as a sexual orientation. This indicates that every society has their own indigenous beliefs and meanings with respect to sexuality. The problem arises when there is an infiltration of other cultural and societal (especially mainstream) biases, meanings onto the indigenous and tribal cultures. There are concerns regarding the biases of a few individuals that often come with the developmental policies just like how colonization had an effect on the gender fluidity of tribes like Yoruba. Infiltration of the ideas of the mainstream society through developmental programs and policies adopted for the tribals can hinder their version of identity, sexuality, and culture, thus enabling queerphobia under the facade of development and modernization. Knowledge about the queerness in tribal societies helps us to realize how gender gets modified and constructed by the power dynamics of

the powerful and developed societies. I believe this understanding will put us in a better position to ideate and formulate steps to change the queerphobic narratives of our society.

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# 20. DQ: DISQUALIFIED/ DALIT QUEERNESS

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*Have you found yourself facing a contradiction when it comes to addressing people who belong to a minority, in any given context? What are the other layers that are a part of this contradiction when an individual's identity is subject to more than one minority group? These are the questions that the following article attempts to address by focussing on the intersection of a Dalit Bahujan and queer identity and the various societal forces that play a role in its formation, development and growth.*

Let us talk about not one, but two elephants in the room when it comes to Indian society; intersectionality is in fashion after all, and so is Indian society layered enough to pretend to have two elephants in a room without them bumping into each other even a little - the caste hierarchy and queer people. On one hand, we're liberal, egalitarian, and inclusive enough to not have a society divided by caste and, on the other, we toss these values out of the window by denying let alone rights, but the very existence of queer people as real and valid. How is it that we justify this complex contradiction so well? With our superior Savarna (individuals born into families that belong to forward castes - the Hindu varna, in the contemporary context) intellect, of course, that us Savarnas have crowned ourselves with, to ensure the oppression and domination of others through language and racial notions alike. One only needs to look at all the 'Tam-Brahms' (Tamil Brahmins) in the IITs to see a manifestation of the Savarna intellect. What happens though, when the latter of the two aspects, queerness, becomes relatively more legitimised in the due course of time? How do we find our way in the contradiction, we have so religiously justified and stood by? Yes, you probably guessed it right, our superior Savarna intellect comes to the rescue yet again.

The LGBTQ+ movement in India is still budding, and yet it is largely a representation of Savarna voices. A movement that aims to address discrimination within social structures alarmingly shies away from addressing the discrimination within itself. We could draw parallels with the early feminist movement in the United States of America, where women of colour were systematically blocked from accessing leadership roles and relegated to the side-lines, with white women taking centre stage. This notion of the privileged leading a movement owing to visibility and the ability to negotiate could be refuted by the logic that leaders from the marginalized sections pave the way for a larger change in the social structure. In the context of the queer movement in India then, a Savarna leading it could mean wider acceptance because of the prevailing deference towards upper castes and the social location of a combination of a marginalized and a privileged identity, in contrast to a Dalit Bahujan leader who would be seen as only perhaps marginalizing the movement, coming from two marginalized identities. This logic plays into the homogeneity of a social movement also, where it is projected that the voices of the movement have to be uniform; and for that to happen, so should the identities be uniform. Further, within the queer community, there is a denial of Savarna privilege by arguing that the Dalit Bahujan community has constitutional reservations and thus it has enough, even more representation, in the absence of the same for the queer community.[1]

A flawed notion of an effective social movement is built up by the aforementioned arguments; for it assigns priority to an individual identity's dignity and rights. For example, it's easy to cave into the rationale of campaigning for and securing women's rights before aggressively and visibly vocalizing for the rights of queer persons; something

1 Caste and LGBT. Retrieved from: https://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8203:caste-and-lgbt&catid=119&Itemid=132.

that the queer community has critiqued the feminist movement for - not being intersectional in including voices from the LGBTQ+ community. Yet, the Savarna oriented Indian queer community is replicating that very silencing of the marginalized voices. It is not only not letting the community take centre stage in the discourse, but also appropriating them.

The Savarna saviour complex plays into the appropriation of Dalit Bahujan voices, and is very prominent in the Indian feminist movement where Savarna women make loud proclamations of liberation of poor Dalit Bahujan women while trivializing, or completely neglecting the role that Brahmanical patriarchy plays in the oppression of Indian women. Likewise, when it comes to queer fashion, it is largely Savarnas pompously appropriating what has historically and culturally been associated with the Dalit Bahujan community – ribald sexuality that is coarse, in your face, and amusing in its ridicule of the predominant norms around sexuality.

Historically, narratives around the Dalit Bahujan population have hyper-sexualized the identity of Dalits by portraying them as the 'other' that is promiscuous, especially through scanty clothes, which were often imposed as part of their identity to project them as less civilized. We accede that queer fashion in India is possibly inspired from the hyper-sexualization of the community and more often than not, by the community, particularly in the West. However, with a history of caste taboos associated with nudity and sexuality in India, it ceases to be just inspired from just the West. The local legend in Kerala, of Nangeli, the woman who protested the breast-tax (tax for covering up one's breasts for lower caste women) by cutting off her breasts as tax is illustrative of the social taboos of shame and humiliation that span across nudity, sexuality and belonging to the lower castes. Imagine if a Dalit Bahujan person would be able to wear a head dress or ride a horse, appropriating symbols of Savarna culture as easily as a queer Savarna person is visibly sexual in public through their dressing, or the lack of it. In the 21st century, the former gets you killed, and as for the latter, it is positive media coverage as in an *Outlook* article – "we saw men dressed up in plunging necklines, frilly outfits and bold red lip colour. Women were seen sporting moustaches and beard. This, in turn, will help in having a more liberal and equal society" (Roy, 2018); with the caveat of it being a liberal and equal society only for Savarnas. The space for subaltern voices that are not Savarna are very surreptitiously usurped by subtle social, cultural, political, and economic ministrations like these that effectively render Dalit Bahujan people with little or no agency to visibly express themselves in the mainstream discourse.

It is important for us to explore how the Dalit Bahujan expression of queerness is different, in what ways, and in ways in which it is consistent with the Savarna expression along with the causes and consequences tied to the same. The first common and rather prominent signifier of any queer identity that we would like to explore is, the fashion that the community endorses and proudly accepts as part of the expression of their identity. The queer community is an active recipient of fashion, but it is important to observe the difference or lack thereof of the consumption patterns of Savarna queers and Dalit Bahujan queers. While Savarna queers use their privilege and subsequent agency to influence, shape, and actively reinforce the dominant culture's practices for all queer people, there is a consequential suppression of the representation of the Dalit Bahujan queer culture. Even through our understanding of these differences, it is important to note that consumption of fashion is just one aspect of comparison that we have used and in no way are we assuming or propagating the fact that fashion or consumption is the core of queer identity. However, because of the dominant culture influenced by Savarna agency, it is essential to understand that fashion consumption is a fundamental instrument of the journey from the closet and out of it for many queer people; for it is a street of acceptance into the community for them. This is made apparent in Clarke and Turner's (2007) study about fashion expression of LGB individuals where it was observed that there is strict policing of appearances based on appearance norms of the community and individuals conform in order to feel more accepted.

Fashion statements and visual representation of queer identity are of particular importance to examine the difference of Dalit Bahujan queer expression. It is often observed that several recently out of the closet queers conform to appearance norms more than relatively more secure queer individuals who have come out for a while (Clarke and Turner, 2007), and are now comfortable in their individuality, of which their sexual orientation is only one aspect. It is an expression of comfort in one's own skin and being; and more importantly a signifier for reading one's sexuality. As this involves the consumption of mainstream or at times high-end fashion, a privilege not easily available to Dalit Bahujan queers, it consequently results in furthering their marginalization. Moreover, if the fashion as propagated by the dominant culture is

The exclusion of Dalit Queer identities from the Pride bandwagon
*Anthea Lobo*

something which the Dalit Bahujan queer cannot relate to, in terms of expressing their social capital, through socio-economic status, sex, ideology i.e. capitalist, socialist, or communist and political representation that they have been subject to, it leads to the formation of an incomplete and alienated identity. This is not a natural phenomenon, and Savarna queers do not have to undergo this because they are the ones who make the dominant culture and set the trend for others to follow. The media too, focuses only on representation of Savarna queer people. How often have we come across popular media representation of queers other than the ones in cosmopolitan cities, clad in super niche, high-end fashion accessories and more often than not nothing but as fashion designers?

The Indian society is historically characterized by vertical stratification of the diversity that it pompously propagates. The queer space of the country is no less bereft of one's caste location, as any other component of an identity, highly governed by the amount of privilege that one is subject to. This is evident from the ratio of representation in mainstream culture and how it is dominated by the Savarnas. A lot of the speaking and listening is still controlled by Savarnas in the queer space; and as a consequence, or perhaps as part of their objective, Dalit Bahujan queers are almost always side-lined and suppressed. Their voices are not expressed on the same scale as the Savarna voices and hence require a greater effort to amplify.

It is important to consider why these voices are suppressed; it perhaps stems from the effectiveness of articulation as well. The way Savarnas articulate their demands is starkly different from the articulation that integrates the various components of a Dalit consciousness. Since the queer space is dominated by openly out Savarnas, their language is spoken and understood, leading to the double marginalization of the Dalit Bahujan queer experience. Queer literature is largely dominated by Savarna narratives like Mitrachi Goshta by Vijay Tendulkar, a play (1981) which depicts a same-sex romance set in the 1940s between two college going women. We cannot dismiss the fact that Dalit Bahujan queer people existed even then, there was just a clear disparity in the accounting of their intersectional lived experiences; and to that extent a rejection of their intersectional lives as well, in the mainstream media at least. Owing to the fact that the caste identity played a pressing role in the expression of queerness, several Dalit Bahujan queers still find it safer to come out as queer before embracing their caste identity in public; because the Savarna consciousness is more receptive

to the former than the latter (Vyas, 2018). This is just one way in which Dalit Bahujan queers are made to compromise in accepting and expressing their complete identity. When a Dalit Bahujan queer chooses coming out of the closet over declaring their Dalit Bahujan identity, it is important to understand why this fear still heavily shadows their expression, their consumption, and their choices as a whole. Many a time it is the fear of being associated to a particular way of life, as depicted by the media, as propagated by the Savarnas, and more often than not, as followed by the old folk of the Dalit Bahujan queer's families themselves.

What poses as a contradiction is that even after receiving due acceptance for their queer identity, Dalit Bahujan queers struggle to embrace their caste identity, which cannot be dismissed because everything from access to recognition to demands and needs are experienced by them at an intersection. An intersection which imposes two marginalized, minority identities on them, at once. The struggle and need for representation stems from an immense urge to break out of the shackles that the Dalit Bahujan stereotype imposes on them and the fear of choosing which box to fit in, as dictated by of course, the Savarna intellect. It imposes a fear of what choice to make, to embrace the identity and practice rational free will, or to remain under a disguise because it is easier to do so, or to embrace the Dalit Bahujan identity and then bear the risk of having to be a certain way, as dictated by their caste consciousness and pop culture. Of all possible combinations of these choices, one such combination is being Dalit and queer, and having absolutely no space to find expression for this sense of self that develops over an intersection.

Such representation is not a problem when thought of in the context of one's caste identity. It is only such representation which is a problem when it results in dismissing the culture and value systems of an entire community of people. As for the effectiveness of the social movement, it is always going to be difficult to push against social structures, especially when contradictory norms prevail. However, the decision to choose its integrity to its cause over the pressure to partially conform to and in this case, even reproduce social hierarchies to be deemed valid by the very structural norms they are fighting against, is a complex one but ideally an obvious one too. A movement cannot be incisive without the people fighting for it, all of the people and all of each of those people; their caste, class, and gender identity and sexual orientation alike. The LGBTQ+ movement in India being largely an elite enterprise of affluent Savarnas with their lavish parades, is reflective not of a social movement for the rights of its people, but rather a queer obsession with caste that disqualifies the Dalit Bahujan queer experience and this Savarna expression in our opinion, warrants a DQ.

As for this article we hope you do not DQ it because it is two Savarna, cis-het authors writing it, for this is not a claim to be a voice for Dalit Bahujan queers but a call for all Savarnas to look into the casteist nature of our progressive societies.

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# 21. THE ACE OF HEARTS: EXPLORING ASEXUALITY IN MODERN SOCIETY

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*This article delves into the status and experiences of asexuals in modern society; by constructing a historical progression of social standards that explores the attitudes towards intercourse and relationships in various eras, we may better understand the modern conception of sexuality and the dynamics of asexual engagement with these norms. Through a fusion of established theories and new research into asexuals, we can gauge the degree to which asexuals fit into or disprove traditional ideas of 'love'; leading into a variety of important questions that shall define the future of studies on the topic of sexuality and challenge our notions thereof.*

Sex has always played a vital role in the shaping of culture and society, but occupies a particularly intriguing position in modern Western liberal democracies. While it still retains some measure of its 'scandalous' connotations borne from the Victorian times, there's also a general liberalization that enables sexual content to be portrayed with large degrees of freedom in mass media and advertising. To that end, society is saturated with sexual imagery, ranging from well-loved sitcom characters who have a conveyer belt of weekly partners to hyper-sexualization as a means of marketing. We may see this as symbolizing a compulsory sexuality, a veritable hegemony that aims to glorify the act of sex, and while heteronormativity is the primary impetus, even queer movements embrace flamboyant expressions of sexual desire and love. In short, anyone who doesn't engage in sexual activity or lacks even the bare minimum of arous seen as deviant and is alienated in myriad ways. This article therefore attempts to explore the intersection of this sexualized hegemony with the experience of asexuals in modern society.

First, let us establish a rudimentary timeline of sexual standards. Foucault (1979) describes the fusion of necessity and power that drove the 'deployment of sexuality', creating different ideals of sexual behavior based on social circumstances. Prior to the modern era, sex occupied a largely pragmatic role, performed within marriage as a means of ensuring hereditary inheritance and also maximizing field labor or apprentices to familial professions. Chastity was valorized by the aristocrats who looked to distance themselves from the 'vulgarity' of the masses and also avoid an overabundance of prospective heirs to their fiefdoms. After the rise of the industrial age and the Victorian era, overpopulation as a result of migrants flooding into slow-expanding cities led to the creation of a middle class below the bourgeoise who aimed to imitate the ideals of the upper classes, while also reducing the costs brought on by an offspring. Ideals of purity and monogamous love fostered by Europe's chivalric traditions still persisted amongst the elites despite the increasing cynicism and individualization spreading through the continent as a result of capitalistic alienation.

Governments controlled not only population rates, but also the standards, expectations and preferences of the masses by controlling sexuality; cultivating hegemonies of the 'right' way to fall in love and reproduce. Moving from the Catholic tradition of the confessional where all 'sinful' thoughts were revealed to the dominant clergy to institutionalized legal systems that banned homosexuality or gave benefits to married couples, a system of privileges and disabilities could thus guide sexuality in the requisite ways. However, the emergence of the United States as a global power marked a change in sexual standards under entirely different circumstances. While the ideals of England were still adhered to in high society, particularly in cities like New York and Boston, the general culture of America prioritized free thought and emancipation. The need to populate and cultivate a massive new nation fostered an age of sexual awakening, especially in the Progressive Era, and the value placed on 'choice' in American culture led to the rise of 'dating',

marking the freedom to pick and choose partners. USA's position as capitalism's prime representative led to the generation of consumerist attitudes even in romance and sex. Staffan Ladner (1970) observed the acceleration of social life caused by rapid economic development, making interactions far more businesslike- the obtainment of maximum gratification for the lowest 'price' in terms of both time and emotional investment. Thus, the 'first three dates' system signaled reduced gatekeeping before sex, further decreased to the point of nonexistence by the rise of hookup culture and one-night-stands.

City life with hectic work schedules necessitates a clear divide between 'business' and 'pleasure', and while sex still retains its symbolic status as a proof of virility, popularity and the ability to procure mates, it has largely been divorced of any long-term obligations such as childbearing. As per capitalist attitudes, sex is quantified as a marker of 'productivity', so those that regularly have sex can seek validation. Romance and true love are relegated to the realms of fantasy and sex is thus ironically considered more reliable- a source of quick physical pleasure where the 'quantity' of partners is an easier metric than the 'quality' of a relationship. This is facilitated by sexualized enculturation from advertisements and media, an increased availability of pornography, widespread use of contraceptives and a general consumerist focus on swift recreation (Heldman & Wade, 2010). In all of this, the asexual is alienated- whether it be the pressure to produce offspring in heterosexual marriages or the impetus to leap into the dating scene and indulge in a variety of liaisons, sexuality of the targeted kind is a must. Those who do not express such tendencies face twofold discrimination, being perceived as substandard by the heteronormative mainstream and also misunderstood by the queer community. Just as the trans community was long excluded from the queer movement, asexuals are often seen as 'privileged' as compared to homosexuals, since their lack of attraction supposedly translates into a lack of oppression and alienation- an assumption that is both inaccurate and toxic, turning the queer movement into a competition for protesting 'negative experiences' rather a platform for inclusion and leading to dire asexual erasure (Mosbergen, 2017).

Being defined by a lack of attraction rather the presence and directionality of it, the nature of asexuality challenges many entrenched ideas about arousal and sex. About 33% of asexuals are found to be in long-term relationships and have no issues with the expression of 'love' as it is popularly understood (Bogaert, 2012). While romantic attraction isn't as clearly defined as sexual desire, love is generally explained as a biological process intended to promote feelings of attachment between adult sexual partners so as to secure their support for the caring of a child (Hazan and Shaver, 1987). Whether this love is expressed as a prelude to sexual relationships or as a result of them to ensure continuity, the fact remains that love and sex are closely grouped along a timeline. Asexuality erases sex from the equation while still allowing for love, lending further legitimacy to constructivist and performative ideas of sexuality- the obligation for romance is internalized and pursued despite a lack of congruent desire.

This leads to interesting intersections with preexisting models, such as Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (Sternberg, 1986), which segregates the components of 'love' into passion (leading to sexual attraction and consummation), intimacy and commitment, positing that the interrelations between these three produce different forms of love. As per this model, asexual relationships would be classified under 'compassionate love', which is described as a 'long-term, committed friendship'. And yet we cannot declare that asexual relationships are bereft of passion- Sternberg himself speculates that the 'passion' criterion may depend on more factors than mere arousal, such as validation, domination or submissiveness. While passion is linked to intimacy on the rationale that physical gratification reinforces emotional bonds, one could reverse-engineer this to posit that intimacy might bolster passion as well, in the manner of the 'dating progresses into a full relationship' process. Alternately, we might argue that asexual couples feel 'passionate' about events that aren't limited to sex, such as the chance to be together after a long day at work or to embark on a long-anticipated romantic activity.

The conclusion here is that neatly defined geometrical or mathematical models of attraction aren't applicable to asexual relationships. What we need is a more holistic approach, taking into account factors beyond the personal and the physiological and accounting for their changeability. To that end, we might examine Sternberg's idea of love as a 'story' (Sternberg, 1995), building upon the nuances and gaps in the aforementioned triangular model. Rather than the result of delineated factors, this theory views love as a 'narrative' that people continuously elaborate, modify and recontextualize as a result of real-world events. Partners may view the same relationship as a different 'story' and act our certain roles accordingly,

moving towards 'endings' or satisfying 'themes'. The narrative depends upon a wide variety of factors, including the cultural background of the participants.

People are both active and passive in this regard, internalizing certain ideals of love from media and social expectations whilst tempering or polishing them over the course of lived experiences. We operate simultaneously as narrators and characters, and each event has a range of contexts that shift as we process them, selecting some while discarding others. Much like a prism that splits white light into a spectrum, we derive several reactions and feelings from objective occurrences, weaving these developments into the greater fabric of our tales. There is no 'universal measurement' of priorities in this theory, since the main criterion for change is the effect that the stories have upon our minds or lives. Passion may be a vital theme for some and a trivial detail for others, and they define their relationships accordingly. In this regard, while asexuals might be saddled with traditional love stories, they can rewrite them to fit their personal experiences and move towards whichever 'ending' that they desire. They are not 'unfit' for roles of any kind as long as the narrative is their own, since they'd seek out the kind of 'plot' that best serves their purposes. In this regard, they are not just controlled by the idea of love, but may exert their own control over it as well.

Asexuality occupies its own spectrum that is far too complex to be contained under a simplistic '+' in the LGBTQ+ banner. Thus, inadequately representing, aromantics who feel no impetus towards love (arguably complex enough to merit their own spectrum, particularly depending on how these perspectives intersect with biological desire); asexuals with heteroromantic or homoromantic inclinations, demisexuals who only feel sexual desire after forming strong emotional connections and even *autochorissexuals*, who have sexual fantasies and masturbate on occasion, but do not project themselves into the fantasies or see themselves as the subjects of sexual fantasies, merely exercising the biological functions of arousal and release without a real 'target' (Bogaert, 2012). Beyond this, there exist *gray asexuals*, occupying the boundary between the twin spectrums of sexuality and asexuality, or perhaps even highlighting the gaps generated by such a binary. This further ties into the desire-attraction dichotomy and highlights just how limited our ideas of sex can be when examined in context of lived experiences bereft of desire. Sexuality is not a number upon a scale, but a dense network of attractions and emotions that morphs in a variety of

Can the oppressed oppress?
*Rhea Vakharia*

psychosocial contexts, and lest there be individuals who lose themselves amidst this network with no means of understanding or navigation, we must chart the course of sexuality anew and question our preconceptions.

Asexuals present a virtual goldmine in terms of both physiological and psychosocial variations, while also being a massive community that deserves representation and awareness. Many are sufficiently integrated into mainstream understandings of sex to grasp things like sexual humor or the aesthetics of nudity in art, but also face the dilemmas of self-definition and loneliness due to constant bombardment with these ideas without a clear way to operationalize or completely identify with them. There also exists a tendency to pathologize asexuality as a defect and view it as biologically unfeasible, which stigmatizes and trivializes the experiences of asexuals. While there do exist cases where a lack of desire could be traced to hormonal imbalances, anxiety or deep-set trauma, the greater phenomenon of asexuality is still too complicated to be reduced to a simple cause-and-effect relation. One of the central purposes of the asexuality movement is to prove that asexuals aren't missing anything, and the drive for asexual identity represents a desire to be recognized as people with the right to live their lives and be non-sexual as per their choices and preferences (Gressgard, 2013). Simply put, they aren't celibates who abstain from choice or machines with no drive for affection, but individuals with distinct forms of lifestyles, perspectives and social behavior, shaped by both their internal and external circumstances. In this regard, recognition and research is vital in the field of asexuality to expand horizons for research in general and queer studies in particular.

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# 22. MORE MOM, DOUBLE DAD: SAME SEX PARENTING

ISHA PUNTAMBEKAR
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*Adoption and surrogacy has always been an uphill battle for aspiring parents of the LGBTQ+ community. Their fitness as parents has been relentlessly called into question, simply because of their sexual orientation. Since the late 20th century, as sperm banks opened their doors to lesbian parents and gay adoption was legalized in the US, the debate about whether children's psychological adjustment is affected by varied family structures has lingered on the socio- political horizon. With the increase in the number of families with same sex parents, a number of studies have been carried out to put this question to rest. There is overwhelming empirical evidence to conclude that children raised in same sex unions are not at a developmental or an adjustmental disadvantage compared to their peers raised in heterosexual families. Yet, the stigma persists. Adherence to gender roles and heteronormative ideals of familial conventions as well as potential socioeconomic disparities between homosexual and heterosexual families contribute to this stigma. With increasing public awareness and media visibility, people's attitudes are changing for the better.*

It has been argued that parenthood for homosexual couples is more difficult to achieve than it is for heterosexual couples. It certainly cannot be unplanned or accidental, as a result of failure of birth control. Same sex couples become parents through prior heterosexual relationships, adoption, donor insemination or surrogacy (Allen, Pakaluk, & Price, 2013). Adoption and surrogacy has always been an uphill battle for aspiring parents of the LGBTQ+ community. Their fitness as parents has been relentlessly called into question, simply because of their sexual orientation. For example, until 2008, Florida had a law banning same sex parents from adopting. The state appointed case experts claimed that homosexual unions were more unstable than heterosexual unions, with higher incidence of alcohol and drug indulgence in case of the former (Averett, Nalavany, & Ryan, 2009). Several states in Southern and Western Australia do not extend any legal custody of the child to the male non-biological same sex parents while limited custody is granted to the female non biological same sex parents(Webb, Chonody, & Kavanagh, 2017). The Indian Surrogacy Regulation Bill 2019 excludes homosexual couples among other non-traditional forms of family including live-in couples and single parents from opting for surrogacy, restricting access to legally married heterosexual couples ("Lok Sabha passes Surrogacy Bill", 2019).

Since the late 20th century, as sperm banks opened their doors to lesbian parents and gay adoption was legalized in the US, the debate about whether children's psychological adjustment is affected by varied family structures has lingered on the socio-political horizon (Bos et al.). With the increase in the number of families with same sex parents, a number of studies have been carried out to put this question to rest. Patricia Morgan in her 2002 right wing Christian discourse Children as trophies? Examining the evidence on same sex parenting exposes a fundamental potential source of prejudice against same sex families. Morgan believes that the 'right' to have a child is reserved be naturally 'generative' (heterosexual) forms of coupling, capable of 'normal reproductive processes'. Homosexual parents wish to acquire children in order to derive the benefits of what she calls a pseudo-heterosexual imitation of normality (Hicks, 2005) particularly in their gender and sexual identity. The author considers two examples, a UK Christian discourse opposed to all forms of lesbian and gay parenting and a US liberal equality approach, represented by the work of Stacey and Biblarz (2001 These 'pretend' families are perceived as impersonal, illicit and unnatural unions that pose a threat to familial conventions of blood ties and kinship. Moreover, they are regarded as a poor imitation of the 'real' families, characterized by biological parent-child bonds as well as legally recognized marital relations (Hicks, 2006). The arguments about why same sex parenting is harmful for children generally revolve around the same few points;

deprivation of the benefits of gender complementarity, a-typical gender development (homosexuality begets homosexuality as far as they're concerned), emotional maladjustment, social vulnerability, even delinquency in children (Fitzgibbons, 2015).

Wainright conducted the first comparative study between adolescents from same-sex and different sex families using the data obtained from National Longitudinal Study of adolescent health. His study found out that adolescents showed no difference in functioning regardless of the family types. The relationship of the children with their parents determined their school outcomes and not the gender of their parents. (Bos et al.). Farr and Patterson (2013) found no correlation between co-parenting and social adjustment of children in homosexual and heterosexual couples in their cross-sectional study (Muñoz-Martínez, 2016). Research under Australian Study of Child Health in Same-Sex parents (ASCHESS) reported similar results. However, they pointed out that the perceived stigma against the off-springs of same sex parents played a vital role in children's mental health. (Muñoz-Martínez). Moreover, a cross-sectional study carried out in the UK revealed that same sex parents were rated better in the quality parent-child interactions, while behavioural and conduct related problems were found more frequently in children with heterosexual-parents. It would be safe to assert that an extensive body of research has conclusively proved that children from homosexual families are not at a developmental or adjustmental disadvantage. Moreover, the aforementioned difficulties in achieving parenthood for same sex couples implies a strong selection effect. It has been suggested that, if same sex couples have to work harder than heterosexual couples to become parents, perhaps they are, on an average, more dedicated as parents compared to their heterosexual counterparts, which in turn, can only be beneficial for the children (Allen et al., 2013). Yet, the stigma persists.

Parenting is still parenting without heteronormative boundaries.
*Rakshita Deshmukh*

According to Herek (2009), stigma "refers to the negative regard and inferior status that society collectively accords to people who possess a particular characteristic or belong to a particular group or category." Sexual stigma, in this case, is the shared belief that same gender relationships are deviant, relative to heterosexuality. This internalized belief is manifested and endorsed in terms of a set of negative evaluations of homosexual individuals, leading to sexual prejudice. At an individual level, this sexual prejudice is referred to as homophobia. Most commonly identified predictors of sexual prejudice include demographic characteristics such as age, gender, level of education, place of residence as well as personality characteristics such as religiosity and political conservatism. Another important predictor is the perception of controllability of homosexuality, that is, the notion that homosexual behaviour is a choice (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2019).

In order to understand the prejudice against same sex parents, it is important to evaluate the roots of prejudice against same sex couples in general. According to the social role theory, men and women are expected to adhere to certain roles based on norms determined by biological sex and power differentials between the sexes. Women, traditionally viewed as the nurturers, are expected to engage in behaviour viewed as typically feminine, such as cooking and cleaning. Men, traditionally viewed as the providers, are expected to complement the opposite sex and engage in behaviour viewed as typically masculine, including working outside of home and leadership. People who violate this social norms are subject to ridicule, ostracization and risk economic as well as social penalties (Webb, Chonody, & Kavanagh, 2018). Research has consistently found gender differences in

attitudes towards sexual minorities. Webb and Chodony in their 2014 literature review, found that heterosexual males harboured a significantly more negative attitude towards gay men than lesbian women, possibly due to the fact that the latter have historically been viewed as socially acceptable, erotic, fodder for sexual fantasies. On the contrary, hypermasculine cultures persecute gay men for being 'feminine', as a means of affirming their own masculinity (Webb et al., 2017). This ideology percolates into social attitudes regarding same sex parenting. The social stigma against same sex parenting is further altered by the gender of the same sex couple. Studies have shown that lesbian adoption is supported more often than gay adoption. This is because lesbian mothers are still women, perceived to be naturally skilled at parenting and nurturing their children. Gay fathers are seen as violating the masculine norms to a greater extent as compared to lesbian mothers. Hence, they are seen as more detrimental to children's understanding of gender roles (Webb et al., 2017).

Gender roles are assumed to have a direct impact on children's gender performance and sexuality. The heteronormative society firmly believes that children need a mother and a father who adhere to the traditional gender roles prescribed by the society. Division of responsibility in heterosexual couples is traditionally determined by biological sex and gender roles. Same sex couples violate this gendered family structure with a more flexible division of responsibility and hence face prejudice (Webb et al., 2018). Thus, 'deprivation of benefits of gender complementarity' is just a clever way of saying that the society does not want its children deviating from traditional gender roles. God forbid they learn behaviour deemed unsuitable for their biological gender or fail to develop as heterosexuals themselves (Vitelli, 2013).

Socio-economic disparities between children raised by same sex couples and children being raised by different sex couples is an important marker of child wellbeing in same sex unions. Legally married couples are understood to have more socioeconomic resources (benefits of tax incentives, pooled income and so on) compared to co-habiting families. Higher financial resources are directly related to better education, access to health services etc. In case of same sex couples, their access to socioeconomic resources is restricted due to institutional disenfranchisement such as lack of legal benefits of marriage, discrimination in employment and hiring practices, unequal pay etc. resulting in lower annual income (Usselman, 2017). Moreover, homophobic treatment in schools and communities is an additional threat to social adjustment of children with same-sex parents. A 2008 US study revealed that 40% of children raised by sexual minority parents reported some form of harassment ranging from bullying to micro-aggressions and verbal abuse. Long term effects of such forms of harassment include internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems such as emotional outbursts, attention and sleep related issues (Vitelli, 2014).

Truth is, this was never about the children. The prejudice against same sex parenting, like every other prejudice, comes from the ruthless tendency to eliminate deviation from convention. A child's upbringing shapes his personality and future relationships. Slightest missteps in parenting can result in dire consequences. If all parents received the same level of scrutiny that same sex parents do, perhaps we could prevent the emotional maladjustment, delinquency and whatever else same sex parenting supposedly causes. There is sufficient empirical evidence to conclude that the only real threat to the wellbeing of children raised in same sex unions stems from institutional and social stigma and the resulting prejudice. But instead of using lack of social acceptance as an ammunition to further a baseless, homphobic agenda, perhaps as a society, we should be trying to fix it.

The situation is not as grim as it seems, however. With increasing public awareness and media visibility, people's attitudes are changing for the better. Celebrities like Neil Patrick Harris or Ryan Murphy, by choosing to celebrate their families on social media, have paved way for acceptance. Sanna Marin, a Finnish politician set to be the youngest Prime Minister at the age of 34, has been vocal about her rainbow family and the challenges she faced growing up ("World's youngest PM Sanna Marin is a working mother, raised by same-sex parents", 2019). The entertainment industry has made some significant strides in portrayal of same sex families during the last decade. Characters like Carol and Susan (Friends), Mitchel and Cameron (Modern Family), Callie and Arizona (Grey's Anatomy) and many others have affected a major cultural shift towards convincing their audience that same sex parents are no different from the straight ones. According to a 2012 Hollywood reporter poll, 27% of the viewers reported that depiction of gay characters on television has made them pro-gay marriage (Kornhaber, 2015). Although some of these television series have sparked debates about problematic, stereotypical portrayal of same sex households, any

depiction of homosexuality encourages other television networks to take chance on similar series, which in turn, helps increase diversity and representation popular culture. Needless to say, it is an important first step.

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# 23. INCLUSIVE PUBLIC POLICY

VANI SHARMA
EDITED BY: SARA MARIA VARGHESE

*By amending Section 377, the Supreme Court had delivered a powerful riposte against the institutionalised disgust and contempt aimed directly at the LGBTQ+ community in India. Today, more than a year after this judgment the question remains - has is it been enough? The longer we delay the construction of laws that tackles homophobia and transphobia, the greater the toll it will take on the LGBTQ+ members. There are loopholes that need to be addressed. With the advent of The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019 and The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act what creates doubt is that, is our government willing to stitch these loopholes?*

Every Indian knows the words that constitute the preamble of our Constitution; but whether the tenets of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity are followed not just on paper but in spirit as well requires introspection, and investigation. These principles were designed not keeping the majority in mind, but the oppressed minorities and the subaltern (Zahariadis, 1999). When seen in this context these words sound like an oxymoron, especially in this current milieu. The perpetuation of multiple systematic methods of marginalization destroys the ability of the said section of people to question the systems which have imposed these shackles on them (Sharma, 2008). The LGBTQ+ community carries upon itself a history of ostracization, and stands at a delicate point of time where it has to counter stereotypes from multiple spheres, by carving out its own space and narratives from the debris[1].

Betwixt the reality of hatred, the increasing global emphasis on human rights in the past few decades has spun into propulsion, advocacy and activism aiming to eradicate lop-sided hierarchies of existence. The demands of the LGBTQ+ no longer reverberate off in a deafening silence, as there are generations of people who are fighting to make this country a more inclusive environment for all of its citizens.

With the amendment of Section 377 of the IPC in September 2018, marking the criminalisation of the LGBTQ+ as unconstitutional, India witnessed a hallmark judgement. Reversing a relic of British oppression; the court created history by also ordering that LGBTQ+ Indian citizens be accorded all the protections of their constitution, but today, over a year after this judgment, the predicament is – is this enough? Rights like the freedom of marriage and divorce, or protection from abuse, continue to remain in a haze. A careful review of debates over gay rights Bamforth (1997) reveals the influence of various attributions on this sphere of public policy. Public opinion studies have consistently revealed that while traditional prejudice toward minorities has declined over time, support for policies that would reduce inequality has not increased in magnitude in American society (Bobo, 1988).

Utilising a similar approach on the Indian landscape, one can conclude that anti-LGBTQ+ laws stem from the socio-cultural fabric of the nation. It thus becomes imperative to question patriarchy, heteronormativity and homophobia by engaging in dialogue with society itself (Sharma, 2008). This is crucial from the perspective of agenda setting; as any intuitive investment in the process of initiating such a dialogue will only extend resources on multiple levels. It wouldn't be limited to just raising awareness, but would also include rehabilitation of people to review and revisit their own stereotypes and myths, assistance to those who find it difficult to conform to the structures of hegemonic heterosexuality and thereby enable an informed choice regarding their own thoughts and actions. Eventually, such a process

1 As a community, their status started degrading when the British rolled out the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871 which particularly targeted their existence. The Act was repealed in 1952, but the damage it caused is still visible. Transgenders, for the first time, were identified as the third sex only in the 2011 Census.

The law has evolved smashing conventionality yet creating more ambiguity.
*Rakshita Deshmukh*

can be instrumental in developing a 'national disposition' that allows for a constructive discourse about sexual diversity.

Pluralisation of sexuality is important to challenge popular prejudice in order to make allies of people who may not identify as queer. Hence, the moods and motivations of people do matter, especially in a diverse democracy like ours. In this political schema, the country's polity will cease to cater to *all* of its citizens, unless the inherent empathy and responsibility between the citizens themselves does not exist.

Along this trajectory of thought, the sociological perspective which deems public policy as the means that the government uses to intervene in a society to bring about change; is perceived to be for the common good of that society. The central assumption of this view would reflect a liberal-democratic bias that policy is a prescriptive mechanism designed by elected representatives and implemented in a subordinate manner by public officials (Ham & Hill, 1984). Policy decisions are thus equated with policy actions. The key to understanding this perspective would be to see the association of the state and its citizens through the lens of key concepts like control and compliance.

Despite having politicians like Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Priya Dutt, and Poonam Mahajan (Pink List India, 2019) who have spoken up in support of the community, the Congress and BJP manifestos mentioning their intentions to streamline the LGBTQ+ integration, is the parliament a friendly place for the community? How you acknowledge a community, shows how much you care about their welfare. The derogatory vocabulary that BJP has used to describe the LGBTQ+ community and the hurried passing of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 and Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019 in the Lok Sabha, almost in continuation with the Kashmir 'verdict' speaks volumes.

The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019, which has passed in the Lok Sabha, imposes morality by limiting a family to the confines of a heterosexual marriage. With commercial surrogacy heavily regulated in many western countries, India had become a hub for the same and undeniably several incidents of women being exploited or coerced have been reported (Ghosal, 2018). However, this bill is a shrewd attempt to end such exploitation and bring regulation into the realm of 'altruistic surrogacy' while completely banning commercial surrogacy. Experts argue that the bill is inflexible and privileged an 'archaic family system' that is not in sync with present realities (Ghosal, 2018). The parliamentary committee, for instance, that analysed the bill had opposed an outright ban, arguing that the bill in the present form was 'moralistic'. Harish Iyer, Queer India, added that the lack of consideration given to the LGBTQ community resulted in the "denial of equal rights" for the community and argued that the bill was "highly prejudiced". He said, "If the sole intention had been protecting the rights of surrogate mothers and to steer against making wombs-on-rent a norm, there would have been a plan to rehabilitate and integrate surrogate moms into our societal framework. There is no plan whatsoever in this direction. Instead, we get a bill that almost brings surrogacy to a standstill" (Ghosal, 2018).

Furthermore, the ill-intentions of the state are exhibited in the passing of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in the Lok Sabha and then in the Rajya Sabha on 26th November. The transgender community in India refers to this day as the 'Gender Justice Murder Day'. To begin with, activists pointed out that it is inappropriate to include the intersex community in the definition of

transgenders, which the bill does. Additionally, the rights of transgender citizens are diluted; there is absolutely no discussion regarding reservations in public jobs and educational institutes. Alarmingly, the penalty for raping transgenders ranges from just six months to two years in stark contrast to the seven years to life imprisonment awarded for raping a cis-gendered woman. The community has raised a concern that crimes against them are considered and penalised as mere petty crimes. Finally, and most importantly, the act recommends one national level committee consisting of only five representatives from the transgender community, in a committee of thirty members. This is a blatantly unfair representation of the transgender population.

As far as public policy goes, starting from one single vote right to the parchment being passed around in the legislative assembly, each cog matters. The Multiple Streams approach is appropriate in disassembling the entire mechanism that operates behind systematic discrimination. It refers to an approach that attempts to understand how policies are made by understanding agenda setting (Kingdon, 1984). According to Kingdon, there are three main process streams – problems, policies and politics; that are flowing within the system which determine which issues are accepted for negotiation. Many ideas that may approach the same issue from different perspectives are just hovering about, for the attention of the policymakers at any given time (Kingdon, 1984). Out of the large spectrum, only a few receive the attention of the policymakers and even fewer are selected for action (Kingdon, 1984). In this scenario, while the problem areas have been identified, both the bills are very tokenistic in engaging with their solutions. For example, the only data used to make the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 is nine years old (Census 2011) which is not inclusive of several parameters like educational background or income status, etc (Nambiar,2018). So how does this Bill intend to empower a section of people without knowing their present condition?

Overall, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 is the only one that is even aiming at talking about LGBTQ+ rights, however it still lacks the means to achieve them. The right to residence, the prohibition of discrimination, inclusive education, livelihood, protection at the workplace, and healthcare are discussed but how it will happen is missing. Without the inclusion of the suggested amendments, instead of social, economic, and educational empowerment, the bill will only result in anguish against the government among the community members; as is being witnessed in reaction to the passage of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (Reddy, 2019).

Out of the 8% of our population (Reddy, 2019) that belongs to the LGBTQ+ community, most have to wake up to face a warped reality; one where society is disgusted by their birth and doesn't just verbally discriminate against them, but rather subjects them to bigotry, cruelty and unthinkable physical abuse. To top this, even when they are wronged against, they don't have the means to report it. A 2003 report by a civil liberties group in Bangalore narrates a gruesome testimony of a hijra sex worker who was first gang-raped by a group of men and then gang-raped by the police (PUCL-K, 2003). Hence, there should be an urgency to make provisions in the IPC that make these laws gender neutral, and inclusive of all people; because whether an individual identifies as male, female or transgender, everyone is vulnerable to assault, sexual violence, and rape. For true equality to prevail, these rights must be explicitly and fully extended to LGBTQ+ people; because violence in this world identifies weak cogs in the society and then attacks. Justice Indu Malhotra appropriately articulated during the Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. v. Union of India, 2018 judgement, "history owes an apology to the members of this community and their families" (Rajagopal, 2018). With individuals being subjected to 'corrective' rape, corporates clearly ousting the community, and the system of insensitivity that has rendered the eyes of law (a.k.a. the police) to be blind – the gravity of the situation is pressing. The longer we delay construction of laws that tackle homophobia and transphobia, the greater the toll it will take on the mental health of the LGBTQ+ members. We need laws that address the ambiguity surrounding issues like queer marriage and adoption rights; and also delve into the constitutional complications of nominating your same sex partner for insurance (that can be easily contested by any family member) (Shekhar, 2019). There are loopholes and we need to fill them out. But the larger question that creates doubt, lies in whether our government is willing to stitch these loopholes?

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# 24. THE RAINBOW BUSINESS

AUREA FALCO & SANJANA GANDHI
EDITED BY: VANSHIKA JAIN

*In this paper, we will be exploring the concept of Rainbow Capitalism wherein a plethora of MNCs use the rainbow flag on their marketing collateral in order to strategize their business growth. We also aim to explore the thin line between 'support' and 'pink-washing' by accentuating the extent to which neoliberalism produced a market-mediated and consumer-driven visibility by alluding to different brands and marketing strategies that will help us see through blatant pandering and social progressivism.*

The concept of capitalism is built on the notion of accumulating wealth and is a macroscopic economic system dependent on the tensions between demand and supply forces in the market. The fundamentals of capitalism are thus based on the dynamics of the relation between demand and supply which has the undertones of intentional and structural imbalances. Neoliberal capitalism, a phase of capitalism where restrictions on the global flow of commodities and capital, including capital in the form of finance have been substantially removed, impacts the construction of queer identity by replicating exclusionary hierarchies of power inherent in capitalism within queer communities and individuals. Due to such inequality being weaved in the fabric of capitalism, it ceases to exist sans an imbalance and inaccessibility to resources.

Another important concept is that of identity formation which is both an emergent process of self-discovery and self-identification, as well as a constructed response process to culture (Cathers, 2017). Sexual orientation, physical or emotional attraction to a particular gender or gender identity, is considered an inherent process, but the parameters by which an individual may satisfy and express this attraction are culturally defined and influenced (Burnes, 2014).

Rainbow Capitalism aka Pink Capitalism is a subgenre of a capitalist economy engulfing the LGBTQIA+ population under its belt as current or potential customers (Yeh, 2018). It essentially connotes the practice of businesses creating products specifically marketed towards the queer community, in order to capitalize off and leverage their purchasing power. While it is important to gain cognizance of the fact that this hypocrisy exists since we live in a world teeming with consumerism, we also cannot deny the fact that celebrating pride has transmogrified into a sort of marketing gimmick. People indulge in this bandwagon in order to promulgate performative allyship via purchased goods rather than activism. However, there are a myriad of companies who celebrate pride, not just by splattering rainbow colours on their products but by embracing the notions of love, equality and diversity, thereby helping and supporting the LGBTQ non-profit organisations.

For instance, in 2019, the Converse Pride Collection featured a variety of Pride symbols tinted with pride colours whose proceeds would benefit LGBT groups like the It Gets Better Project and OUT MetroWest. Even Disney's The Rainbow Disney collection offers more than 50 products, including ringer tees, jewellery, backpacks and rainbow Mickey Mouse ears whose proceeds help GLSEN, a non-profit organisation established to provide a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ students.

Besides, Nike, American Eagle, Absolut and Banana Republic are a few firms championing the LGBTQIA+ community rights and giving back to the community. However, one cannot eliminate the fact that most of the LGBTQIA+ movements have become increasingly corporatized due to which pride has now changed to capitalism with a pink hue as the pride parades are often dominated by big business sponsors and floats, vote-seeking politicians and state agents such as the police, who brag about their LGBTQIA+ inclusiveness.

One such example is Adidas' campaign of the "pride pack" to honour Pride month, also one of the major sponsors for this year's World Cup held in Russia. The

contradiction comes into play with the realization that Russia is a country with anti – LGBTQIA+ laws that bring forth the sheer emptiness that lies at the centre of corporate gestures of "support" for the community. It is easier to show support for the LGBTQIA+ community by changing your logo or by buying a shirt rather than addressing the deeper issues we perpetuate. While it is important to understand that it is a step forward in spreading awareness, it is imperative to know where the money is going and whether capitalist corporations are taking any measures to benefit the community.

Marketing targeted towards the LGBTQIA+ community is also one of the major forms of Pink Capitalism. Several companies economically exploit the LGBTQIA+ community's self-expression through their production of pinkwashed items. They cater to the LGBTQIA+ community by splattering the colours of the rainbow since it makes financial sense. Thus, rainbow capitalism is essentially practised to capitalize off the purchasing power (pink money) that queer people have by indulging into pinkwashing.

The term Pinkwashing is a portmanteau of "pink" and "whitewashing" which in the context of the LGBTQIA+ community, essentially delineates the promotion of the gay-friendliness of a corporate or political entity in an attempt to be perceived as progressive, modern and tolerant. One can find a plethora of examples wherein corporates and political entities have involved into pinkwashing. Evident examples can be found in local or international LGBTQIA+ magazines or other offline/ online platforms, such as Têtu and Shangay - two main gay magazines respectively in France and Spain. (Yeh, 2018)

However, on the other hand companies, including H&M, donate a portion of what their customers spend on pride merchandise to LGBTQIA+ charities. The amount going to charity varies by the company and product: J. Crew donates 50 percent of the purchase price of its pride T-shirts; H&M only donates 10 percent of the sales from its "Pride Out Loud" collection. So, money going to LGBTQIA+ charities are a good thing, right? In the abstract, yes, but taken in aggregate, this consumerist donation structure creates a context of so-called slacktivism, giving brands and consumers alike a low-effort way to support social and political causes.

This brings us to the idea of looking at the rainbow flag as a symbol of freedom from occupation. Studying representation of a homophobic Palestine versus a gay-friendly Israel, it can be understood that the key words used to describe lives for gays in Palestine are "secretive", while gay lives in Israel are linked to "safety". The Israeli government uses pinkwashing to brand itself as tolerant and modern, while painting the rest of Middle East as backwards and violent. This same government simultaneously uses the sexuality of closeted LGBTQIA+ Palestinians to blackmail them into becoming informants. In this specific case, one can see the mobilisation of the rainbow flag for purposes other than promoting the LGBTQIA+ community. The rainbow flag as a global symbol is not only appropriated by the hegemonic power but also contributes to the decolonisation of the Palestinian queer and encompasses not only LGBTIQIA+ rights, but also the struggle against military occupation and for national independence and social justice.

Airbnb markets itself as a progressive and ethical alternative to the hotel industry, its actual impact is

Corporations support the community with campaigns and posters only to get their heaps of pink money.
*Rakshita Deshmukh*

much more sinister. It profits off the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by listing properties in the occupied West Bank, which is a war crime under international law.

Understanding the flag as a floating signifier illuminates the central role that places have in the creation and conflict over meaning, so radically so as those that have been standing for hours holding the rainbow flag as an expression of community and belonging now strongly endeavour to disidentify themselves from the same flag. By blending gay/lesbian-friendly elements in marketing campaigns like a splash of rainbow colours, seeking sponsorships of LGBTQIA+ organizations and events, or involving gay/lesbian couples in the commercials, helps create a self-identifiable association with their LGBTQIA+ customers. For instance, with the approving of same-sex marriages in the USA in 2006, a myriad of brands grabbed the opportunity and started syncing their campaigns to LGBTQIA+ elements, which not only showed support for LGBTQIA+ but also reinforced the gay/lesbian-friendly image among their customers.

In major cities in the world, nightlife and city tourism has become an integral part of urban lifestyle, and thus related business is logically viewed as an alternative profit-making logic. LGBTQIA+ specific business in this realm is emerging as well: gay and lesbian bars, nightclubs, themed restaurants and even gay hotels. In order to attract LGBTQIA+ customers, they make every possible means available, to incorporate theme-related elements into their business models. (Yeh, 2018)

Thus, with the rise of the gay rights movement, pink money has gone from being a fringe or marginalized market to a thriving industry in many parts of the Western world. LGBTQIA+ couples are DINK (Double income, no kids) couples who have fewer children than other groups and higher-than-average salaries, meaning plenty of disposable cash. Hence, pink money can bring billions of dollars to any economy if the spending power of queer population is activated. For instance, earlier, India was possibly throwing away more than $26 billion a year when it marginalised the LGBTQIA+ community. Now with the decriminalising of the Section 377, Indian markets are likely to benefit from the vast spending power of the queer community. This decriminalization of homosexuality has allowed the nascent gay culture to be embraced by all and thereby laid the foundation for the country's pink economy. This brings forth the problem with commodifying "awareness". While it may serve to raise money for a charitable cause, there's no guarantee that money will result in any sort of tangible outcome. It's nominal activism divorced from real action.

After the milestone judgement of scrapping section 377, a plethora of campaigns were projected in the face of the Indian queer community. A gazillion VIBGYOR brands and advertisements with nebular links to the LGBTQIA+ community have introduced stylised
merchant to fleece of the middle class in the name of pride. Moreover, every pride parade is meticulously altered to sync with the narrative that 'Love is love'. This support and celebration of pride doesn't actually help in materializing equality and inclusivity as it is just done to create more propaganda.

These arbitrary references to queer issues have arisen only after the decriminalization. Prior September 2018, gay narratives weren't even mentioned and businesses were the last pressure groups to wake to the needs of these community. Now, within legal tandem this process of global exploitation has unfolded to not propel the movement but to benefit of it. Majority of these companies fail to take articulated stands but rather paint a few rainbows here and there to show support.

However, visibility and its power cannot be undermined. LGBTQIA+ movement that is based on shared experiences of resistance and independence from powerful institutions, is being sucked back into its hold. It is hard to ignore the blackened hands that paint these rainbows. The question of being a true ally also comes into place, for the good intentions of these programs are severely doubtful if this rainbow capitalism hoards the space of unheard queer voices and takes the mic from queer narratives rather that echoing the fundamentals of this movement.

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# 25. THE QUEER FINANCIAL EXPERIENCE: EXPLORING LGBTQ MONEY

NIVEDHA KANNAN
EDITED BY: STUTI NABAZZA

*This research article examines the unique financial experience of the LGBTQ+ community in terms of their monetary transactions, investment options, wage policies and financial benefits. The aim is to explore the same in line with the United States and draw parallels to the Indian experience as well. it also explores policy recommendations and structural shifts to make this aspect of LGBTQ life more inclusive and holistic.*

*'The only queer people are those who don't love anybody.'*
- Rita Mae Brown

Any dialogue about the world and its people today would be incomplete if it does not encompass the LGBTQ+ community. The community stands as a significantly large contributor - socially, economically and culturally. It has holistically integrated itself into all realms of being and doing and has had an empowering transition from an era of persecution to an era of liberation. Though, today, we see a level of acceptance that would have been unimaginable in the 19th and 20th centuries, we must allow ourselves to look back upon how far we have come. Homosexuality never started at a fixed point in history. Historians agree that there is evidence of homosexual activity and same-sex love in every documented culture. ("History of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Social Movements", 2019). Across realities and cultures, this way of life came to be known, grown and communicated to the west through travellers' diaries and diplomats' churches.

The European colonizers of these nations enforced civil and criminal laws to curb what they thought was a severe deviation from the traditional heterosexual norm (Morris, 2020). In the United States, significant strides have been made in the LGBTQ+ community movements. The landmark Supreme Court ruling in 1954, Vermont's legalization of same sex marriages in 2000 and the 2015 Supreme Court declaration of same sex marriages as a Constitutional right nationwide were some of the major milestones of the community's movement. The Indian LGBTQ+ movement has been called "a rainbow of many fascinating hues". ("SAATHII: Genders and Sexualities > Calcutta > Indian LGBT Movement", 2019). It represents the rich diversity of all genders and cultures that exist in India, either overtly or covertly. In India, the movement gained fuel in the mid-1990s and since then, there have been calls for acceptance, respect and acknowledgement of the community all over the country. A landmark Supreme Court ruling in 2018 decriminalising Section 377 has been the latest feather in the cap of the community.

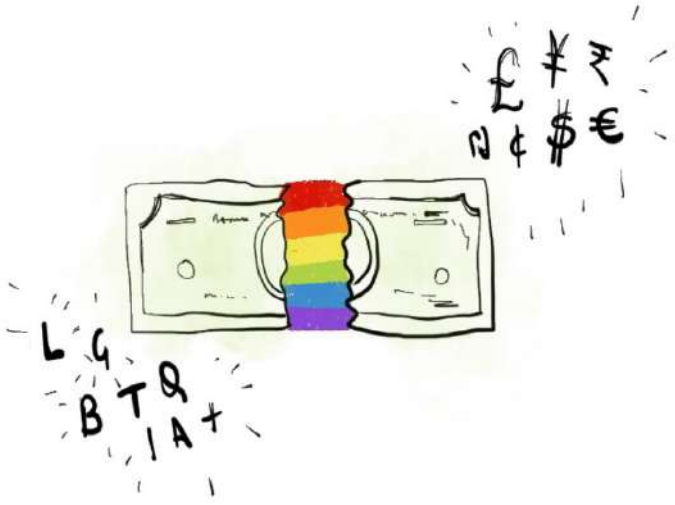
Social acceptance of the community is a process that has seen gradual change. But the society still lacks in terms of integrated financial acceptance. There is an implicit understanding that LGBT money is different than straight money. One would wonder how this divide creeps into an aspect as quantitative as monetary planning. Before proceeding to the analysis, it is essential to note that a broad generalisation of the community would be nothing short of a grave blunder. The diversity prevalent in the community only implies that the financial challenges faced by all of them are uniquely different. That being said, here are some broad problems faced by the community.

Wage gaps have threatened to damage the fabric of workplace equality since time immemorial. This differentiating practice is nothing but the murder of merit and real deserving. A similar scenario exists in the LGBTQ + realm. An LGBT male, on an average is paid $56,936 which is $26,533 less than the average heterosexual man's pay. ("5 financial challenges for the LGBTQ community and how to face them", 2019). A lesbian woman earns around $45,606—$5,855 less than heterosexual women ("5 financial challenges for

the LGBTQ community and how to face them", 2019). These pay gaps are accentuated by the fact that most LGBT individuals prefer to live in urban, fast developing areas that tend to be more accepting of the community, like New York or San Francisco (Magazine, 2019).

But this acceptance comes at a cost. These areas are characterised by high costs of living and high rents, utilities and daily spending requirements. A lower wage rate coupled with a higher cost of living is not a scenario conducive for financial stability and most LGBT individuals find themselves at this precipice, having to make tough choices that their straight counterparts would never have to dwell upon. The situation in the Indian subcontinent is worse off. The report by the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy highlights that the "workplace discrimination laws and maternity benefits laws fail to account for LGBTQ+ persons"(Ghoshal, 2020). India is yet to formulate an inclusive HR policy that provides room for acceptance and dialogue. The judicial provisions also do little when it comes to protecting a self-identifying member of the LGBTQI community from harassment. Even though the Transgender Bill has been passed by the Lok Sabha, there does not seem to be a lot that it can do in way of uplifting the community.

Finances do not involve only earning. Saving is as important to finances as the LGBT community is to the society. Ironically, the same community falls behind in this virtue. They struggle to save as compared to the general population, 34% v/s 28% ("5 financial challenges for the LGBTQ community and how to face them", 2019).




Capitalism sees pride as money
*Rhea Vakharia*

This has been attributed to the 'not-so-wise' spending habits of members of the community. On average, LGBT individuals are found to spend more on entertainment, dining out, travel and other highly consumerist activities. A new Experian study has revealed that LGBT individuals direct less than 11% to saving and investment. Experts postulate that one of the primary reasons for this could be the constant devaluation they have faced because of their sexual identity and the need to overcome it by possessing symbols of the modern capitalist society just like their straight counterparts (Schultz, 2019).

Institutional discrimination affects a larger proportion of the population than individual discrimination can. The community has to carefully navigate the lanes of banking, housing and credit. Most countries still lack concrete laws that guarantee legal protection to the members of the community. A recent study has shown that LGBT individuals in the United States apply for mortgages that are 73% more likely to get denied than the ones applied for by heterosexuals. (Akin & Akin, 2019). Even the ones that do get approved are charged 0.2% more in terms of interest and fees.

The basic premise of handling any monetary aspect is financial planning. In a world full of financial advisors, planners, agencies and facilitators, the community still faces a dearth of sound financial advice. 86% of the LGBT consumers in the US think they need help managing their wealth but more than two-thirds of them do not have a financial advisor (Akin & Akin, 2019).

Starting a family is a difficult decision for anyone but more so for homosexual couples because of both the stigma and the expenses involved. These couples are more likely to adopt reproductive technologies such as artificial insemination or surrogacy. Not only are these very expensive methods of reproduction, but they also involve an enormous amount of paperwork for 'proving' the legitimacy of their relationships. While heterosexual relationships are construed 'normal' and require lesser reaffirmation, homosexual ties require a very high level of preparation and organization. If a crisis arises, they need a stronger backing shield than the general population does. All of these aspects make the community's financial experience not just cumbersome and stretched, but also degrading and disrespectful. India, on the other hand, does not even acknowledge parenthood as a legal right for homosexual couples. The country's family laws only consider the institution of marriage as a legitimate form of expressing emotional

and financial dependency. Since that avenue is closed off for same-sex couples, consequently so are adoption rights. The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956 states that while "unmarried" females can adopt, males only fulfill the prerequisite "if he has a wife living".

Another very important problem faced by the community affects them in the form of retirement planning and estate planning. The heteronormative understanding of these concepts tells us thus: your estate, your property and your retirement plans should be centered around your offspring, your children. But what does one do when there are no children? A major proportion of same-sex couples choose not to have children, either due to personal choice or lack of affordability of expensive reproductive techniques like mentioned above. That being said, there is no one retirement plan that can be tailored for them broadly. Similarly, before the marriage equality movement began, estate planning was the biggest challenge for same-sex couples. They were not even 'recognized' as spouses, let alone get additional benefits for the same. Procuring something as basic as home loans could be a task of great difficulty for the community.

All along, the dichotomy of 'straight' versus 'gay' has prevailed. But the understanding that the LGBTQ community is not a monolith is essential to acknowledging all layers of their problems. A single individual can identify with several minorities at any point- a woman can be a black, bisexual, divorced Muslim all at the same time, but the stigma meted out to all these groups is not the same. The aforementioned woman is bound to be subject to more discrimination than a white homosexual Christian male, just by virtue of accident. The same constructs that affect majority groups permeate into minority group structures and wreak havoc on individuals who cannot pass or assume a less stigmatized identity. (Pannu, 2019). Certain characteristics possessed by some individuals gives them a higher 'social currency' or 'value' in the eyes of other community members; consequently, they are able to command more respect as well. The financial facets vary similarly as well. Examining these intersectionalities is the only way to understand how finances are placed differently for different members of the community.

But this is not to say that the LGBT community has to remain financially downtrodden for good. The global spending power of the LGBTQ community has been estimated to be $ 3.7 trillion dollars as of 2015 (Lang & Humphreys, 2019). These figures make the community's share of the total consumerist structure really important. Keeping that in mind, companies, investors and agencies have sought ways to explicitly cater to the queer market while also making structural adjustments to make their workplace more LGBTQ-friendly and inclusive.

To expand the impact of portfolio investing, the total portfolio activation system was initiated, the groundwork for which was based on the research conducted by Tides and Trillium Asset Management in 2012. It is based on the basic premise that every investment has an environmental and social impact. Under this, responsible investors should identify misalignments, gaps, and breaks in their investments and then restructure it accordingly to maximize positive social impacts. It deals with four interrelated areas:

- ***Investment Selection*** - Choosing the companies and firms that work under social impact creation.
- ***Active ownership and engagement*** - Involves a more direct, engaging and active approach by directly collaborating with investment agencies and intermediaries
- ***Networks*** - Assists in creating a collaborative space for like-minded individuals entrepreneurs and angel investors in the venture capital space (Lang & Humphreys, 2019).
- ***Policy*** - Roping in the government, policymakers and other regulatory bodies to shape the investment marketplace.

To sum it up, LGBT investing is not limited to the community itself. It intricately links itself to several aspects of the environment, government, and society. This interrelation gives rise to a holistic approach that encompasses everything as shown below. The stark image that the diagram is trying to convey is thus: LGBT issues should be the society's issues; LGBT victories should be the society's victories.

The community has come a tremendously long way from the persecuting era of the 20th century. It has seen remarkable achievements by individual reformers, waves of revolution by whole groups and landmark rulings by different legal platforms. To be able to realize the full potential of this progress, it is important for it to extend across all arenas. It is important that a community as important as this, both in terms of spending power and representation in the population, does not experience financial lagging. The vehicle of change is around the

corner, but its engine needs a powerful push by policy institutions and public participation. Through that, the larger mass of the population will get integrated into responsibly investing and creating a significant social impact. Only then can one conclude that the community has progressed in its entirety. As American actor Chris Colfer put it, "There's nothing wrong with you, there's a lot wrong with the world you live in". We ought to try and fix the 'wrong' and provide a wholesome living experience, regardless of whether we identify with the community or not. The world is the same for everyone, money should be the same for everyone, then why can't love be the same for anyone?

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Gay

Photography by Megha Udeshi

SEMINAR PAPER

# 26. FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN COMEDY: POLITICAL CORRECTNESS VERSUS POLITICAL CENSORSHIP

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GUIDED BY: MS. KETAKI HATE
EDITED BY: SARA MARIA VARGHESE

*Political correctness today is understood to be a social mechanism that discourages the use of disparaging speech in order to protect subjugated sections of the society. It aims to empower these groups through sensitive discourse. The term however, has been misinterpreted by some to mean restriction of discussion on sensitive topics like race, gender, sexuality, and the like. This paper differentiates between banning certain words resulting from an expectation of respectful discourse and prevention of problems from being addressed. Further, it differentiates between political correctness and political censorship, with the former being necessary to maintain order in society and the latter being a form of institutional hindrance to freedom of expression.*

**Introduction**

Comedians have always been afforded with more leeway when it comes to their right to freedom of speech and expression as compared to the ordinary citizen, at least in the Global West. There are several sensitive topics that one is allowed to broach under the pretext of comedy which they would not be permitted to approach otherwise. Although the objective meaning of political correctness remains a matter of debate, the Oxford Dictionary defines it as, 'the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against.' Therefore, for the purpose of this paper we will infer political correctness (henceforth, PC) as a social phenomenon that prescribes the use of a bias-free terminology on the grounds that certain words reflect the underlying power structure present in society and their usage reinforces hegemony.

The arguments posited by the proponents of the practice centre around the historical oppression of people, placing a heavy emphasis on group membership, claiming that it is a linguistic instrument which will empower these oppressed groups (Dyson et al., 2018). By following these norms of PC, we recognise that the groups in question are under threat and require protection (Moller, 2016). While valid, this fails to address the illusory nature of PC and also its stress on group membership (Dyson et al., 2018).

**Illusion of correctness**

Critics of the likes of Fry (Dyson et al., 2018) and Žižek (Big Think, 2015) disapprove of this argument on the grounds that it promotes an illusion of equality in society. Devocalising offensive opinions or censoring 'problematic' language does not lead to an automatic change in the individual's and consequently, that particular society's internal belief system. Rather, it creates an additional issue of detection of such views making their correction more difficult than it would otherwise have been. Žižek (2015) even goes as far as to compare PC with totalitarianism claiming that it is simply a form of 'cold respect'.

To illustrate the basis of this argument we can examine a hypothetical situation in which all forms of sexist humour are banned. Here, all comics, in order to avoid any controversy or punishment either avoid the topic of gender altogether or indulge in sensitized jokes. This in turn gives the immunity of invisibility to problematic views. The removal of all sexist humour only silences the voicing of the comics' sexist views and isn't an erasure

of it from their lived realities. An obvious consequence of this is that it makes detection and correction of any existing prejudices impossible. Additionally, and more alarmingly so, in silencing these problematic views such a ban also normalises prejudices.

This argument falls short in that these theorists view the phenomena through a Durkheimian lens. Their proposal that problematic speech is a sign of free speech and will exist in any society that is flexible to social change is the root of the problem. While promoting egalitarianism as one of its objectives, the central aim of PC is to promote considerate public discourse (Alibhai-Brown, 2018). It is radically different from totalitarianism in that it provides alternatives. Furthermore, it operates on the principle of basic courtesy. Certain nomenclature that was previously acceptable can over time become offensive to members of a particular community. However, an unwillingness to adopt the new terminology on the grounds of protection of one's freedom of speech shows a disregard for their sentiments and refusal to change with the times. Such arguments against political correctness are often the result of either a deep entrenchment in pre-existing biases, or unwillingness to undergo the discomfort of the process of discarding the old and adopting the new (Vanity Fair, 2015).

**Group dynamics behind PC**

A different criticism posited by Jordon Peterson during the Munk Debates[1] (2018) outlines that PC culture excessively relies on group and power dynamics and that it prevents human beings from being considered as individuals. Every person's identity is reduced to their group membership exacerbating groupism. The first section of his argument was countered by Michael Dyson (2018) by highlighting that the presence and dominance of group identity in popular discourse today is a result of historical discrimination and oppression. Power dynamics under such conditions were so skewed that they continue to affect members of the group to this day. That is to say that if a person is treated in a discriminatory manner because they are a woman (group membership) then one cannot fight for their rights without addressing the power imbalance that has historically pervaded society and continues to even today. The second point of individual identity can be countered by differentiating, yet again, between politically correct language and prohibition of dialogue on a certain topic. I believe that the former is necessary while the latter is an infringement of one's freedom of speech and is a misinterpretation of what PC stands for. PC seeks to prevent the feeling of 'othering' by endorsing a sensitized vocabulary. It is against disparagement, not speech.

**Exclusion facilitated by PC**

In the context of comedy, prohibiting certain topics from being joked about often adds to the stigma attached to it. Trevor Noah in his performance titled 'Jokes about Deaf People' (2019) explores this idea wherein he narrates an incident where he was approached by a deaf person and was asked why he didn't joke about the deaf. Examination of this anecdote and the general subject matter of the comedic content in the video highlights the distinction between joking about topics and the manner in which it is being joked about. In this instance Noah admits that by being excessively cautious, he was inadvertently patronising the hearing-impaired community. I believe that this is true for every comedian and all communities. This idea follows from the notion that by tabooing certain concepts from comedy you are reinforcing pre-existing inequalities (Sloss, 2018).

The issue with restrictions within comedy today is that line between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable is determined by the proportion of its audience that it offends or amuses and not by whether it causes actual grievance to the community in question.

**The Curious Case of PC in India**

The key point to note is the separation of comedic content that uses humour as a means to sensitize its audience and comedians who contribute to the problem by shoddily veiling their prejudices with humour.

In India, however, this balance is skewed. PC in our country is dictated less by values of dignity and more by the ideals of respect that pervade our society. Whether a joke is deemed to be offensive is controlled by the amount of egos and not by the emotions that it hurts. A clear example of this phenomenon is the outrage that Tanmay Bhat's Lata Mangeshkar/Sachin Tendulkar snapchat video caused whereby he superimposed their faces on his to enact an argument between the two. (Express Web Desk, 2016). In a similar incident, the comedian used Snapchat's dog filter on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's face. In both of these instances, there

1 The Munk Debates are a semi-annual series of debates on major policy issues held in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. They are run by the Aurea Foundation, a charitable foundation set up by Peter Munk and his wife Melanie Munk.

isn't anything explicitly politically incorrect. His actions have nothing to do with marginalisation of the oppressed. On the contrary, his subjects in both the instances are among the most powerful in their respective fields and highly privileged members of Indian society. While both, his video and the photo were mostly parodic in nature, rather than hateful, reactions ranged from shock to threats of violence (Kay, 2018). This was a repercussion of the expectation of blind veneration towards certain sections of the society in our culture. Fact remains that if Bhat had done the same with persons with comparatively less privilege than his subjects, the general response to it, despite its politically incorrect nature - apart from backlash from a small predominantly urban faction of the population - would have been laughter.

Kunal Kamra addressed the dichotomy of acceptable language and behaviour in an episode of 'Shut up Ya Kunal' (2019) whereby he made the observation that freedom of speech on comedic stages is waning while allowances made for conventionally deemed incorrect language throughout the country are increasing to the extent that it seems as though there are no restrictions on communal, anti- religious, homophobic, and sexist hate speech. The most concerning feature of this change is that people now no longer respond to a situation as much as they respond to responses (comedy) to the event. This was also addressed by Varun Grover at the India Today Conclave (2016) wherein he mentions that the performance for which he received the worst backlash, was when he made a joke on the suit that the Prime Minister wore to greet President Barack Obama. The premise of his joke (the amount of money that the suit was auctioned off for) was factually incorrect which enraged people who in turn proceeded to accuse him of purposefully defaming the Prime Minister. This in stark contrast to the reaction received by the shocking hate crime against 24 year-old Tabrez Ansari, who was tied to an electric pole and beaten up while being forced to chant 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Jai Hanuman' all under the false pretext that he had stolen a bicycle unearths an alarming reality. Reaction to this incident ranged from the arrest and subsequent custodial death of Tabrez to an eery silence on the part of those in power. Responses that Kamra regularly receives highlights this point further. He has gone on record (Mathew, 2019) to say that he has to cope with venues cancelling his shows because of the political content that he covers. What is most disconcerting about this situation is that Kamra would have been hailed rather than silenced had his political views differed.

Indian political 'correctness' therefore seeks to punish not hate speech but to silence the voices that speak out against increased aggression and violent language through comedy. Varun Grover addressed this issue at the India Today Conclave in 2016 whereby he explained that he had been doing topical stand-up for eleven years and had only started to be labelled as 'brave' for doing it since 2014, notably a period when the current government came into power, sweeping the country with a Hindu nationalist fervour. In September, 2019, comedian Hasan Minhaj was denied entry into the 'Howdy Modi' event that took place in USA because he had been 'blacklisted' by the Prime Minister's Office for passing untoward comments about the office and the Government of India in his Netflix series, The Patriot Act. It is in these examples of ebbing freedom of expression that we can observe Žižek's totalitarianism; the individual is provided with only two choices – either to support the government or have their careers and lives threatened.

**Conclusion**

I believe that PC in language in the form of modification of certain derisive terminologies is necessary to maintain order in society. It is the censorship of opinions and prohibition of discourse on subjects which should not be permitted if society is expected to grow. The problem with PC culture in the Indian setting as we've seen, however, is that it finds its basis in a gross misinterpretation of the meaning and intent of the exercise. The perception of PC in Indian comedy is the opposite of what the ideology stands for - it polices social issues but not language, it defends individuals, not communities, it protects not the fragile status of subjugated minorities but hegemony of dominant groups – defeating its entire purpose of promoting equality and making it a true infringement of people's right to freedom of speech.

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SEMINAR PAPER

# 27. DEMOCRITIQUE

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*There is no contesting the fact that democracy is the healthiest form of government, but the hegemonic form of democracy today - Western, liberal, and multiparty - does not always work in developing countries. This paper explores the ways in which blindly replicating this model can be detrimental and how communities can evolve systems of self-governance that may be better suited to their society. It also addresses the existence of systemic paradoxes that prevent us from achieving ideal democracy and the biggest blind spot in policy today- the future.*

2011 saw a wave of democracy roll over authoritarian regimes across the Middle East and North Africa. Mass protests across Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya managed to oust sitting dictators and autocratic presidents. This call for democratization came on the heels of a similar wave that washed over Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and seems to be a recurring theme in modern political history. The current narrative leads us to believe that democracy is the only form of government that provides citizens with a voice to assert their rights and demand accountability.

Democracy is undoubtedly the healthiest form of government, but there are countries around the world that have been cobbled together artificially, or are far too big and can only be ruled dictatorially in their present form, for example - Iraq, Congo, and Sudan (Johnson, 2019). As Michael Robbins points out, the association of democracy with weak economic performance, the inability to maintain stability, indecisiveness, and ordinary citizens' lack of preparedness for this type of governance make it hard for democratic systems to take root. This leads to the question of whether despite all its advantages, democracy really is the universally applicable default.

**The question of universality**

In a study conducted by Michael Robbins in 2015, certain Arab Spring countries were no longer amiable towards democracy. Tunisia, for instance, has seen growing concern over the effects democracy has had on internal affairs. Rising terror attacks, including the assassination of politician Chokri Belaid while the survey was being taken, fueled fears that democracy leads to insecurity. As Ariel Levy commented on the universality of democracy, "In theory, sure, but unfortunately not in practice. Governing by majority creates minorities - whose interests are then more often than not underserved. And when you combine democracy with capitalism, the resulting governmental stew becomes an economy of haves and have-nots."

The hegemonic form of democracy comes from developed countries, and is Western, liberal, and multiparty. Liberal democracy is rooted in the doctrine of political liberalism, which assumes the centrality of the individual subject; the desirability of the free-market as a way to achieve economic development; prioritizes private property accumulation over re-distribution of wealth; and conceives the state as a mere facilitator. Thus, it has not always delivered the expected outcomes in today's developing world. The equation is one of "freedom above equality;" which makes it unsurprising that there is a need to look at amending the current model and even at viable alternatives that are not only more functional but also more apt for the realities of the citizens of the developing world.

Some communities have found ways of governing themselves that circumvent the problems caused by this kind of standard model. They find unique ways to govern themselves that contextualizes government in their culture. One such example is Madagascar, where David Graeber documented the fokon'olona or village

assemblies that created a government parallel to the State and arguably more powerful. They make decisions based more on traditional practices than on State law. This allows decisions to take place at a far more personal level that takes into account individual intentions and a broader sense of social justice.

This form of highly decentralized government seems to be working just as efficiently as the State government was. Administration and record keeping still take place but the State has ceased to use force or intervene in the life of the population. In fact, there have been instances of executions based on decisions of the fokon'olona with no backlash from either the community or State. The right to carry out legitimate acts of violence, a defining conception of State, has been dusted off by the State itself. Thus, the Malagasy community in Betafo has evolved to become self-governing despite rather than due to the existence of a democratic government in the country. While it is argued that this kind of government is highly disposed to breakdown in the modern world, this would only happen with external intervention. When left to itself, the fokon'olona rule has worked for the community it functions in. Thus, there are often nuanced alternatives that are better suited to developing countries.

Beyond cultural variations in governance, the structural components of democracy need to be adapted and modified. An example of this is the practice of competitive elections. "Democracy is, by its nature, a system of institutionalized competition for power. Without competition and conflict, there is no democracy" (Diamond, 1990). Highly contested elections with uncertain outcomes create the base for active and responsive governments in mature democracies. But extremely competitive elections do not work in all democracies. According to Gottlieb and Kosec (2018), a superheated campaign with numerous candidates may actually impede democracy in younger countries. For example, the political structure in Mali is quite different. Party members tend to answer first to their specific kin or ethnic group instead of party leadership (Gottlieb & Kosec, 2018). This blurs the ideological lines that help voters know who will best represent their interests. Approximately 25% of the public officials interviewed in the study said they had switched parties at some point in their career, often after a dispute with a fellow party member. Defection turns personal rivalries into partisan conflict, making legislative deal-making even more difficult. Political parties also splinter over wedge issues, leading to the formation of new parties which further divides voters. Malian municipalities with fewer contestants were more efficient since money and time were not wasted on partisan infighting.

Their study complicates the idea that competitive elections are the hallmark of a robust democracy. That understanding is based solely on the experiences of rich countries. Efforts to improve life for people in the developing world must therefore look beyond the superficial measure of free, fair and competitive elections to consider how to help democratic governments work better for their citizens after the heat of a campaign.

**The question of representation**

In fact, even if one ignores the socio-cultural differences in the effectiveness of democracy, it is not a perfect gauge of public opinion. In the late 18th century Marquis de Condorcet introduced the social choice theory of the Condorcet paradox that captures the situation in Mali (Stodder, 2005).

| | Preference 1 | Preference 2 | Preference 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Voter 1 | A | B | C |
| Voter 2 | C | A | B |
| Voter 3 | B | C | A |

In this situation there is no consensus on who the winner is. If A is chosen as the winner, it can be argued that C should win because two voters prefer C over A. A similar argument can be made for choosing B over C and A over B. The majority of people prefer A over B, and majority prefer B over C. Deductive reasoning would lead us to believe that by extension A is preferable to C. However, the majority prefers C over A. Since majority opinions can contradict each other, a democratic vote cannot always represent public opinion. However, the probability of the Condorcet paradox occurring in realistic models has been proved to become increasingly rare with a small number of candidates and a large number of voters (Gehrlein & Lepelley, 2011). So, the unresponsive political environment in Mali can be partially explained by the inability of democracy to be a fool proof meter in more pluralistic politics.

Paradoxes in democracy are not only related to voter behavior. In the prisoner's dilemma experiment, Merrill Flood and Melvin Drescher discovered a conflict between individual and collective decisions. They belied

the neoclassical economic belief that individuals acting rationally in their best interest produce the best outcome for all concerned. When players chose the best outcome for their personal interests instead of cooperating it can lead to a worse off situation for all players involved. In a competitive high-stake environment such as politics the chances of cooperation are even fewer since each candidate is looking out for the option that best safeguards their long-term interests.

Even the systems used to determine the winners of our elections are questionable. Whether we consider India's first past the post system or the United States' electoral college, neither system is a true representation of majority opinion. How can it then be said that our leaders are accurate representations of the majority public opinion, much less our value consensus.

**The question of the future**

A discussion about democracy would be incomplete without talking about its biggest blind spot; the future. Universally, democracy's biggest challenge is balance; balancing competition and consensus, representativeness and governability, consent and effectiveness, and the present and the future. With politicians unable to look beyond their re-election in the next term, governments fall prey to "political presentism" and consistently fail to deal with the big picture. Representative democracy systematically ignores the interests of future people. As public philosopher Roman Krznaric argues, "future generations are disenfranchised in the same way that slaves or women were in the past." Issues like climate change should be at the forefront of political discussion but the myopia of current systems has side lined it in favor of discussions on economic growth. Those most acutely affected by it, future generations, have no political voice or power. The future is constantly put on hold.

It is a daunting challenge to reinvent democracy itself to overcome its inherent short-termism and to address the "intergenerational theft that underlies our colonial domination of the future" (Krznaric, 2019). The Seventh Generation Principle, observed by some Native American people, is a practice that takes into account the impact of a decision on the welfare of the seventh generation in the future (around 150 years). This was the inspiration behind Future Design in Wales that ensures that public bodies in Wales working in areas ranging from environmental protection to employment schemes, make policy decisions looking at least 30 years into the future.

**The question of freedom**

When we analyse democracy using Weber's ideal types, we find that none of the assumptions he stated hold true in reality. Voters are often swayed by irrational appeals to religion and communalism. They are rarely privy to not only complete information about candidates before elections, but also large parts of the actual mechanics of the functioning of the government. Awareness of one's actions should stem from an understanding of one's motives which carries the implication of free will.

Going back to the discussion of the effects of combining democracy with capitalism, it calls to question the level of independence in decision making among voters. The 2016 US Presidential election was a testimony to the effect that social media, and more concerningly, foreign third parties can have on influencing voters. Not only were social media algorithms responsible for amplifying divisive social and political messages across the ideological spectrum but it also allowed hundreds of pages operated out of Russia to target and run ads that influenced voters (Overby, 2017).

In this political environment, it is evident that democracy itself can limit our freedom at every level of political involvement. At a community level, the right to be governed effectively or instead live under relevant traditional governance. At an individual level, the freedom to choose and be represented by those we choose. And at both levels the rights of future generations to enjoy all the freedoms that we do today.

The solution is not necessarily a different form of government, rather adjustments to existing systems on a case by case basis. There are two factors that do stand out though. Firstly, as Graeber notes, true democracy exists in small societies. The most successful democracies today exist in Nordic and European countries like Norway and Switzerland where democracy is more direct. It is effective to break up extremely large and unmanageable countries into smaller units that are capable of supporting democratic rule. Yugoslavia, for example, broke up from one dictatorship to lots of smaller democracies. And secondly, finding ways to entrench sustainability in all policy making to improve from the past, develop the present, and safeguard the future.

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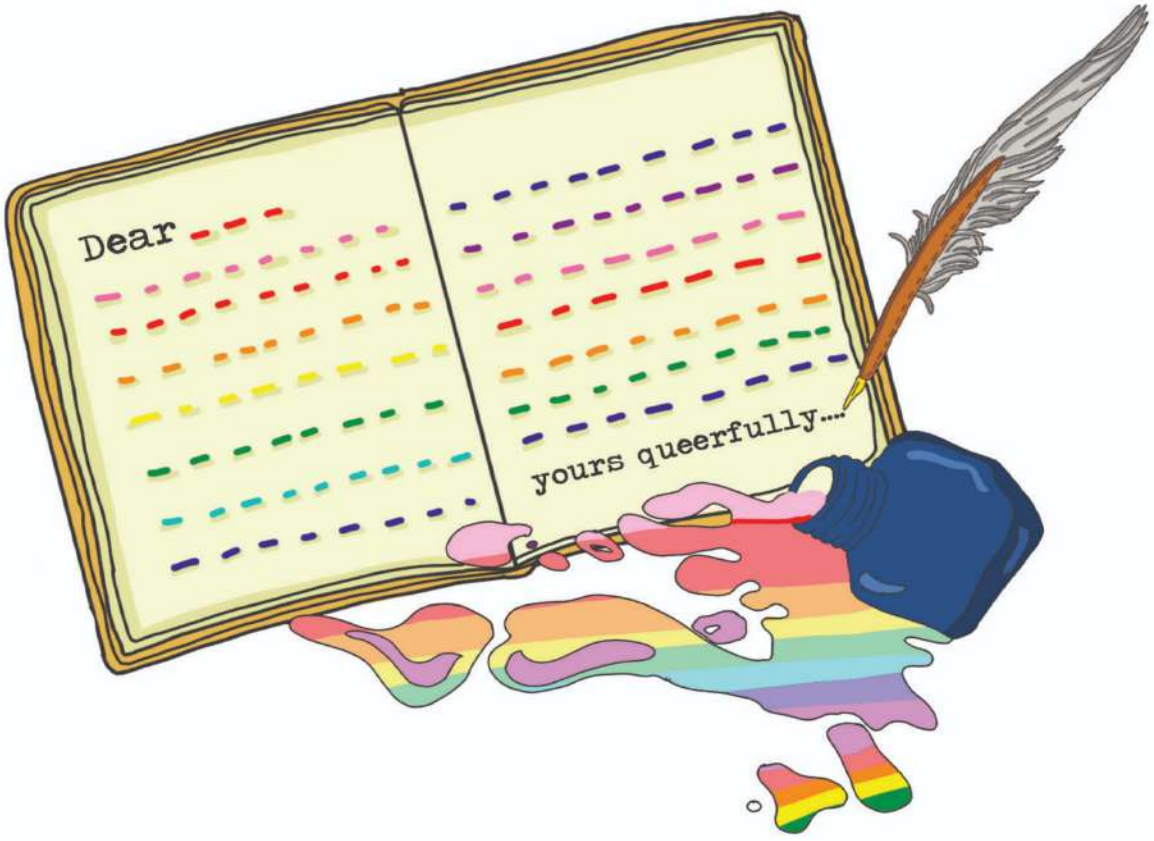


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