

Invisible Minorities - Queer Identities and Experiences in India

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Abstract: Interpretation of history is a fascinating tale with each scholar having their narratives and theorems. No matter how diverse their approaches may be most of them may agree that in each historical epoch, there have been social divisions that stratified people into majority and minority groups, one having power over the other (Marx and Engels, 1848,) [6]. However, the state has seldom ventured outside the realm of binary sexes to identify the oppression or emancipate the gender-deviant (LGBT+) individuals who from the beginning of modern civilization till date have been the invisible minority. Their invisibility has been a result of a saga of lies, lies about gender identity being a mental disorder, lies that gods will punish them in hell, lies that have been fed to the masses by elites in power to hold power; and the result of such lies have aggravated in forms of hate crimes, homicide, suicide and mass murders. Even though there have been certain reforms towards social modernization in the Global North that have provided for a more inclusive society for homosexuals, the condition remains intensely bitter if not uninhabitable in the Third World. Being on the traditional side of development, the Eastern mind is neither accustomed nor open to the Western form of progress and needs an endogenous change concerning the inclusion of non-traditional genders. This paper employs a case study approach to analyze the politics behind the status of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual population in Indian society. It aims at the identification of the causes and effects of oppression upon the esteemed community and deconstructs the myths and prejudices revolving, around that obstruct their right to live freely with pride and dignity.

Keywords: Minorities, LGBT+, New Rights, Alienation, Colonialism

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, there has been a certain section of the population in every form of social order who were discriminated against by the mainstream people, pushed to a particularly menial status reasoning such treatment with the inferiority of race, language, culture, class, and whatnot; backed by a notoriously glorified creation of fiction called mythology (B. and Lincoln, 2001 [4],)- a story which is strangely corrupt and captivating at the same time. The supreme theory that these mythologies provide not only crystallizes people into cultural communities but also creates minorities within those communities.

People unknowingly became servants to an alien order and habituated themselves to serve the upper sections at the cost of their lives, liberty, and freedom. For centuries this class-based hierarchical social construct came to be followed as the status quo, whose rigor and pattern hardened over time in favor of the economic entitlements of the class masters and the position of these minorities degraded. With grand events like the Renaissance of human civilization and the Industrial Revolution; when arts, science, and logic evolved rationality among men, they started acknowledging the inhumane torture, subjugation, and division imparted on people. This conscious yet Fabian-paced development of morality motioned in the creation of human rights; which patented its birth, in a (nearly) chronological fashion. It started with the emancipation of women and slaves by giving them citizenship followed by the abolition of distinction based on race, caste, and class, recognition of immigrant rights, etc. Such phenomenal change in societal structure was eloquently captured by Czech jurist Karel Vasak in 1977 with the identification of three generations of human rights (UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog, 2019) which include liberty, equality, and fraternity. Governments across the world started identifying minorities within the country and as a recognition of their struggle and centuries of pain inflicted upon them, constituted certain constitutional frameworks to safeguard their rights which began with non-discrimination policies and then extended to equal representation at jobs, education and public services; a swift shift from inequality to equity. However, the contents of the passage are not an account of these people who are recognized in terms of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or economic minorities. It is the story of those people who every age were and are still minorities within minorities who, unfortunately or strategically, were never recognized by the state, and just like their rights their lives remained invisible.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a comprehensive study of secondary materials. It bases its structure on the Marxist interpretation of Alienation.

A. The Fiasco of the Fragile

Love is quite a word, the most incredible stories of which remain unheard by the ears of the present, untold by the activism of the past. In here literature of yesterday doesn't find roots of continuity & instead gets buried in the ruins of time. If love were to be an art and we were to find the sources of vandalism of this pure literature it would be the one perpetuated by the ignorant masses against the diverse lovers who scared for their lives had to confine themselves into the claustrophobic prison of civil society. It is ironic how Hegel

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saw this civil society as the antithesis of the narrow life of confinement that family provides (Mueller, 1958,) [7]; for it is this civil society that does not falter to commit hideous crimes against the group of non-conformers. Such draconian attitude of the immense cis-gendered majority towards the queers pushes them more towards alienation from public life in general and also from themselves. The torture that begins at the societal level snowballs its way into the mind and with each synapse fuses itself more crudely into the blood to mimic the sensations of fear and anxiety with each breath. Karl Marx in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* talks of Alienation (Marx, 1959) [5], given his focus on the relationship between the bourgeoisie and proletariats in capitalist society, he forgets to identify other levels of alienation existing within the society, as did his fellow Marxist and post-Marxist successors. In the diverse realm of gender when the immense majority itself is the cause of infliction of pain upon the gender deviant minority, the quality of alienation increases manifold. To put it per the chronology of succession, alienation of the gender queers happens while adulting; which begins from adolescence and follows throughout. Growing up under the influence of the Indian Education system, an individual gets to know about two biological sexes and their functioning in general and on hitting puberty when they come to realize the reality of their gender orientations, they find themselves as deviants in society unfit to perform the functions and produce the family as the academic books suggests; thus, begins the process of *alienation by realization*. As the person develop contacts with others outside their family circles and associate themselves with their friends and peer groups, they start to learn the “unnaturalness” of their behaviors and attractions (DeFleur and Goffman, 1964) [3]. Finding it hard to synchronize the needs of their body and mind with those of societal expectations, settles in the alienation of individuals from society- *alienation by socialization*. Then arrives the art of religion, media, workplace, and all other forms of social institutions that with their symbols, texts, and narratives of a supposed good life; that materialize in the familial relationship of a man, woman, and child, further stigmatizes an individual’s mental faculties. Afraid of not being accepted by the people they love, by the society they grew up in, by the government they voted for; these individuals grow in them an apathy towards public life for the public has already through their acts, conscious or unconscious, have rejected them (Garcia, 2018) [10]. To alter this rejection, they try to camouflage in the straight and clear color’s that the society is familiar with, thus, *alienation from themselves*. Such altercation of one’s being locked in a closet is the very essence of their existence, forcing them to live a life struggling with their inner self and outward expression. Now, since the safer choice is to hide their true self the LGB community poisons itself to a slow and painful death which starts with a likely game of ‘hide and hide’ and ends with an identity crisis and it is here where the death blooms in the red of Hibiscus.

B. Chronicles of the Dead

Death is the only natural and inescapable thing that is promised to man at his birth, yet he fails to adore it. Death misunderstood as a terror, is exploited by the powerful to

enforce their narratives and maintain control. But for the marginalized, like the LGBTQ+ community, death offers a tragic escape from a world that denies their existence. Cicero in his consolatory *Tusculan Disputations* praised death and welcomed it for liberating us from the world of distress and the numerous evils of humankind; evils they can’t see to commit. Walter Benjamin was another scholar who claimed that what we seek in fiction is the knowledge of death that is denied to us in real life. Heterosexuals, trapped in their unhappy unions, perpetuate myths about the bleak futures of homosexuals and bisexuals. These repeated lies, insidious in their repetition, hollow out the queer community, particularly in the East, where family and emotion hold immense value. Even youthful love is cast as a tragic omen, a harbinger of doom for the “*World-losers and world-forsakers*” (O’Shaughnessy, 2017) [8]. Tales of queer love, ethereal and doomed, are rarely told, as they don’t fit the conventional narrative. Yet, people, regardless of orientation, yearn for love, romantic or platonic, as idealized in popular media. In a world that often denies them this love, they seek it in the face of death, hoping for a future where their love can flourish: “In another life, I would be your girl. We’d keep all our promises, be us against the world” (<https://open.spotify.com/search/The%20One%20That%20Got%20Away>).

Suicide, or self-inflicted death, is viewed as a grave issue, with the Indian Penal Code’s Section 309 criminalizing attempted suicide. Classical liberal thinkers like Rousseau also emphasized the state’s role in preventing suicide. However, what if the state itself is driving a segment of society to choose death over life through systemic neglect and oppression? Under Section 299 of the IPC, individuals committing homicide with intent or knowledge of likely fatal consequences are punishable. But when those in power, masquerading as public servants, perpetrate mass killing against marginalized groups by disregarding their rights and well-being, who should face punishment - the individual or the state? What punishment is fitting for such systemic atrocities?

Aristotle argued that the state exists to ensure a ‘good life’. However, this promise remains elusive, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals. The social contract, meant to protect the right to life, seems to prioritize the majority’s interests over marginalized groups. The history of queer struggles remains erased from mainstream discourse, lacking academic representation, and their fight for emancipation is largely unrecognized. The question remains: where is the ‘good life’ philosophers envision? Is it a utopia, or a reality reserved for the privileged? The silence is deafening, and the structures of alienation persist. It is only when the class of queers becomes conscious of their position in society and instills in them the courage to come out of the closet in bold but fluid colors of rainbow that the social movement of reformation to gain the love and acceptance, they deserve from the society begins.

It would be unjust to solely attribute the lack of equity for the queer community to governmental and societal structures. Members of this community often remain marginalized, both within society and even within themselves, forced into the closet out of fear of societal repercussions. The practice of

"passing," while potentially ominous to Western observers, remains a stark reality in many parts of the world, particularly in former colonies. As Marx observed, developed nations often serve as a mirror reflecting the future of less developed ones. This holds for queer movements as well, which aspire to the freedoms enjoyed by their counterparts in Western nations. However, in many parts of the Global South, where poverty, disease, and illiteracy are pervasive, the struggle for queer liberation is often overshadowed by more immediate survival concerns. In such contexts, invisibility itself can be a form of death.

C. Barriers to the 'ism'

While patriarchal societies are undoubtedly responsible for the coercion and exploitation of the queer community, it's equally important to acknowledge the shortcomings within queer liberation movements. The discussion and production of queer knowledge often occur within isolated echo chambers, limiting engagement with opposing viewpoints. (Warner, Accessed 2024). This isolationism has led to cynicism toward government and society, undermining the movement's potential for inclusivity. In attempting to eradicate discriminatory attitudes, some queer activists have ironically become discriminatory themselves, dismissing logical counterarguments from heterosexual individuals. This contradicts the principles of freedom of speech, as exemplified by Evelyn Beatrice Hall's statement: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it". To truly become a liberating force, queer activism must engage with counterarguments, even if they seem sexist or anti-LGBT. By acknowledging and addressing these opposing views, the movement can foster growth, prevent stagnation, and maintain its core values.

Queer theory, although it challenges traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and identity, has made its inherent emphasis on fluidity, diversity, and deconstruction presents unique challenges in establishing a cohesive and cumulative body of knowledge. Unlike broader knowledge strata, such as liberalism, socialism, environmentalism, and feminism, which focus on identifying similarities and shared goals, queer theory's emphasis on differentiation and deconstruction hinders the development of a unified framework. This issue is exacerbated by the ever-expanding acronym LGBT+, which, while inclusive, creates difficulties in establishing a common dialogue. The lack of a base or integrating factor necessary for a coherent "ism" in academic terms hampers the queer theory's progress. Moreover, Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, which challenges the notion of fixed identities, further complicates the issue (Butler, 2011) [2]. While this deconstruction is essential for recognizing the diversity of queer experiences, it can also make it difficult to establish a unified queer identity or a coherent queer theory.

D. Neo-Pronouns

The problem of recognition within the queer community is exacerbated by the aggressive and often confusing use of Neo-Pronouns. While intended to reflect gender identity more accurately, their rapid proliferation and lack of widespread understanding can hinder social acceptance and create barriers to communication. This, coupled with the absence of a unifying framework within queer theory, further

complicates the issue of identity and recognition. The use of noun-self pronouns as Wikipedia holds comes from a position of privilege and makes the LGBT+ community look like a joke, or the attention placed on neo-pronouns pulls focus away from larger, more important issues, such as homophobic bullying, the murder of LGB people, and Suicide. It is not surprising that we tend to talk and associate with people who we perceive to be or are similar to us and since the gender equation itself is a matter of antagonism between homosexuals and heterosexuals; the use of neo-pronouns catalyzes the antagonistic relationship by decreasing the spheres of similarities. The LGB community often makes use of vague terms like liberation, freedom, and rights to voice their demands, however, they fail to recognize what those big words mean or how to achieve the ideals reflected by those big words. (ALBEE, 1972) [1]. The use of such generic terms just to march in the rallies is a serious problem in the way of recognition of their rights as a minority. If the requirement of the community remains unclear or generic or largely restricted within the community as jargon no representative government in the world could make appropriate laws by deciphering such connotations. The lack is not only in the field of practice, the ideological and/or philosophical underpinnings although exhaustive remain foggy. Unlike Georges Sorel's Syndicalism, where the vagueness itself served as "a myth which fills men with ardor, as the expectation of Christ's second coming inspired the early Christians"; the vagueness perpetuated by the Queer theories portrays a nebulous canvas, even an identity crisis.

To a large extent, queers draw their motivation from the feminist struggle; which although effective, subordinates Queer theory as a chapter within a book called Feminism. Reflections of such crisis are envisaged when many from the LGB community identify themselves as women, even when they are born with genitals antagonistic to their assumed titles i.e. penises. It would be fine to accept the essence of the word "women" as an identity marker if such chosen specification is done in a structural order but if it is done as an attempt to fancify one's outlook or just for the sake of non-conformity then the output is dangerous not only for the individual themselves but also for the community as a whole and even people born with XX chromosomes i.e. biological women. In the frenzy of such over-adventures, the LGB community unconscious has raised a catastrophic debate on 'what is a woman?' Jacques Derrida, in his deconstruction theory (Derrida, 2020) [11], concentrated on language and deconstruction of texts which, according to him, have no determinate meaning but consist solely of interpretations; any coherent piece of writing can be read in many conflicting ways and is subject to an infinite number of contradictions. Like Derrida, other postmodern thinkers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have by discarding the meta-narratives imposed by socially constructed words having objective meanings called for a shift towards diversity through subjectivity. Rewriting narratives created by the then people in power might be a way for the post-colonial countries and the third world at large to gain their sovereignty but for a philosophy that itself is global in its approach, changing narratives at the comfort of individual desire, instead of building

collective force against the oppressive system becomes fragment and rudderless. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a woman as an adult female person; however, the woke society doesn't consider this definition as valid; according to them, a woman is someone who identifies as a woman irrespective of the epistemology with which the society identifies them by birth. In this sense, a human male without making any clinical change or change in their physical attribute can suddenly identify themselves as a woman instead of a man; and somehow society has to accept it. This frenzy of a culture is critically exploited by male supremacists to paralyze the queer and feminist movements for if there is no consensus on the definition of women; how can there be movements to emancipate that unknown ideal entity that is yet to materialize in the physical world? Matt Walsh's 2022 documentary titled "What is a Woman?" produced by the Daily Wire (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42ivIRd9N8E>), a conservative media company has raised these issues to a madly high level with an Audience Score rating of 97%. Although the critical aspect of the commentary lies with the trans-sexual community the ideological relevance is appropriately applicable to the LGB members. In the craze of being Woke, LGB communities along with their allies seem to put activism above logic and scientific truth. Human nature is more tolerant of intolerance, for in the market society prejudices and hate sells like opioids. Personalities like Ben Shapiro, Michael Knowles, and Andrew Tate are often criticized for being misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, patriarchal, and whatnot. However, a close analysis of their content shows the mere use of logic may be in an aggressive or un-accommodative manner. It is true that such discourses if reach the wrong person might generate more hatred against the community but the same thing is done when the LGB people debate such logical conclusions with shouting and illogical statements. Irrational shouting and adopting a lifestyle-activism kind of approach pushes the movement centuries back, for people cannot distinguish between a legitimate need for emancipation and a cry for attention. People need to be educated about their conditions and orientations before they can make statements about their liberation. It is only when the Queer community from being a class in itself transitions to class for itself that protest in its true essence can emerge.

E. Queering India

It is true that as Indians, unlike most of the world, the Queer population here has achieved Political freedom in terms of the abolition of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that decriminalized consensual homosexual intercourse, however, the Indian gays are far from being truly free. The Constitution of India uses the term *Minorities* in two places under Article 29 (Protection of Interest of Minorities) and 30 (Rights of Minorities to establish and administer educational institutions). Seema and Nitin Sangwan in *Essential Sociology* say that communities are declared minorities not based on their absolute number, but based on other factors like their threat perception, cultural development, and development level. However, the Queer community although ticks above mentioned boxes, their identification as a minority as well as their reservation is still not a valid option

for the largest democracy. The developed world is not doing any better regarding reservation policies for the LGBTQ+ section; despite being the flag bearer of inclusion and diversity the gendered population doesn't have any reservations.

Civil rights of the homosexuals in the East as well as their true citizenship will only be valid when the immense population instead of just tolerating their existence begins to accept them as they are, and that acceptance will emerge only when the Queer movements come out of their colonial yoke and western mentality and starts adopting indigenous means to their struggle. Rabindranath Thakur in his book 'Nationalism' said, "*We cannot imitate life, we cannot stimulate strength for long, nay, what is more, and a mere imitation is a source of weakness. For it hampers our true nature, it is always in our way*". India's queer liberation movement, born in Kolkata-1999 Rainbow Pride Walk, mirrored Western norms, adopting neo-pronouns and rejecting religion. However, it fought a secondary enemy, echoing Western gay rights struggles. During the 1990s AIDS crisis, Western gays fought governments for support. Indian queers followed suit, creating AIDS funds, despite AIDS not being a primary concern in India. This disconnect stemmed from differing social realities: Western men could openly engage in same-sex relationships, a luxury not afforded in India. This mimicry neglected local issues, exemplifying the "Game of Thrones" analogy: Essos worrying about Westeros' White Walkers, irrelevant to their context. India's queer movement has adopted Western ideologies but neglected the unique struggles and contexts of the Indian experience. While admiring Western liberation movements' achievements, Indians have overlooked the scars, rage, and resilience that fuelled those struggles. Instead, Indians have cherry-picked Western queer culture, ignoring the historical context and ongoing challenges. The Indian government's tokenistic acknowledgment of queer rights, as part of the agenda for 2030, has not translated to meaningful social change. The reliance on Western ideologies, neglecting the unique social and cultural contexts of the region has hindered the growth of indigenous queer movements in India.

F. Gods and the Colonisers

The criminalization of homosexuality in India was a result of colonial-era laws, not indigenous beliefs (Wong, 2021) [12]. Hindu mythology, as interpreted by scholars like Devdutt Pattanaik, suggests a more tolerant view towards diverse sexual orientations (Pattanaik, 2014) [9]. However, the intersection of religion, politics, and Western influence has led to a complex and often antagonistic relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and religious institutions. The tyranny of the medieval churches was a phenomenon largely restricted to the West. Their imagined supremacy later termed as "White Man's Burden" and penetration in the rest of the world was the reason why religious mobilization on fundamental lines materialized. The Hindu states in India were not theocratic at all [13]. Religion in ancient India did not dominate politics. The state was independent of the religious institutions and the priests did not interfere in administration. The dictates of religion were limited to



principles of moral guidance for rulers and the ruled alike [14]. The ideology of Multiculturalism that is now emerging has always been there in India. Even during Islamic rule, many Hindus adorned the courts of the rulers and were the holders of titles like Ratna's. There was no shame in professing love as it is considered the purest of all emotions. So much so that even the scriptures at temples showcase the grandeur of sexual love be it hetero or homosexual. The founder of the Mughal kingdom, Babur was a self-proclaimed bi-sexual, if not gay, Islamic ruler. According to the Baburnama (the personal memoirs of the first Mughal Emperor), a 17-year-old Babur fell madly in love with a younger boy named 'Baburi'. Diversity in sexuality was a part of our culture. It was only after the establishment of the British Raj in India along with their policy of "divide and rule" that people got divided on religious lines, competing amongst themselves for resources and positions which helped Britishers dominate the region without unified resistance. Like the Divide and Rule policy, institutionalization of caste, fragmenting Bharatvarsha based on language; and stratification based on homosexual discrimination are also an event brought by the Christian usurpers. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was forced upon India and Indians as part of the British colonial project, which smothered civil and moral values in the name of reformation.

Similar provisions that forbid homosexuality are visible in all countries that the British Empire colonized. Colonizers perceived native cultures as sexually corrupt. Colonial legislators believed that their laws and policies could indoctrinate ruled masses with European morals. Thus, Thomas Babbington Macaulay took it upon himself to civilize us, the barbaric masses, and drafted Section 377 IPC in 1838 and implemented it in 1860, to control visual signs of sex or sexual pleasure. The British notion of opposition to homosexuality got so deeply embedded in the Indian mindset that the people of India started to believe that homosexuality was against Indian values and culture. Unfortunately, we forgot our history and continue to carry that colonial hangover with us even after the decriminalization of Section 377. The Christian values are deeply influenced by the 'sex is sin' stance of the Christian Bible, which states that the purpose of sexual activity is to procreate. Therefore, any sexual activity not meant for procreation was taboo. Thus, since procreation biologically needs a man and a woman, sex for pleasure was perceived as morally corrupted. Indian society was more liberal and tolerant of homosexuality. But, on the other hand, Britain declared buggery a capital crime. Due to the same, many individuals residing in Great Britain did not want to be sexually repressed and tried to escape Victorian society by coming to India. It was then that the Britishers decided to impose their morals of punishing buggery upon India. Soon this became the norm and we had to accept it.

The majority of the religions that originated in ancient India believe in polytheism which allows us to choose the gods we like which can be male, female, or gender non-conforming gods too, who are ritually and ceremonially worshipped by the masses. The population is indeed orthodox with the religious heads manipulating them to keep on with their position of power, but the religious texts show the presence of many gods and demi-gods who could be assumed to be the

flag bearers of the LGBT+ population. In a religious society like ours, change can be brought not by leaving religion but by reforming it from the inside. Maa Durga's Shibani avatar and Lord Arjuna's Brihanalya avatar are primitive examples of Drag Queens; Lord Vishnu's Mohini avatar with whom Lord Shiva had a son called Lord Ayyappa recognizes Transparenthood; furthermore, the tale of mighty Shikandi rages through the epic of Mahabharata. Freedom is not in rejection of religion; reject the religious heads and pandits. In Hindu Dharma we refer to the gods as fathers and mothers no one can tell us how to serve our parents for we can serve them the way it pleases us, the Pandits are none to have authority over that. If someone chooses to be a completely acceptable atheist but rejects religion just because an individual is not straight is not the right thing to do. Historian Rana Safvi says "Whether ancient or medieval India, fluid sexuality was present in the society. One can see the depictions of homosexuality in the temples of Khajuraho and Mughal chronicles, "love was celebrated in India in every form". We as the people of India need to harness our Indian-ness to bring back the love and acceptance that always prevailed in the land of Bharata.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Indian queer liberation movement has been hindered by its adoption of Western ideologies and neglect of indigenous contexts. The movement's focus on mimicking Western struggles, rather than addressing local issues, has resulted in a disconnect between political freedom and true social acceptance. The legacy of colonialism, particularly the imposition of Section 377, has smothered India's traditional tolerance for diverse sexual orientations, evident in Hindu mythology and pre-colonial history.

To achieve true emancipation, the queer movement in India must transition from being a class "in itself" to a class "for itself," recognizing its unique struggles and adopting indigenous means to its struggle. This requires reclaiming India's cultural heritage, where fluid sexuality and love were celebrated, and reforming religious institutions from within.

The Indian queer community must move beyond tokenistic political acknowledgment and Western-inspired activism, embracing its own history and cultural context. Doing so can foster a more inclusive and accepting society, where love and diversity are celebrated, and true freedom is achieved. Ultimately, India's queer liberation movement must find its voice, rooted in its rich cultural heritage, to create a brighter future for all.

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