

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY: NEGOTIATING DIVERSITIES AND INTERSECTIONS OF QUEER SPACE IN INDIAN WRITINGS

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ABSTRACT: *The entire systems of social categorization agree to for two sexes - male and female. But some societies explicitly articulate three sex categories, socially distinguishing hermaphrodites as a third, mixed intermediary, or alternate sex. Other societies seems to give consent to additional categories, allowing for a range of mixed, crossed, complex, or fluid identities in between male and female. Indian culture is based on the notion that there are two opposite sexes with distinct culturally approved gender characteristics. Using this binary system allows little tolerance for cultural and social variances of what is perceived to be masculine or feminine. Indian society is much more focused on sexual behaviour rather than social role choices and expectations. In Indian culture some people who are merely dissatisfied with their gender role often feel pressured to anatomically become the other sex through surgery. Some people do not believe that their gender identity corresponds to their biological sex, namely transgender people, including transsexual people and many inter-sexed individuals as well. Consequently, complications arise when society insists that an individual adopt a manner of social expression i.e. gender role which is based on sex. Sexuality, or gender identity, may be all about the cultural response to the individual. Some people may be born with confusing sexuality and they need to find the gender role that fits with their nature, and others find that the male/female, man/woman roles are not sufficient to embrace their gender/sexual role. The present paper examines how questions pertaining to sexual orientation and gender expression are inter-connected with the politics of citizenship. It also seeks to critically examine the social understandings of sexual identity and the powerful role that it plays in the arenas of family, personal relationships, the economy, work, the media, health, security and the environment. Through an examination of the selected literary texts in Indian writings in English, we will interrogate the ways in which heteronormativity permeates a variety of institutions in the public sphere. We may find answers and ways to respond that would embrace all human beings.*

KEYWORDS: Sexual Orientation, Homosexuality, Transgender, Sexuality, and Gender.

INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the world, individuals face discrimination and abuse because of their perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. To some extent, Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons have been able to attain assimilation in the mainstream of society and culture in some countries but not in others. Transgender have their own way of speaking to others, actions, gestures, body movement which is totally different from the other genders. Over the past years, the treatment of sexual minorities has received increasing attention in academic writing and

cinema. A greater tolerance for people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities has been observed in several parts of the world. They are forced to live in cloistered groups, on the fringes of society and in extreme poverty. Literature and Cinema have beautifully depicted the sociological, sexual, psychological, cultural violence faced by this community. These people have their own way of style, language, expression, feeling and behaviour. All of them are neglected by the society and thus they create their own society in which they make themselves comfortable but even then they are tortured and disturbed by the outer world. The two great Sanskrit epic poems, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, indicate the existence of a third gender in ancient Indic society. Some versions of *Ramayana* tell that in one part of the story, the hero Rama heads into exile in the forest. Halfway there, he discovers that most of the people of his home town Ayodhya were following him. He told them, “Men and women, turn back,” and with that, those who were “neither men nor women” did not know what to do, so they stayed there. When Rama returned to from exile years later, he discovered them still there and blessed them, saying that there will be a day when they will rule the world. In the *Mahabharata*, the Pandavas used *Shikhandi*, a eunuch, to defeat Bhishma Pitamah in the battle of Kurukshetra. The Hindu God Shiva is often represented as *Ardhanarisvara*, with a dual male and female nature; Typically, *Ardhanarisvara*'s right side is male, and left side is female. Disowned by their families in their childhood and ridiculed and abused by everyone as *hijra* or third sex, eunuchs earn their livelihood by dancing at the beat of drums and often resort to obscene postures but their pain and agony is not generally noticed and this demand is just a reminder of how helpless and neglected this section of society is. Transgender have their own way of speaking to others, actions, gestures, body movement which is totally different from the other genders. They are forced to live in cloistered groups, on the fringes of society and in extreme poverty.

Homosexuality seems to be alien to Indian culture and is a source of moral corruption. Homosexual love and its representations are not new in India. Homosexual love has its echoes, explicit or incipient in Indian religious scriptures, paintings and literatures, ancient and modern. Critics such as Ruth Vanita, Saleem Kidwai, who have written extensively on the history and traditions of same-sex love argue that “many believe that the idea and practice of same-sex love were imported into India by ‘foreigners’- Muslim invaders, European conquerors, or American capitalists” (Vanita and Kidwai 2008, xxxv) who did not approve of non-procreative sex. The situation was severely worsened when the British Government being influenced by the principles of Victorian Puritanism introduced a penal code that considered homosexual love a crime of severe punishment which continued to be part of the Indian Penal Code, (Section 377, Chapter XVI): “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine” (Sec. 377, Ch.XVI). The section was declared unconstitutional with respect to sex between consenting adults by the High Court of Delhi on 2 July 2009 which was a result of protests from different social organizations, homosexual rights activists and intellectuals across India and abroad (Vanita and Kidwai 2008, xx). But that judgement was overturned by the Supreme Court of India on 12 December 2013, with the Court holding that amending or repealing Section 377 should be a matter left to Parliament, not the judiciary. An unbiased excavation into the ancient and modern Indian cultures and traditions surely proves that same-sex love is not alien to India; it is not a foreign import (Vanita and Kidwai 2008, 4). Earlier than that in Indian culture, lesbianism and gayism were acceptable forms of sexuality – the most ancient sculptural art of *Khajuraho* caves and the architecture of some of the Hindu temples in Orissa bear a burning testimony. Influenced by colonial thinking, the non-

heteronormative sexual identities came to be abjected and outlawed in India. The overarching umbrella term 'Queer' came to be used for all these categories. Judith Butler's theory of 'performativity', using post-structuralist tools of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, conceptualized gender/sexuality as 'performative, that is, a role performed by the subject, according to her/his choice which resulted in pluralism of gender identities and considering gender/sex as fluid and a matter of choice. The consequence can be seen in India, where the Gay Pride Marches in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore and Chennai include lesbians, gays, transgenders and others who come together as 'Queer' to forge coalitional politics against the homophobic Indian society.

On 2 July 2009, the Delhi High Court delivered a judgement in favour of Naz Foundation, an organisation that works for same-sex equality, declaring that the application of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that penalised consensual sex among adults was unconstitutional. The decriminalisation of homosexuality enacted by the landmark decision rescinded in part - it retained non-consensual sex as criminal – the colonial penalisation of same-sex practices introduced by T.B. Macaulay in 1860 that prohibited “carnal intercourse against the order of the nature with any man, woman or animal” (qtd. in Narrain and Elridge 9). Heralded as a “great victory over an archaic and bizarre law,” the successful culmination of a decade long political mobilisation created a distinct temporal divide between pre- and post-2009 queer activism in India (“Gay Ruling”). LGBTQIA community have praised this judgment as a landmark in ensuring equality and freedom to homosexuals in the choice of their partner. On 15 April 2014 in a path-breaking judgment, the Supreme Court has affirmed the constitutional rights and freedoms of transgender persons, including those who identify as third gender and those who identify in a gender opposite to their biological sex, i.e., persons, assigned female sex at birth, identifying as male and vice-versa. By recognising diverse gender identities, the Court has broken the binary gender construct of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ that has pervaded Indian law. The judgment was pronounced in *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India & Ors.* by a division bench of Justices K.S. Radhakrishnan and A.K. Sikri.

An exploration of literary and cultural expressions of sexuality and gender includes sexual norms and dissidence, gender identity and expression, the relationship between aesthetic forms and sexual subjectivity. Interpretation of texts particularly through the lens of queer theory shows how sex and gender intersect with other forms of difference, including race and class. The cultural environment is hostile to gays and lesbians in India. They are afraid to cross the boundaries and ‘come out’ for fear of physical violence, and social opprobrium and there is not much literature dealing with same-sex love. Any cultural expression of lesbianism/gayism engenders anger and retaliation, especially among the Right wing forces, who display abhorrence and complete intolerance of homosexuality, in art and literature. The blazing protests against Deepa Mehta's lesbian film *Fire*, and strong denunciation of Karan Razdan's film *Girlfriend* were symptomatic of this hostility. Mehta's *Fire* showed the element of sexual and lesbian desire in women for the first time in popular Indian cinema. It provoked the aggressive response from the Hindu far right because women are typically represented as sexual objects and not as sexual subjects with desires of their own, and lesbian desire decentres men. Further, Mehta's non-resident status in India added fuel to the controversy around the film, specifically those concerning India's national culture and heritage. The film dealt with lesbian desire in an Indian context and the Shiv Sena critiqued the import of western forms of same-sex desire and their imposition on India. For Bal Thackeray, the iconic chief of *Shiv Sena*, homosexuality was not a part of Indian culture and people like Mehta were “ushering in a wretched culture” (sawnet.org). Thackeray's remark emblematises a standard dominant view

of cultural essentialism that connects non-normative desire with the —decadent West. Literature in this genre, which as mentioned earlier is rather scant, is sought to be suppressed, as was Ismat Chughtai's most celebrated short story, "Lihaaf" (The Quilt) published in 1942 in the Urdu literary journal *Adab-i-Latif*, was labelled with charges of obscenity, which was considered obscene and a case was filed against it, or it has been calculatedly ignored as pulp and inferior literature. Literary and artistic expression has another mode of resistance as histories of queer artistic and cultural products. The queer literary panorama comes to be enriched with a host of prolific literary critics and creative writers such as Hoshang Merchant, Suniti Namjoshi, Manju Kapur, Shobha de, Khuswant Singh, Ruth Vanita, Saleem Kidwai, R. Raj Rao, Ashwini Sukthankar, Eunice de Souza, Ashok Row Kavi, Firdaus Kanga, Kamaleswar and so on. Hoshang Merchant considered India's first openly gay poet, has produced a plethora of creative writings that include numerous collections of poems, anthologies of gay writings and theorizations on homosexual love. Of the writings that lay the foundations of Queer Literary genre in India, *Yaraana: Gay Writings from South Asia* (1999) edited by Hoshang Merchant, *Facing the Mirror: Lesbian Writings from India* (1999) edited by Ashwini Sukthankar, *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History* (2008) edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, Ruth Vanita's *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West*, and Hoshang Merchant's *Forbidden Sex/Texts: New India's Gay Poets* (2009) deserve to be mentioned specifically since these writers have ventured out to break the silences, to point out to the self-willed neutrality and secrecy about homosexual people and their lives that a race has so tactfully managed to maintain over the years. In recent years, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, and Shoba De have openly discussed free play of sex, homosexuality, and lesbianism in their novels. Women are awakening through Indo-Anglian Literature with the assertion of their rights and they have also asserted their right to their bodies. Arundhati Roy's, *The God of Small Things* registers the silencing of women and their victimization in the patriarchal society. Velutha, an untouchable, pays the penalty having fallen in love with a high-caste Christian woman, Ammu, who is a master of her body. Dattani has beautifully depicted the sociological, sexual, psychological, cultural violence faced by the Transgender community in his play. Dattani is dramatizing all these questions and shows his protest against the marginalization of the people in the name of culture, customs, community, gender etc. The manifestation of gay issue challenges the established and accepted social patterns. He brings this theme home to audience in some of his plays. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the Needful*, and *Bravely Fought the Queen*, have central motifs of homosexuality. He doesn't pass any judgment over the issue. He just discusses it as it happens in our society. He shows how established norms of society suppress and repress individual urge and passion causing mental agony to the person concerned. His play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* satires the society practicing double standards. The eunuchs are forced to live outside the mainstream of the society. It is the irony of the situation that the same untouchables are acceptable and desirable on the occasions of marriage and birth for blessing the married couple and newborn respectively. In this play, he traverses on the untravelled path i.e. secret marriage with an eunuch and our cruelty towards them. *Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi written originally in Tamil and translated by V. Geetha in English is an autobiography by a person marginalised by class, sexuality and gender poses many questions to unravel power, domination, oppression and resistance. These seminal works are indeed works of literature that attempt to speak about issues that concern homosexual people to reclaim an equal space into the mainstream. Besides the recent trend of perceptibly queer texts, queer readings of apparently hetero-normative cultural texts are a form of politicized, subversive criticism. Scholars like Ruth Vanita and Salim Kidwai have attempted to uncover a continuum of same-sex desire in Indian culture in

their edited book *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (2000). It brings together literary representations and historical evidence of homoeroticism from ancient to contemporary India. The selections that are gleaned from historical and literary sources from a time-span of over two thousand years bear evidence to the existence and acceptability of homosexuality in the Indian cultural context. This evidence is perhaps most useful in deconstructing the myth of heteronormativity promoted by the Hindu Right Movements in contemporary India, a myth that holds homosexuality as a Western import incompatible with traditional Indian culture. This paper focuses on gender, sexuality and sexual orientation in the selected writings of the famous Indian writers - Manju Kapur, Shobha De, R.Raj Rao, Khuswant Singh to trace the emergence and development of LGBTQIA literature in India that aims at creating a homosexual discourse in the modern academic and cultural realm in India.

Shobha De's novels realistically present an intimate side of urban woman's life and also reveal her plight in the present day society. It is a fact that woman is victimized and subjugated by the patriarchal society everywhere. She has been the subordinate sex and has to conform to male standards. In most of her novels, she has focused on the marginalization of women in Indian society. She draws our attention to women's exploitation, discrimination and commodification. The women are treated with double standard. Subjugation and marginalization are the vital factors in their lives. Amrita in *Strange Obsession* (1992) is a challenging woman who travels all alone from Delhi to Mumbai to pursue a career in modelling. She goes through a lot of turmoil as she messes up with the lesbian Minx who becomes her constant companion. Minx is obsessively crazy for Amrita and they begin having a sexual relationship, though it is much against Amrita's will. Amrita despite her earlier unwillingness submits to Minx's amorous advances: "Amrita lay back against the pillow inertly. Her mind switched into a dream like state. She shut her eyes and ceased to think or feel, surrendering to Minx who was over her, moving her hands tenderly...caressing her face, kissing her softly. She felt Minx's finger ... and she did not resist" (136). This novel deals more with how one woman subjugates the other woman than the subjugation of women by men. The novelist would like to establish that Amrita was a 'normal' woman who was never a lesbian unlike Minx who was proving herself to be one and redefining the roles women can take in the society. It may be argued that women have an identity of their and it is very well within her power to act as they like maybe they have started to see themselves. Through this novel, De questions the traditional institution of marriage and sanctity of normal sexual relationship between man and woman. In lesbian affairs one of the lesbian partners may assume active part, called butch, as Linda and Minx, yet in such relationship there is mutuality not duality as observed by Simone de Beauvoir:

Between women love is contemplative; caresses are intended less to gain possession of the other than gradually to recreate the self through her; separateness is abolished, there is no struggle, no victory, no defeat; in exact reciprocity each is at once subject and object, sovereign and slave; duality becomes mutuality. (155)

In *Snapshots* (1995) the women turn into useful plaything for men in patriarchal society. The ruling ideology that favours men prompts these women to fall prey to the designs of men. All the men presented in the novel are tyrants whereas the women – Aparna, Rashmi, Swati, Reema, and Surekha are all victims of male tyranny. the portrayal of the image of subjugated and marginalized women in Shobha De's novels with an emphasis on men's pride, incompatible marriages, traditional norms of behaviour and patriarchal social system as the real forces of the oppression and exploitation of women. All the women in the novel lead

fascinating lives and their characters reflect the image of the new woman in every aspect. Swati is the most daring of the six friends. She had married and then divorced her husband and now returns to England to remarry there. The concept of marriage among these new breed of women is no longer that of a sacred tie. To them all marriage is just a transaction of convenience and hence meaningful as long as it is useful. Swati marries, divorces, and remarries. Rashmi is an unwed mother. Aparna is a divorcee; Reema uses her husband for her material comfort and enjoys a promiscuous relationship with her brother-in-law Randhir. Surekha is married but shares a lesbian relationship with Dolly: "Surekha too could not imagine life without Dolly. Their lives and became inextricably intertwined. Dolly and Surekha like a happy married couple....Just enough physical familiarity to promise regular comfort." (220). When Aparna considers the ugliest sight in the world is of a man with an erection, Balbir comments that he always thought that perhaps women like the sight of "ready to action cock". Listening this Aparna snorted, "It's a favourite male myth—another stupid stud fantasy, that's all. The truth is women don't need men at all—there are ways and ways of seeking satisfaction.' She further announces, Women are so self-sufficient, men can't bear it. That's what gets them. Nobody is cock-slave." (226). Here, lesbianism does not mean only sexual bond between women-women. Adrienne Rich suggests the idea of "Lesbian continuum" that "include a range ... of woman identified experience; not simply that a woman has had or consciously desired genital experience with another woman." (87)

The word 'lesbianism' is derived from the Greek word 'Lesbios,' a Greek island in the Aegean Sea which was the native place of Sappho, the 7th Century B.C. lyric poetess who addressed her love poems to women. In the *Kamasutra*, the famous classic of Hindu erotica, there is a clear mention of lesbianism. Today lesbianism is a universal phenomenon where women find sexual fulfilment among themselves. It has been increasing in the conservative Indian society despite the society's lack of recognition to this practice. Reason being a woman can work up another woman better than a man; whereas a man performs and after doing it he become indifferent to his female partner or show lack of care for her. Indian women are controlled during their pre and post marital stages of life. They are either under the clutches of their parents or husbands. They are subjected to social bias and issues from which many of them fail to find a way out. A mainstream novel by Manju Kapur, *A Married Woman* (2003) is one of the recent lesbian novels, which inscribes and at the same time outlaws lesbian experience in order to validate patriarchal social structure of family and prioritise heterosexuality. Lesbianism has gone beyond the limits of the Indian social code of conduct. Astha shows the forte of a liberating soul. She constantly struggles for recognition and a social cause. Her married life offers her sumptuous smoothening through conjugal bliss but slowly she feels the pangs of alienation and dissatisfaction. She is brought up in a traditional homely environment of a typical middle class family. Her husband is busy with the business and Astha feels loneliness at home. She joins the profession of teaching. Hemant has little time to share Astha's feelings and her daily routine matters. Astha develops affair with a woman Pipeelika which offers her much comfort. She is trapped in an inescapable situation. Astha tries to bring everything she experienced on the canvas of painting. She is a good artist. Astha's life with her first husband though was happy externally, she found the inner happiness missing that leads her to soulfully find Aijaz for herself. But even Aijaz's loss does not turn her spirits down since she is dare enough to get acquainted with Pipeelika, a widow, with whom she finds the peace that was lost. Astha breaks the laws of nature and even society, in her relationship with Pipeelika. Against all social norms, the friendship between the two women develops into a fully intimate same-sex relationship, clandestine but deeply intense. In these ways, her extroverted activities

do not imply that she wanted to be superior to man, but she longed for the equality and something beyond that in order to fulfil her duties at home and in all the undertakings. Such thoughts act as an aspiration for her to evolve into a new woman of revolting nature. It is easy to say that Shobha De's women are realistic to the core. She has successfully drawn the image of the new woman who resides in the aristocratic world of Indian high society. The image is not of the weak and submissive woman fearing her domination by her husband. These new women are dynamic, strong and highly confident. Shobha De once said, "I write with a great deal of empathy towards women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the women situation." (*The Fiction of Shobha De* 35)

R. Raj Rao is one of India's leading gay-rights activists. His novel *The Boyfriend* (2003) is one of the first gay novels to come from India. He also published the non-fiction work *Whistling in the Dark* (2009), and the novel *Hostel Room 131* (2010). Poems from Rao's *BOMGaY* collection served as the basis for Riyad Vinci Wadia's film *Bomgay* (1996), said to be India's first gay film. Following the success of *The Boyfriend*, Rao founded the Queer Studies Circle at Pune University. Rao was one of the first to offer a course on LGBT literature at the university level in India. Rao first offered it in 2007, after years of resistance on the part of his academic superiors. He said: "It's strange how the academic fraternity that has always been quick to accept all kinds of literature -- Marxist, feminist, Dalit — had a huge reservation when it came to queer literature. For years, the Board of Studies refused to let us start the course saying that 'Indian students do not need it. Finally we clubbed it with Dalit literature and started it under the genre of Alternative Literature.'" (*The Punekar* 2011). Rao's novel *The Boyfriend* deconstructs received understandings of sexuality, sex, and gender in India and inscribes the queer subculture of Bombay as a legitimate part of Indian culture, thus counterbalancing homophobic nationalist discourses that reproduce normative sexualities. Set in Bombay (now Mumbai) in the early 1990s, it intervenes as a queer narrative of resistance to heteronormative impulses in India. It is about the homosexual relationship of Yudi, a journalist in his forties and Milind, a nineteen-year old dalit boy. It negotiates a space for queer representation within the Indian context and appears as a counter-narrative to the conspiracy of silence concerning homosexuality in India. However, Milind's contempt for Yudi and the conflicting class/caste impediments to same-sex love reposition the queer narrative of resistance to the heteronormative nation as fractured resistance. Rao shows the possibility of an ideal homosexual community, only to renounce it and therefore reinforce the inescapability of other identity formations. This is evident in his description of Yudi and Milind's first penetrative sex:

Whenever Yudi picked up strangers and took them home, he gladly offered them the active role in bed. He had a theory based on years of experience. As long as men were allowed to penetrate, there was no fear of their returning afterwards to demand money or to beat you up. Some even thought it beneath their dignity to accept cash from someone they had buggered. For such a person, according to them, was at best a hijra. And their heroism and sense of valour did not permit them to assault a eunuch. It was only when these men were penetrated that they became wounded tigers. They felt emasculated. They could then even murder. Currency notes, wristwatches, walkmans, sneakers, were not compensation enough; these couldn't restore their lost masculinity. They accepted the presents with one hand and put a knife in your back with the other. (11)

The novel demonstrates that Yudi and Milind are separated by class, caste, age, language, education and religion, and, in a society where such formulations constantly militate against fulfilling relationships, even gay idealism cannot emerge untainted by social conditioning. This recalls that of Dennis Altman, who claims of the ‘developing world’:

The romantic myth of homosexual identity cutting across class, race, and so on doesn't work in practice any more than it does in the West. The experience of sexuality in everyday life is shaped by such variables as the gap between city and country; ethnic and religious differences; and hierarchies of health, education, and age. The idea of a gay or lesbian/gay community assumes that such differences can be subordinated to an overarching sense of sexual identity, a myth that is barely sustainable in comparatively rich and affluent societies. (34)

Rao interrogates gender and gender identity through Yudi and Milind's relationship. Fluidity and multiple gender identifications are central to queer scholarship. Butler's antifoundationalist analysis has helped queer studies to deconstruct normalising discourses, which regard gender, sex and sexuality as mutually dependent and fixed categories. She claims that gender is a “corporeal style, an “act,” as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “performative” suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning. (*Gender Trouble* 177). The novel also explores the inflections of class and caste in the Indian context and in the wider framework of sexuality. Queer scholars have recently begun to address the absence of class and Third World/ethnic contexts from the larger queer paradigm. Thus, Terry Goldie in the special issue of *Ariel* on the intersection of postcolonial and queer studies, contests the “the end of ethnicity as a social category” within recent cultural studies and critiques the relegation of the “social configuration of homosexuality to a marginal element in queer studies” (21). Rao does not allow Yudi's idealistic vision to go unchecked, instead revealing it as illogical and contradictory. To ascertain whether or not Yudi is really troubled by his caste, Milind exhorts him to eat several wafers which he has half consumed, and Yudi reacts furiously:

“Homos are no different from Bhangis. Both are Untouchables. So why should I have a problem with eating your jootha?”

“But you are a Brahman, aren't you?”

“No, I am a homosexual. Gay by caste. Gay by religion.”

“I don't understand what you are saying.”

“What I am saying is that homosexuals have no caste or religion. They have only their homosexuality.”

“How can that be?”

“That's how it is. Straight people are Brahmans, gays Shudras. So you see, both you and I are Shudras. That's why we are best friends.”(81-82)

However, Rao's texts extend in order to redefine the cultural norm of what constitutes Indian culture. Transgenders/*Hijras* (Eunuchs) were granted voting rights in 1994 in India. Shabnam ‘Mausi’ Bano - is the first transgender Indian or *Hijra* to be elected to public office. Padmini Prakash has become India's first transgender to anchor a daily television news show. The Hon'ble Apex Court of India in *National Legal Service Authority v. Union of India and Others*, Writ Petition (Civil) No 604 (2013), the Supreme Court on created the “third gender” status for hijras or transgenders. Earlier, they were forced to write male or female against their gender. The SC asked the Centre to treat transgender as socially and economically backward. The apex

court said that “Transgenders are also citizens of India. The spirit of the Constitution is to provide equal opportunity to every citizen to grow and attain their potential, irrespective of caste, religion or religion” (“India court recognises transgender people as third gender.”). This is for the first time that the third gender has got a formal recognition. The SC said they will be given educational and employment reservation as OBCs. The apex court also said states and the Centre will devise social welfare schemes for third gender community and run a public awareness campaign to erase social stigma. The SC also added that if a person surgically changes his/her sex, then he or she is entitled to her changed sex and cannot be discriminated.

Khushwant Singh’s *Delhi: A Novel* (1990), a picaresque history of India’s capital extending over six hundred years narrated by a eunuch has intervened the historical perspective. “I return to Delhi as I return to my mistress Bhagmati when I have had my fill of whoring in foreign lands” (1). Thus begins Khushwant Singh’s vast, erotic, irrelevant magnum opus on the city of Delhi. By focusing on six centuries ranging from Ghiasuddin Balban to the assassination of Indira Gandhi leading to the massacre of Sikhs, Singh comes across many people, emperors, eunuchs, poets, prostitutes, saints, soldiers. It accounts the history of Delhi from the eyes of an old Sikh; named Mr. Singh. The old Sikh guide finds Bhagmati and Delhi the same. The novelist beautifully parallels the old Sikh’s passionate romance with both. “As I have said before I have two passions in my life; my city Delhi and Bhagmati. They have two things in common; they are lots of fun. And they are sterile” (28). The character of Bhagmati resembles Tiresias, a blind priest in Sophocles’ “Oedipus”, the king. The only difference is that Tiresias is blind. Singh pictures Bhagmati with the city Delhi. It assumes itself multiple identities as a site, text, and persona. Bhagmati, the eunuch whore is a metaphor for the city Delhi and for the history simultaneously. Her character epitomizes reconciliation between the antithetical elements, reconciliation to one’s situation psychological, social or economic. His passionate romance with Bhagmati is a representation of Delhi, which beautifully parallels. Budh Singh, the watchman of the apartment where hero (narrator) lives, has strong objection about his relation with Bhagmati and so he confides, “everyone is talking about it. They say, take woman, take boy-okay; But a hijda; That is not nice” (6). But the hero remains unaffected by his objections. The narrator expresses his own obnoxious sexual encounter with Bhagmati. He explains:

I felt a desire for sex. I tried to put it out of my mind. A sick, scruffy hijda—how could.... I was aroused. I pulled her beside me fished out a contraceptive from under my pillow and mouthed her. She directed me inside her. It was no different from a woman’s. She smelt of sweet, I avoided her mouth. She pretended to breathe heavily as she were getting worked up. Then sensing my coming to climax she crossed her legs behind my back and began to moan.... She began to play with my nipples—first with her fingers, then with her tongue. She placed her head on my chest and began to stroke my paunch—first with her fingers, then with her tongue. She went on till my reluctance was overcome... with a series of violent heaves she sucked my seed into her in a frenzy of abandon. I lay on top of her—exhausted.” (40-41)

Singh presents the character of Bhagmati to highlight the practice of going to prostitutes to enjoy the pleasures of life. This institution shows a shared agreement on the exploitation of this suppressed section of society at the hands of all. He seems endorsing the idea about the importance of sex in one’s life when he shows Mir Taqi Mir dissatisfied with his wife because she is unable to satisfy his sexual and emotional needs which are best fulfilled either in the company of his beloved or whores or even in Singh’s novels in the company of an eunuch as

well. Khushwant is keenly aware of the fact that the sexual abuse of minor boys and girls by their near relatives is becoming increasingly common in metropolitan cities and other parts of our country. The novelist further shamelessly highlights the sexual abuse of “hijdas” by different people; some enjoy them like a woman and some others like a boy unnaturally:

When men came to expand their lust on ‘hijdas’—it is surprising how many prefer them to women—Bhagmati got more patrons than anyone else in her troupe. She could give herself as a woman; she could give herself as a boy. She also discovered that some men preferred to be treated as women. Though limited in her resources, she learnt how to give them pleasure too. There were no variations of sex that Bhagmati found unnatural or did not enjoy. Despite being the plainest of hijdas, she came to be sought by the old and young, the potent and impotent, by homosexuals, sadists and masochists. (30)

Further research may be carried out to explore the different seminal texts or literary representations of Indian writings in English related to the LGBTQIA community-- that are still seem to be uncovered or unexplored vistas of Queer space i.e. present in it. The intensification of the body leads us to class awareness, as Foucault says: “one of the primordial forms of class consciousness is the affirmation of the body” (126). He then reaches the following conclusion:

If it is true that sexuality is the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a certain deployment deriving from a complex political technology, one has to admit that this deployment does not operate in symmetrical fashion with respect to the social classes, and consequently, that it does not produce the same effects in them. (127)

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