

HOMOSEXUALITY AND ASPIRING FOR SPACE IN SOCIETY

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to analyze the self-long-suppressed segments of society which is now gaining recognition worldwide, but still facing problems when it comes to social acceptance. LGBT community these days are now receiving proper media coverage and various literature books trying to prove that homosexuality is not imported from West but it existed in India. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, has decriminalized homosexuality, and made it possible for Indian citizens to be his or her own self, according to their identity of themselves vis-a-vis gender.

Key Words: Recognition, Suppression, LGBT community, homosexuality, gender.

I am a free-range chicken/don't fence me in/I can cockadoodle doo your do/nd lay with the best of your lehens/I am a criss-cross hop scotching/... I am a sexual politic/free to follow the geography of my desire/I am a human politic/craving out new language/in a time when there are no pat answers (Chanana. *Introduction: Reclaiming Homoerotic Literary Spaces* 1).

The non-acceptance of homosexuality is linked with the notion of people and the law of the country. It may be linked with the colonial rule where Britishers forged a strong channel between sexual identity and national struggle for freedom. Uma Chakravarti opines that,

The degeneracy of Hindu civilization and the abject position of Hindu woman, requiring the protection and intervention of the colonial state, were two aspects of colonial politics.

The third aspect was 'effeminacy' of the Hindu men who were unfit to rule themselves.

In the book *The Intimate Enemy* which is written by Ashish Nandy, where he analysis that 'to glorify heterosexual masculinity Britishers opposed to the feminine weakness of gay men as they were not able to tolerate it. Gay men who looked like females were punished publically' (Chanana. *Introduction: Reclaiming Homoerotic Literary Spaces* 37). Writers like Ruth Vanita, who has examined that it was a common tendency to associate a sexual identity with national character. The characters have to be heterosexuals, having masculine traits and can procreate identity. But the representation of gay men was seen as projecting a very negative picture of Indian men before British imperial power which could have been a setback to the national struggle for independence. Ruth Vanita says that "there is a constant tendency in public/private, cultural/political and social/academic environment to situate homosexual desire as a middle-class, western import completely devoid of Indian roots" (*Love's Rite*, Vanita).

The writings of Ugra, Rajkamal Chaudhary, Ruth Vanita etc observes that homosexuality is not imported from West. It existed in India. There are many archaeological proofs to prove that homosexuality was prevalent in Indian culture since ages. Ruth Vanita opines that in Hindu texts and traditions, whether it is written or oral there is a God and a story of every activity and way of life. There are Epics, Vedas which talks about homosexuality. Indian writings represent same-sex marriages, sex change, cross-dressing and moving beyond gender etc. Ancient Hindu narrative of Bhagavata Purana presents a narrative when nectar was extracted from ocean and how Lord Vishnu assured Lord Shiva that he would take the form of beautiful, enchanting woman Mohini in order to delude the demons into giving the jar. Ruth Vanita says in

her book *Same-Sex love in India: A Literary History* that:

The story of Shiva's attraction to Vishnu's Mohini form is related in at least three Puranas which date approximately from 850 to 950 AD. In the *Brabmanda Purana*, Parvati stands with her head lowered in shame when Shiva chases Mohini (Vanita. *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History* 81).

There have been many narratives which talk about varied interpretation of the story as it was also said that Shiva himself takes the female form during love play with Parvati. Ruth Vanita says that Mohini, or Vishnu in female form, is worshipped in a few places mostly in South India. She says that in Andhra Pradesh at Ryali there is a temple where both forms of Vishnu or Mohini is worshipped. It is a misconception of the people of India that homosexuality is imported from the West. There have been enough shreds of evidence that homosexuality, Same-sex marriages existed in India. Ruth Vanita further cements the belief by tracing back Indian homoerotic desire. Her essay, "A Rose by Any Other Name" discovers names such as *Jami*, *chapti*, *dogna*, *sakhi*, *aamadparast* and *husanparast* (words used for male poets in medieval Islamic tradition to describe gay attraction) and regional slangs like *janana*, *giriya*, *kothi*, and *panthi* (Chanana 40).

Words such as *napumsaka*, *kilba*, *pandaka*, *opasa* and *kumbhika* were used in Vedic period and *Charaka Samhita* to show recognition of sexual difference. Same-sex desire can also be located within the middle-class setup where a desire to have a space in society is of prime importance. The word desire has so many connotations attached to it. One meaning could be a desire to be recognized in the society where 'self' is representing identity other could be recognized for the long-suppressed segments of the society such as LGBT. Maya Sharma in her book *Loving Women* gives the introduction about how a working-class queer woman tries to project about their struggle in society. She tells the story of ten working-class queer women in North India where they deconstruct the notion that lesbians in India are westernized and upper and middle classes. The narrative of the story gives the voice and provides a space to the voices that were neglected time and again. Another notable example can be of R Raj Rao in *Whistling in The Dark* where gay men gain voice across culture and class. His main focus is on the issues of sexuality, sexual identity, gay bashing heteronormativity etc. The interviews of queer people from a different class, section of societies, educational institutes talks about the struggle where they are continuously struggling for a space in the society. The narrative provides a deep insight into the lives of LGBT people.

These records of [personal histories undoubtedly blunt the boundaries of exclusive heterosexual-national-identity and emphasis on the issues pertaining to citizenship-rights and citizen subject (Chanana 41).

In *Queering the State* written by Lissa Duggan opines that time has come to think about the queer people. Thus the works of Thandai, Ruth Vanita, R Raj Rao focuses on decriminalizing section 377 of Indian penal court. They are demanding to legalize same-sex marriage. Not only the novels or literature is written by the writers are focusing on giving voice to the voiceless but there same is done through many activist movements.

Cinema is also playing an important role in giving LGBT people space in society. Cinema plays a positive role in representing the struggle of LGBT people. Deepa Mehta's movie *Fire*, when released, invited lots of criticism from Shiv Sena. The film according to the activists projects the notions of anti Indian and western imported slogans.

L.K Advani who states: "Why are such films made here? They can be made in US or other countries. A theme like lesbianism does not fit in the Indian atmosphere (Sharma, Maya 2).

Media and cinema is a powerful tool to showcase the reality when it comes to gender roles. In India or perhaps many other countries where the mass of population believes that what media or cinema shows is somewhere or the other part and parcel of their life. Cinema has lately tried to project the expression of the long-suppressed section of the society which is now gaining recognition on the large scale and worldwide. The Delhi High Court's decision to decriminalized section 377 of Indian Penal Court has given a choice or

space to homosexuals to be his or her own self, according to his or her own self perceived identity. Ruth Vanita opines that:

'The cultures that have come to be called Hindu allow for a diversity of belief and practice ranging from monotheism, polytheism, and what nineteenth-century Germans Ideologist Max Muller termed 'henothesim' to animism, atheism, and agnosticism. (*Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History*, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai 1).

Cinema has absolutely contributed lots to the queer motion in India. Sexual minority includes all the ones folks that fall beneath the categories of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgenders. Projection of gender stereotypes in movies creates society's perception of gender roles. The over-saturation of gender stereotypes within the movies results in the misrepresentation of gender roles which gets embedded within the human mind and is surpassed on from the era of technology as an appropriate view Ruth Vanita in her works gives an elaborated description of how Indian Cinema has really helped the same- sex people and LGBT Community to find solace in Hindi popular cinema.

Cinema is a powerful medium to catalyze social exchange. Like other artwork, cinema is both a part of social reality and also a medium of portraying it. Films have a subtle impact on society's way of questioning. Hindi cinematic traditions of portraying same-sex relationships within an overall romantic and erotic economy that gives importance to love and commitment regardless of gender has been the focus of popular cinema. Indians are so much influenced by Bombay cinema that it abolishes all kind of boundaries, religion when it comes to showing the love between same-sex people.

To conclude it can be observed that same-sex desire is not only to make an attempt to provide space to the voiceless but also highlights the various dimensions of sexuality and tries to give voice to the long-suppressed desire to be included in the society. The constant struggle is going in the lives of LGBT people to become a part of mainstream society. They are striving to become a part of the society where they are not treated as 'other' but like any other member of a society devoid of their sexuality.

Works Cited

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