LGBTQ STUDIES:
An Indian Perspective

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Edited by
Dr. Dipak Giri

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Dedicated

To

My Father

Late Sri Dinkar Giri

(1 January, 1950-25 June, 2025)

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Contents

Introduction *xi*

1. Celluloid Closets and Rainbow Reels: Tracing LGBTQ Portrayals in Indian Film History 1
—Dr. Joydeb Patra & Dr. Prodipta Barman

2. Breaking Barriers: A Study of Four Transgender Individuals from Odisha Who Challenged Societal Norms and Achieved Notable Success 15
—Dr. Subhadra Maharana & Dr. Roshan Ekka

3. From Somnath to Manobi: Negotiating Gender, Trauma, and Identity in Trans-Autobiography 24
—Dr. Mohammad Anas

4. Arundhati Roy's Recognition to Transgender and Manju Kapur's Recognition to Lesbian: A Study 33
—Dr. Rohit Prabhakar Patil

5. LGBTQ and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* 40
—Dr. Ramandeep Mahal & Khushpreet

6. Towards Equality: The Quest for LGBT Marriage Rights in India 47
—Moumala Bhattacharjee & Somdatta Mukherjee

7. Rethinking Feminism through a Trans Lens: Trans Feminist Perspectives on Gender Equity in India 60
—Pooja Kalia

SAMPLE

8. From Sacred Recognition to Colonial Suppression: The Historical Paradox of LGBTQ Rights in India 76
—Sharbi Banerjee & Arijita Das Bhowmick

9. Transition from Desire to Danger: A Netnographic Study of Crime against LGBTQ+ in Bengal 87
—Suman Halder

10. Transphobia in India: Origins, Narratives, and Social Impacts 97
—Rathod Rajender & Prof. Nagendra Ambedkar Sole

11. Exploring LGBTQ Identities through the Lens of Indian Religion, Mythology, and Contemporary Society 110
—Rabita Kumari & Dr. Ghanshyam Pal

12. Cinematic Blues: How Kundalkar's Kerala-Set Film Mirrors India's Struggle between Queer Aesthetics and Social Hostility 129
—Avinash Kumar & Dr. Arpana Kumari

13. From Margins to Mainstream: Evolution of LGBTQ Rights in India 140
—Savita & Prof. Nagendra Ambedkar Sole

14. Queer Voices Silenced by Social Stigma: Trauma and Resilience in Contemporary Indian LGBTQ+ Literature 152
—Reshma Dugar

15. Negotiating Gender and Sexuality in Laxmi's *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* 164
—Hamsringdi Maibangsa

16. LGBTQ Identities and Gender Fluidity in Classical Tamil Literature: A Study of Tolkappiyam and Sangam Texts 172
—Varusakkani K

17. Digital Queer Geographies: Mapping Online Communities and Digital Activism in Post-377 India 188
—Viraj P. Tathavadekar

SAMPLE

18. Homosexuality and Religion in India: A Contemporary Perspective 206
—*Dr. Dhananjay D. Mankar*

19. Reframing the Frame: LGBTQ Representation and Reception in Indian Media 212
—*L. Suriyakala*

20. Reimagining Identities: Queer Theory and Non-Normative Narratives in Sachin Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue* and Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King* 221
—*Dr. Anam Jabeen*

21. Transgender Lives on Screen: From Stereotype to Subjectivity 231
—*Soumen Das*

22. Marriage as Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Social Pressure in *Badhaai Do* 245
—*Dr. Sananda Sen*

23. Societal Attitudes towards Homosexuality in Arunachal Pradesh 251
—*Dr. Jimmy Sonam*

24. Exploring the Lived Experiences of Transgender Individuals in India: An In-depth Examination of *The Truth About Me*: *A Hijra Life Story* and Akkai Padmashali's *A Small Step in a Long Journey* 266
—*Barnali Dolai*

25. A Short View on the Portrayal of Homosexuality in Indian Cinema 278
—*Adrija Banerjee*

26. Deviance and Desire: Homosexuality and Societal Attitudes in Santanu Bhattacharya's *Deviants* 284
—*Athira Sanal*

SAMPLE

27. Marriage of Convenience: A Survival Strategy for Queer Individuals in *Badhaai Do* 295
—Rania Devi Hodam, Sakshi Jaiswal & Dr. Prachi Priyanka

28. From Silence to Celebration: Asexuality, Lesbian Repression, and Queer Resistance in Indian Literature and Performance 307
—Harshita Tripathi

29. Gender Fluidity and Queer Desire in Select Plays of Mahesh Dattani 318
—Kapahi Das

30. Dalit Queer Subalterns: Struggle for Survival, Suffering and Will to Power through Nietzschean Lens 329
—Nilotpal Das

31. Whispered Wounds and Unheard Agonies: An Analysis of *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* 343
—Akhila A

32. Intimacies beyond the Binary in Indian Sculpture 350
—Ankur Kumar

33. Retracing the Past: Portrayals of *Hijra* or Transgender in Old Indian Texts and Historical Accounts 375
—Dr. Dipak Giri

List of Contributors 385

Index 389

SAMPLE

Introduction

German Philosopher Martin Heidegger in his seminal 1927 work *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) describes the birth of human into the world as 'Geworfenehit' (thrownness), i.e. the one that is thrown into the world clueless. It is through self-concept, one's experience, perception of others and further sociocultural means that one acquires the ability to navigate the maze called the world. True to Heidegger's concept, Gender is a kaleidoscopic construct, woven from the threads of performance and experience. Moreover, it is a dynamic dance, choreographed by the nuances of culture and the rhythms of life. Building upon the canvas of biological sex, gender paints a vibrant landscape of difference, where the brushstrokes of societal expectation and personal identity intersect. Michael S. Kimmel rightly observes in *The Gendered Society*, "We are not necessary born different; we become different through this process of socialization." And, for Juliet Mitchell, gender is a "socially conditioned fantasy", while Butler says it a 'performative' in her celebrated essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." By 'performativity', Butler means that there can be no gender identity prior to gendered acts. Out of this gender performativity, there arises gender binary or gender binarism based on Derrida's concept of deconstruction that suggests if one intends to understand the actual meaning of a word, one needs to deconstruct its opposite. But this binary draws a marked distinction between male and female as regards their role and performance to society but as far as the role and performance of sexual minorities or LGBTQ community of people is concerned it hardly gives any room

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to these minorities in this binary.

The absence or non-existence of other sexual identities beyond male and female on the basis of role and performance assigned by society or culture at the cost of personal choice or preference of an individual is what we call 'Gender Binary'. Gender binary plays havoc upon the life of sexual minorities or LGBTQ community of people as they cannot stand by this gender binary as their sexual role and performance goes unmatched with their gender. Failing to adjust with what society expects from them, they are compelled to lead a marginal life, full of torture and humiliation devoid of any ray of positive hope to get liberated and be accepted as a social being. In words of transactivist Indian writer A. Revathi in *A Life in Transactivism,* "The gender binary splits and compartmentalizes people into male and female gender roles, gender identities and attributes. In this rigid map of what it means to be male-female, man/woman, people who are gender diverse- whose gender identity, gender experience and biological sex do not 'match' or align with social norms, are marginalized and thereby excluded because they do not conform to normative gender expectations associated with one's biological sex."

Contrary to conventional idea of gender binary, queer theory that emerges in the 1990s, neither gives privilege to one gender against the other nor considers the traditional idea of gender binary as fixed and absolute, instead it claims that masculine and feminine are not the only ways to think about gender identity besides of which there are many other non-normative identities which also need attention. Queer theory covers whole range of humanities, be it normative or non-normative, by drawing people of LGBTQ community into it and claims equality and freedom for everyone. If we trace back to history, we see the long line of changing ideas and theories given by many as regards gender and sexuality. For centuries it was believed that sexuality is natural and is embedded within the individual. Darwin, Malinowski, Marcuse and Freud saw sexuality within human psychology and asserted sexual desire as being part of natural make up. However, after the emergence of post-structuralism, conventional idea of sexual desire as being natural outcome was challenged by post structural theorists. Foucault and

Derrida denaturalized the sexual desire and argued that subjects are the autonomous creators themselves or their social worlds. Derrida suggested that in order to understand the actual meaning of a word, one needs to deconstruct its opposite and as per Derrida's concept of gender binary, male and female appeared but LGBTQ community of people did not find any place in such binarism. Foucault in his most acclaimed book *History of Sexuality* showed sexuality as a social discourses changing over the course of time through historical transition from ancient Greece and Rome to present time. Next Kinsey's creation of Kinsey Scale furthered the idea of sexuality. Having surveyed different people with his invention, Kinsey came to the conclusion that every human being is bisexual in nature. With the inclusion of bi-sexuality with conventional hetero and homosexuality, Kinsey scale added another big chapter to the history of sexuality. Finally, Butler, addressing all existing non-normative sexualities as 'queer' and drawing them under same umbrella, gives the idea of sexuality a new turn. Following the footsteps of Butler, many other queer theorists at the end of last century and in the beginning of present century appear who are trying to win the case for non-normative sexual minorities or LGBTQ community of people. Their reaction against the essentialists that sexual identities are, 'natural, fixed and innate,' (Jagose) and their assumption of the idea that identity is rather 'fluid, the effect of social conditioning and available cultural models of understanding oneself' (Jagose) gives a new dimension to the idea of sexuality.

As far as the position of sexual minorities or LGBTQ community of people in India is concerned, they are, similar to many other countries, for having been neglected in past and misrepresented in history, are unjustly and inhumanely excluded, ostracized and subjected to discrimination, though many bills and amendments have come over the years but hardly any remarkable change is observed in their life. Contrary to the opening sentence of Preamble to the Constitution of India, "WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC" that encompasses all the people of India as equals and guarantees justice and freedom for all, irrespective of any categorization, LGBTQ community of people in India rather

present a different picture, though they have gained some rights after a long battle when in 2014, transgender individuals were brought under third gender from being called 'Others' (But in the guise of welfare, they are placed last in the gender construct, next to male and female), then, in 2018, IPC 377 was overturned by the Supreme Court of India (But homophobia still persists) and in 2019, The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was passed to protect the rights of transgender (But transphobia still persists). The reality is far from what is written in paper. The goal of this present book is to surface all the issues and challenges associated with Indian LGBTQ community of people from all possible data as available in the forms of books, media and other sources of studies.

The first chapter "Celluloid Closets and Rainbow Reels: Tracing LGBTQ Portrayals in Indian Film History", a joint venture by Dr. Joydeb Patra and Dr. Prodipta Barman follows LGBTQ representations in Indian cinema, beginning with the repressed and coded desires latent in heteronormative storylines of early cinema, through to the explicit, in-your-face representation of these issues in more recent cinema and online platforms. The chapter humanizes the queer screen experience by critically analyzing some of the most important films, cultural debates, struggles of censorship, and the larger socio-legal landscape (including the decriminalization of Section 377). It declares the fact that the cinema has traditionally subjected LGBTQ lives to the so-called celluloid closet; the rainbow reels of the present are broadening the boundaries of representation and empathy, social transformation.

Next Dr. Subhadra Maharana and Dr. Roshan Ekka's chapter "Breaking Barriers: A Study of Four Transgender Individuals from Odisha Who Challenged Societal Norms and Achieved Notable Success" investigates the inspiring paths taken by four transgender individuals from Odisha- Meera Parida, Sadhana Mishra, Aishwarya Rutuparna Pradhan, and Meghana Sahoo who have bravely confronted deeply ingrained societal stigmas to attain extraordinary success and recognition. In a culture where transgender individuals frequently encounter systemic discrimination and social marginalization, these individuals have emerged as pioneers, establishing environments of dignity, leadership,

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and empowerment. Meera Parida, a prominent transgender activist and political leader, has played a crucial role in advocating for transgender rights through grassroots activism and political involvement. Sadhana Mishra, an educator and social worker, has dedicated her efforts to empowering the transgender community via education and social outreach initiatives. Aishwarya Rutuparna Pradhan, recognized as India's first openly transgender civil servant, has transformed representation within public administration. Meghana Sahoo, the nation's first transgender cab driver, has shattered occupational barriers and highlighted the importance of workplace inclusion. Through qualitative interviews, narrative analysis, and sociocultural contextualization, this study chronicles their personal and professional experiences while linking them to broader movements advocating for gender justice and inclusion in India. The research underscores the transformative impact of visibility and representation in challenging established gender norms and envisions a more inclusive society that appreciates diversity and human dignity.

Next Dr. Mohammad Anas's chapter examines *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, the autobiographical narrative of Dr. Manobi Bandyopadhyay, India's first transgender principal, co-authored with journalist Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey. The study foregrounds Manobi's lived experiences of trauma, transformation, and resilience, situating her personal testimony within broader discourses of gender, identity, and social exclusion in India. Through the documentation of her travel from Somnath to Manobi, the research captures the intersections of inner war, family exclusion, social bias, and institutional discrimination that transgender women face. It also probes the power of education, writing, and performance as liberatory practices in which Manobi insists on her agency and subverts heteronormative dualisms. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks from Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, and psychoanalytic trauma studies, this work situates Manobi's life as both an individual struggle and a collective voice for the transgender community. Ultimately, *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* emerges not only as a personal narrative of survival but also as a counter-narrative that dismantles hegemonic structures, validates transgender identity, and affirms literature's role in contesting trauma and marginalization.

Dr. Rohit Prabhakar Patil's chapter "Arundhati Roy's Recognition to Transgender and Manju Kapur's Recognition to Lesbian: A Study" explores how two famous contemporary Indian women novelists Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur present LGBTQ theme in their novels. The chapter discusses the life of transgender and lesbian in reference to Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* respectively.

Dr. Ramandeep Mahal and Khushpreet's chapter, with an emphasis on the disparity between Vikram Seth's private life and his literary voice, explores how queer identity is portrayed in his writings and public life. Despite not identifying as a queer writer in the public, Seth's fiction quietly addresses issues and themes around queer identity, emotional complexity, and social conventions. By closely examining *A Suitable Boy*, this chapter demonstrates how Seth interacts with queer subjectivities in both overt and covert ways, influenced by both the internationally literary scene and Indian cultural norms. Vikram Seth, as the most renowned and talented writer of the modern era explores India's diverse culture and social climate. His primary focus is on the internal issues that arise in him and his family. Despite many diverse conditions, his characters almost experience the same kind of suffering. He mixes domestic incidents with societal and political events. Seth recognizes the internal conflicts that people have; while they are born into the society, they endure their hardships all of their lives. Loss, expectations and personal desires are the primary cause of his struggle. The middle-class environment of Northern India is portrayed in this novel. As representatives of how caste, religion, class, and secular values interact in modern society, each character appears to be familiar with the traditional Indian way.

Moumala Bhattacharjee and Somdatta Mukherjee's chapter analyzes legal, social, and cultural contexts in and around LGBTQ marriage rights in India through tracing the historical evolution, current challenges, and pathways toward equality. The most significant judgment of 2018, Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India by the Supreme Court, struck down three provisions of Section 377, which had criminalized consensual same-sex acts between adults, thus

closing one of the most major loopholes in the rights movement of LGBTQ people, though legal loopholes for marriage, adoption, and inheritance still prevail. The chapter is an analysis of the different routes of legislative reform, judicial intervention, and grassroots advocacy that might lead India toward marriage equality.

Pooja Kalia's "Rethinking Feminism through a Trans Lens: Transfeminist Perspectives on Gender Equity in India" explores the emergence of transfeminism as a branch of feminism that addresses the intersection of feminist and transgender issues. By arguing that patriarchal structures disadvantage both cisgender women and people whose gender identities depart from normative expectations, the chapter discusses transfeminist perspectives on gender equity in India and shows how transfeminism essentially challenges essentialist and binary conceptions of gender.

Sharbi Banerjee & Arijita Das Bhowmick's chapter "From Sacred Recognition to Colonial Suppression: The Historical Paradox of LGBTQ Rights in India" explores how India offers history's most spectacular turnabout in gender and sexual diversity attitudes. From classical texts hailing tritiya-prakriti (third nature) to British colonial legislation making same-sex relationships criminal, the subcontinent's experience illustrates how colonialism can systematically destroy millennia of native acceptance. The chapter shows how this shift from a civilization that knew and commonly respected diverse gender and sexual identities to one struggling with ingrained prejudices is not cultural evolution but colonial violence on indigenous intelligence.

The rapid growth of ICT and expansion of digital platforms such as dating app as well as social media in 21st century has become a place for queer's identity formation, companionship, social interaction and intimacy because the desire for LGBTQ people in physical space is considered a stigma. Thus, sexual minorities face dangers in searching desire in virtual spaces, sometimes physically and sometimes digitally. The aim of Suman Halder's chapter is to understand the transition from online intimacy to criminal activities as well as coping mechanisms of it. To employment of qualitative Netnographic study, primary data for the research has been collected through online interview and observa-

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tion with ten self-identified gay and bisexual men belonging to the age group of 20-35 years in Bengal. Research has shown that queer people fulfill their desires in digital space due to social stigma, fear of exposure and neglect and often these shifts into risk and danger in both physical and online spaces. Silence is a main coping mechanism for queer people because of shame and fear of identity disclosure and collective support through Gay community in virtual space is another coping strategy for them due to absent of formal support system in patriarchal society.

Rathod Rajender and Prof. Nagendra Ambedkar Sole's chapter examines the history, types, and expressions of transphobia in Indian society. It discusses social, structural, and internalized transphobia and how they are reinforced through family, educational institutions, workplaces, religious organisations and legal system. Followed by discussing the progressive rulings such as the NALSA judgment (2014) and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (2019), and discriminatory practices, particularly in healthcare, law enforcement, housing, and public spaces the present chapter deals with intersectionality by analyzing how caste, class, region, and rural-urban areas worsen marginalization and explicitly focusing on the Dalit transgender experience and regional policy changes. Finally, it discusses pathways to inclusion and resists discrimination by focusing on activism, legal support, community support, mental health initiatives, and sensitization programs in schools, workplaces, and law enforcement. This chapter highlights the need for comprehensive, intersectional, and community-based strategies to break down systemic barriers and promote equity, dignity, respect, and social justice for transgender and gender diverse people in India by placing transphobia within historical, socio-cultural, and institutional contexts.

Rabita Kumari & Dr. Ghanshyam Pal's chapter examines how religious and mythological stories coexist with modern LGBTQ struggles in India, highlighting both the empowering role of cultural memory and ongoing issues of discrimination, transphobia, and social exclusion. It advocates for reclaiming indigenous traditions of fluidity to support contemporary LGBTQ identities and rights.

Avinash Kumar and Dr. Arpana Kumari's chapter explores *Cobalt*