Towards a Post-Queer Modernity: The Reclamation of Same-Sex Literary Cultures of/in India

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Abstract:

The idea that the discourses and the praxes of sexualities need to be critically interrogated, problematized, and rethought of has gained ground in the recent past, and the issue of 'modernity' has come to occupy one of the key positions that inform and complicate this project. However, the singular idea of 'modernity' is both inadequate and detrimental towards the plurality of modernities in the non-West, necessitating a rethinking through what Dilip Gaonkar and Charles Taylor theorize as 'alternative modernities.' In this context, research on the modernities of 'queer' sexualities can be re-oriented through a consideration of what has been theorized as the 'post-queer' by Peter Jackson, David Ruffolo, and Adam Green. This paper considers 'alternative modernities' and the 'post-queer' co-relationally and attempts at interrogating the idea of a multivalent post-queer modernity through a discussion of some key queer literary and critical texts published in the past two decades in India.

Keywords:

queer, post-queer, sexuality, alternative, modernity, literature, India

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In addressing the issue of cultural modernity in the domain of alternative modernities, the question of the past v. the present becomes informed by and infused in a problematic of the contextuality of cultural representation, i.e., the referential politics of the idea of modernity itself as opposed to modernization. To put it in less abstract terms, the idea of cultural modernity as a functional derivative of and from the West poses critical questions for the beneficiaries and the critiques of modernity, one of which is this: whose modernity in relation to whose? To make it clearer, this problematic that Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar calls the "dilemmas of western modernity" renders every form of contemporary modernity suspect to an unresolved plurality at the face of correlations in temporal and spatial locations (See 1). There is multiplicity in the idea of modernity, i.e., if one considers Foucault's idea of modernity as "an attitude … a mode of relating to contemporary reality" vis-à-vis Kant's discussion of the Enlightenment (Foucault 309), there are 'modernities' located and functioning in multiply discursive manners. In Charles Taylor's take on the multiplicity of modernities, the 'cultural' v. the 'acultural' or the "culture-specific" v. the "culture-neutral" understanding posits further questions in arriving at a workable consensus regarding how the modernity of the West can be discounted at the cost of interrogating the modernity of the non-West (See 172-173). Both Gaonkar and Taylor find the acultural strand of modernity as lacking the access to "divergences" and "connections" that the cultural strand of 'alternative modernities' theory provides (See Gaonkar 17 & 195).

Taking this as a point of departure, I am interested in a similar problematic of understanding the multiplicity in convergences and divergences in the 'wavelike progress' (See Taylor 182) of cultural modernities in the context of queer sexualities –

their understanding, representation, and discussion – in contemporary literary cultures in/of India. Research concerning human sexuality has yielded phenomenal studies and theories in 'Western' academic discourses. In contrast, developments in the field of queer and sexuality studies in Indian academia have only recently begun interrogating complex questions in this context. Given the dire implications of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that indirectly criminalized homosexuality in India until very recently, critical investments in the study of the issues concerning LGTBQ+ individuals have become an important need of the hour. I consider the term 'queer' to posit a heterogeneous idea of non-conformist sexualities and their practices; however, in the context of non-Western sexualities and sexual politics in a country like India, it becomes necessary to problematize 'queer' itself. Following Peter Jackson's, David Ruffolo's, and Adam Green's arguments relating to the dynamic politics and utilitarian relevance of the 'post-queer,' I am interested in considering and complicating contemporary queer cultural studies in India from a 'literary' point of view. This paper considers 'alternative modernities' and the 'post-queer' co-relationally and attempts at interrogating the idea of a multivalent post-queer modernity among several post-queer modernities – in contemporary trends in queer literary and critical texts in India. To this end, the paper concerns itself with discussions on a few key Indian 'queer' literature published in the recent past – *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* (1999), edited by Hoshang Merchant; *Facing the Mirror: Lesbian Writing from India* (1999), edited by Ashwini Sukthankar; and *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Indian Literature and History* (2000), edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai. Additionally, it also looks into anthropological/ethnographic projects such as *Made in India: Decolonizations, Queer Sexualities, Trans/national Projects* (2004) by Suparna Bhaskaran, *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West* (2005) by Ruth Vanita, *Gay Bombay: Globalization, Love and (Be)longing in Contemporary India* (2008) by Parmesh Shahani, *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics* (2012) by Naisargi N. Dave, *Sexualness* (2016) by akshay khanna, and *The Doubleness of Sexuality: Idioms of Same-Sex Desire in Modern India* (2016) by Akhil Katyal.

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Yaraana (1999) and *Facing the Mirror* (1999) edited by Hoshang Merchant and Ashwini Sukthankar respectively arrived as the first anthologies of LGBTQ+ literature in India. While Merchant's text compiled 'gay' or male same-sex/homosexual writings from India, Sukthankar did a similar work in the context of 'lesbian' or female same-sex/homosexual narratives. In his introduction to the anthology, though Merchant claims that he has trouble with and resents the term 'gay,' he continues using it throughout his preface to the collection, pointing to an underlying process of queering how one may think of 'gay'-ness in a non-Western context. He makes references to India's cultural specificities that "treat homosexual practice with secrecy but not with malice" (xxii), where queer sexualities co-exist within the normative constructs of same-sex intimate friendships, relations, and traditions (like '*yaraana*') between and among men existing in Indian since ages (See xvi), and where examples of positive narratives of same-sex relations are in abundance across various cultures (See xviii-xix). As such, Merchant's *Yaarana* constructs an alternative view of modernity pertaining to homosexuality and queerness in India by construing "sexuality in the East as a continuum rather than a category" (xviii). In Merchant's claim that the anthology, with its varied narratives, represents a defining "historic moment for India's

homosexuals" where the nation can come to terms with its own socio-cultural realities, I find the initiation of the literary project of unearthing, re-defining, and re-presenting queer modernities in contemporary India – one that is also furthered by Sukthankar through her edited volume that was published in the same month and year as *Yaraana*.

Sukthankar, in her introduction to *Facing the Mirror*, mentions that as distinct and different the Western construct of the 'lesbian' and the non-Western ideas of same-sex eroticism and intimacy (like the '*sakhi,*' '*samyonik,*' etc.) are in the context of cultural specificity and location, so must be the ways of dealing with them in co-relation to form a sustainable understanding of 'queer' identities, lived experiences, and their literary and cultural representations in India (See xvii-xviii). In discussing the 'conflict' that the term 'Indian Lesbian Writing' has with itself, she accepts that though the difficulty in subscribing a term like 'lesbian' in the Indian contexts of varied (and often veiled) same-sex traditions and relations between and among women since the ancient past (See xix), the anthology 'claims' its use "particularly because it is so uncompromising" (xx) and presents itself as a "convergence of all these nebulous realms – of 'Indian', 'lesbian' and 'writing'" (xxi). In asserting the commonality of the narratives in their 'love for women,' she claims that while marking differences, the use of the term 'Indian Lesbian Writing' helps bring such voices together, in solidarity and proud assertion (See xx), that the agential commonality must never be assumed as restrictive generality of sexuality (See xxi), and that such sharing of narratives reflects the "strategies for existing in India, with respect to India […]" (xxiv). Sukthankar sums up the politics of a multivalent queer modernity in the India 'lesbian' anthology, that I quote at length, as such:

> [W]ho are the women representing themselves here? We are all lesbians […] but what that means is not necessarily obvious. Even for the contributors at ease with the word 'lesbian', and the definition – however enigmatic and fickle – that accompanies it, the identity clearly means a variety of things beyond the basic sense of being a woman who is drawn to other women. (xxii-xxiii)

Following the initiatives of the likes of Merchant and Sukthankar, Vanita and Kidwai's anthology of same-sex narratives from India titled *Same-Sex Love in India* (originally published in 2000 and revised in 2008), ranging from the ancient period to the medieval and concluding in the modern, can be considered a definitive text in the formative canon of queer literature in contemporary India. In its diversity of literature including narratives and texts from the Sanskritic and the Perso-Urdu traditions of medieval India, the anthology attempts at proselytizing a progression of literature that implies a glorification of the traditional that leads up to the modern and converges with the cultural modernity of contemporary queer politics. What I mean to insinuate is that the idea of a queer modernity that is posited in the construction of this anthology of same-sex love in the Indian context is reflective of a politics of alternative modernities. In the "Preface" to the revised edition of the book, Vanita and Kidwai state the relevance of the anthology of diverse same-sex literary traditions through the concept of "cultural continuity" (xxv). They explain it as such:

> Despite vast differences among regions, linguistic communities, and religious and social groups, there was and is enough commonality in literary and intellectual traditions to justify studying this part of the world as a unit. […] We do not agree with those social scientists who argue that this commonality was an invention of Western orientalists. In

> one sense, all commonality is an invention, but this particular invention predates the advent of the British by centuries. (xxv)

In such an explanation of a cultural commonality that converges towards a queer contemporaneity of literary assimilation despite the divergences, like Sukthankar, Vanita and Kidwai construct a cultural strand of alternative modernities, wherein a vague concept of 'geographical and social commonality' functions towards the creation of the queer literary history that, nevertheless, is reflective of a modernity but is not contingent on a modernization vis-à-vis the 'modern nation-state' (See xxv). In excavating the examples of platonic and (homo)erotic love between men and between women present "within mainstream literary traditions" of India, Vanita and Kidwai are very clear about their aim, i.e., "to demonstrate the antiquity and transformation through time of the ideas whose history [they] are tracing" (xxvii). This movement from excavating 'subaltern pasts' towards formation of 'minority histories' of queerness in India traverses the limitations of the non-contemporaenity of a homogeneous historicization that, as Dipesh Chakrabarty states, "is put to question by subaltern pasts that makes the present […] 'out of joint', non-continuous with itself" (26). Furthermore, this project of recording the movement, through time, of the various 'Indian' same-sex love texts plural histories also entails in itself a progress towards a queer modernity – an alternative modernity that is on the one hand located in and localised by the traditions of the non-West sexuality discourse, and is on the other hand critical of West-centred terminologies that subscribe to a singular modernity model. For example, Vanita and Kidwai mention terms that "were in use in different languages at different times and places in India to refer to same-sex love" such as the word '*chapti*' that denoted "sex between women as well as the women who practised it" in late medieval Urdu poetry (xxxii). This, they emphasize, "predates any importation of nineteenth-century European psychologists' terminology" (xxxii).

In the context of the terminology, Vanita and Kidwai declare a very 'alternative' reason for not using the term 'queer' in naming the anthology, but the word 'same-sex' in a way that hints towards a formation and celebration of an 'alternative' take on the progress of sexual modernities in India. They justify their choice in stating that "many of the behaviours and people in the texts […] are not represented as strange or deviant but upheld by the texts as admirable" as opposed to the 'otherized'-meanings of unconventionality that the term queer would otherwise suggest (xxxii). In doing so, Vanita and Kidwai present a collection of 'queer' literary texts, histories, and traditions that, in its basic structure, represents to its best abilities an organic movement across temporal periods and spatial locations towards a multivalent queer modernity. In an attempt at busting the myth that the idea and practice of same-sex love were imported into India by 'foreigners,' they chart same-sex literary traditions towards an alternative idea of queer modernity in India wherein they provide queer re-readings such as the Krishna-Arjun friendship in the *Mahabharata* (See 4-9), the sex change of King Ila that made him a *'kimpurusha'* in the *Ramayana* (See 21), the representation of the third sex and same-sex union in the *Kamasutra* (See 29-32; also see Vanita 46-48), and the miraculous birth of Harihara – the son of Shiva and Vishnu – in the Mohini form – in the *Puranas* (See 80, 109 and 110). Vanita continues the progressions by discussing the various same-sex narratives in the Sanskritic tradition in medieval India such as the marriage of Aravan to Krishna (in the Mohini form) in the Tamil version of the *Mahabharata* (See Vanita and Kidwai 69), the bridal mysticism in the Vaishnava devotion in the Bhakti movement (See Vanita and Kidwai 74-75), and the sex-change of Manahsvamin in one of Vetala's stories (See Vanita and Kidwai 79). Vanita's examples flow into that of Kidwai, who in the context of the Perso-Urdu tradition of

medieval India, discusses poets such as Mir, Madho Lal Hussayn, Sarmad, and Dargah Quli Khan who wrote about male love (See Vanita and Kidwai 126) and also the *ghazal* traditions that eroticised boys and men in Mir and Abru (See Vanita and Kidwai 136-137).

The relevance of this historic progression becomes apparent when Vanita and Kidwai discuss the texts and narratives in the 'modern' times. In the context of the *Rekhti* poetry tradition of Lucknow that celebrated same-sex love among female courtesans, they contend that the politics of erasing it from the Urdu literary canon "embodies both the last vestiges of medieval freedoms and the new voices of modernity" (217). With the background of the British annexation of Awadh, Vanita and Kidwai posit that the tradition of the Indian *Rekhti* culture as "the last impulse of Asiatic modernity before the imposition of Western modernity" (220). For them, the 1860 imposition of the anti-sodomy laws and the advent of the British Empire mark the "transitional phase" where "older indigenous discourses of same-sex love and romantic friendship came into dialogue with the new Western legal and medical discourses of homosexuality as an abnormality or an illness" (222). This, according to Vanita and Kidwai, transformed the way the 'modernising' Indians looked upon their queer literary and cultural traditions through the criticism of Victorian values, wherein they "insisted that Indian culture was originally very similar to Victorian culture and had been corrupted during the medieval period" (223). This Bhabhaesque mimicry that the modernising Indian aspiring towards a cultural modernity of and in the colonial, per Vanita and Kidwai, initiated "the new homophobia" that started with the "heterosexualization of the Urdu ghazal" (228), for example, in Pandey Bechan Sharma Ugra's "Chocolate" (232). The historic progression of same-sex love and relations that finds its source in the ancient and medieval texts of India both informs and questions the modernity of the modern traditions encompassed. The intentions and implications of such a project is informed by a politics of countering the homophobic distortion of the queer traditions of same-sex love in pre-modern India that, as Vanita and Kidwai show, was the direct result of the Western modernity of the imperialist colonizing form. In doing so, their anthology attempts at salvaging a history of queer literary and cultural traditions that can hope to construct an alternative queer modernity of sexualities in contemporary India.

In the context of queer modernity, Tom Boellstorff points to three spatiohistorical scales for analyzing Asian queer subjectivities: the local, "as the site of premodern transgender and homoerotic traditions;" the national, in relation to "the tradition-disrupting impact of colonialism" and "the imposition of Western heteronormative sexual regimes;" and the global, vis-à-vis the "contemporary postcolonial moment of transnational capitalism" (219). When considered in the context of and in addition to Boellstorff's argument, *Same-Sex Love in India* constructs and functions on another scale – it opens up a third space of queer modernity posited between the localism of pre-modern homoeroticisms and literary cultures and the emerging transnationalism in globalization-era (homo)sexualities and their cultural proliferation. This can be understood through what Peter A. Jackson terms as the 'post-queer' in his discussion on Asian perspectives on sexual diversity where he claims that 'pre-gay' LGBTQ+ cultures and subjectivities existed before and despite Western academia's constructions of the particular discourses of sexualities, that the globalization in the 1990s aided the Asian contexts to appropriate the Western discourses of 'queer' sexualities to induce critical insights and resist local strictures, and that the selective and strategic uses of the 'queer' constructs have resulted in new ways of carving out intersectionality and of being post-queer in Asia (See Jackson, "Pre-Gay, Post-Queer" 2-6). Furthermore, Vanita and Kidwai's project makes its aims affective by going beyond the relationship

between queer bodies and queer subjectivities, and exploring what David V. Ruffolo terms as 'post-queer considerations' that "are attracted to disrupting the link between bodies and subjectivity […] calling for a shift from queer possibilities […] to post-queer potentialities […]" (380).

In my discussion of *Same-Sex Love in India*, I propose that Vanita and Kidwai, like the other authors and researchers discussed in this paper, work in this framework of 'post-queer potentialities' and work towards a multivalent 'post-queer modernity' in their representations and explications of queer traditions and cultures. Vanita and Kidwai's text aspires towards this goal in two ways: (1) by making the affective interactions of the sensual and the verbal in the same-sex narratives take the centre-stage instead of the exclusively erotic and physical - for example, the focus on the alternative forms of same-sex relations in the form of friendships and desires; and (2) by constructing an alternative approach to the (homo)sexual modernity of India (as opposed to the homophobic lens of the colonial modernity of the West) through the discourse of a historical refashioning of 'queer' texts, traditions, and cultures from the 'ancient' to the 'modern.' A similar re-telling has also been undertaken by Devdutt Pattanaik in *Shikhandi: And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You* (2015), where the rich heritage of Indian Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain myths, tales, and oral traditions have been discussed with the aim of connecting a modernity-inflected present to the pre-modernity of the 'queer' past of/in India. In this context, it would also be helpful to refer to Adam I. Green's theorisation of the 'post-queer' framework necessitated by the inadequacy of both the strain of 'radical deconstructionism,' as furthered by the likes of Foucault and Butler, and the strain of 'radical subversion,' as furthered by the likes of Sedgwick and Doty (523). While Green focuses on the necessity for the post-queer dynamics that can hope to contribute to the analysis of the sexual vis-à-vis the social, my post-queer consideration of such texts as that of Vanita and Kidwai takes into consideration the sexual vis-à-vis the literary where the anthology itself functions on multiple levels or what I term the multivalence of post-queer modernities. *Out!: Queer Stories from the New Queer India* (2012), edited by Minal Hajratwala, has continued this trend in contemporary queer literary investment by considering the term 'queer' "in the broadest sense" (13), in order to encompass stories and narratives of a multitude of sexualities, sexual subjectivities, and queer modernities; the anthology is specifically agential as it has been published in a period post Delhi High Court's landmark judgement reading down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in 2009.[1] One way the text achieves this is through a queering of the process or construct of categorization itself by "defying easy pigeonholing" of the 'queer' narratives and, instead, assembling them "in an aesthetic order" – in clusters[2] re-presenting a putting together of "an outfit for a coming-out party, a parade, or even a wedding" (Hajratwala 15-16).

Revisionary re-considerations of the sexual vis-à-vis the socio-cultural and politico-legal have also been attempted by critical projects that aim at positing the idea of a multivalent queer modernity in the sociological, anthropological, and ethnographic analyses of LGBTQ+ lives, practices, and relations in India. One of the first representative examples of such investments is Suparna Bhaskaran's *Made in India* (2004). Interrogating the politics and dynamics of queer sexualities in Indian contexts at the turn of the century, Bhaskaran informs that she uses the term 'queer' "in both a broad and narrow sense" and recognizes that "giving it too much umbrella power or too much specificity can be [both] useful and limiting" (8). In her attempt at making sense of "worlds constituted by multiple histories, about subjects who resist and are outside the folds of heteronormativity, and who seek similar gender/sex erotics," she utilizes 'queer' "in a strategic, embodied, very much marked, and invented manner" (8). In

considering and problematizing the construct and utility of the politic of 'queer' in "a dual dialectic sense of fluid and specific," she emphasizes on the necessity to "recognize differences […] and simultaneously seek categories that speak to […] lived experience and coalitions" (9). In the postcolonial Indian context, Bhaskaran claims that though "the formation of particular identities and ideologies of gender may have some comparable influences of modernity […], the discourses of development, privatization, increased trans/national integration (both colonial and postcolonial), virtual and local communities, and nativism have created parallel unique and accidental effects" (11). She refers to specific examples of "co-constitutive discourses and identities" like "the increasingly visible global/local sexual minorities and subjectivities such as gay, MSM (or men who have sex with men), and variously localized categories such as kothi and panthi within the framework of sexual rights and health" to "demonstrate how particular forms of consciousness are negotiated and envisioned" vis-à-vis modernity in India (12). In doing so, the anthropological text post-'queers' both the constructs of sexual subjectivities in socio-cultural contexts and the frameworks of viewing, understanding, researching, and interrogating in relation to multivalent post-queer modernities in contemporary India.

In 2001, Jackson had regretted the lack of "detailed historical studies of the transformations in Asian discourses which have incited the proliferation of new modes of eroticised subjectivity" ("Pre-Gay, Post Queer" 1) – a necessity that he had himself initiated in the context of South-Easy Asian post-queer cultures and politics. What can be considered a preliminary attempt at filling this research gap in the Indian context done by Bhaskaran, has been carried forward by Vanita; Vanita's study on same-sex marriage in India and abroad continues with the discursive critical re-visioning process initiated by Bhaskaran in the context of post-queer modernities. In *Love's Rite* (2005), Vanita reiterates that "the extreme homophobia we witness today […] including India […] is a product not of the ancient or medieval past, but rather of modernity" (Vanita 13) and that "modern homophobia is deeply intertwined with modern nationalism" (Vanita 15). In this curious conflation of the Western modernity model with the extremist nationalism of contemporary India, Vanita reveals the underlying problematic of the (hetero)normative discourse of modernity in post-independence India. In countering this tendency of the oversimplifying nationalist and homophobic modernity, Vanita presents, as discussed earlier in the context of *Same-Sex Love in India*, a double-agency of multivalent queer modernity by stating that "same-sex marriage [as] a social reality in India has roots in the past" (Vanita 1), that "same-sex and cross-sex couples are more alike than different (Vanita 21), and, furthermore, that "modern male-female marriage […] acquired its ideals of friendship not from a heterosexual model, but from the model of same-sex friendship" based on the element of choices (Vanita 26), making the exclusion of "same-sex couples from a modern institution whose ideals draw on earlier ideals of same-sex love" ironic (Vanita 27-28). Throughout the book, Vanita's core argument in this context of same-sex marriage is that in India, it "is really about the dangers of erotic love" (Vanita 33), and in historicising, interrogating and placing texts, narratives, rituals and traditions of same-sex relational and familial structures in perspective vis-à-vis the sexual plurality inherent in Indian history and culture, she manages to problematize and revise the idea of a queer modernity implicit in same-sex marital discourses in contemporary India. She provides and discusses numerous examples from 'modern' India of same-sex relations and marriages that refer to and/or make use of such traditions of same-sex intimate companionship and that reflect upon how a queer modernity can be understood in the agency accorded to it by virtue of its multivalence. Furthermore, within a post-queer paradigm, Vanita criticizes the objection to categories such as 'lesbian,' 'gay,'

and 'homosexual' on charges of misplaced modernity and non-specificity (See Vanita 322-323), and based upon her understanding (and elaborations) of the fluidity and non-prescriptiveness of multivalent post-queer modernities in Indian literary and cultural contexts, she proposes the need to move from the politics of identities to that of relationships and kinships that goes beyond restrictive post-colonial precepts of a singular modernity (See Vanita 326-328).

Similarly, Shahani's *Gay Bombay* (2008) problematizes "the debate within academia about whether one can use Western constructs like gay and lesbian when one studies the sexuality of people from non-Western locations" (50). Shahani makes it clear in the "Introduction" itself that he finds "identity-based categories to be more significant culturally, socially and vernacularly," and that he "do[es] not find the term gay limiting, if used specifically and appropriately" (51). On the theoretical forefront, Shahani, while utilizing Arjun Appadurai's idea of 'intersecting scapes' within the heterogenization model of global-local flow of interactions (See Shahani 32-34; also see Appadurai 32-47), attempts to read 'Gay Bombay' as a "site for the examination of how locality emerges in a globalizing world […] how history and genealogy inflect one another" (Shahani 57). It is within this framework that Shahani proclaims that he uses the term 'Gay Bombay' as it "gives a name to the idea that things might be different, that people marginalized within dominant gender or sex regimes can talk back and carve out spaces by strategic acts of subversion" (51). Furthermore, while queering the term 'queer' itself by replacing it with and making use of terms specific to the Indian contexts of sexualities such as *kothi* (See 53), Shahani intermittently provides snippets of the events and experiences that contributed towards the writing of the text, in a way that is not only non-normative (in terms of narrative style) but also corrective towards the damage done by the failure to acknowledge, understand, and re-present specificities of Indian 'queer' modernities as distinct from Western models even when they may "profess a gay identity in non-Western locations" (83).

In similar contexts of the politics of 'queer' subjectivities, in highlighting the trap of 'binary thinking' when it comes to the study of sexualities and sexual politics in a country like India, Naisargi N. Dave, in *Queer Activism in India* (2012), emphasizes that the generalization of plausible similarities and the presumption of obvious differences must be avoided (See 15-16), in order to interrogate how "cultural norms [are] newly imagined, deployed, and inhabited in and through the politics of sexuality" (17). Similar to Shahani, Dave mentions that this contentious issue for scholarship on sexualities in India must be aware of and accommodative towards the multiplicitous realities of sexualities in a non-Western context, and to this end, she informs that her use of the term 'queer' in her work on the trajectories, histories, and ethics of queer activism in India is "more than convenience;" it is a strategy "that doubles as an analytic as well as an assertion of solidarity" (20). In her emphasis on a "mapping of queer horizons" (20) through both 'analysis' and 'solidarity' to critically re-think the trajectories, histories, and ethics of queer studies in India, Dave lends credence to and furthers the necessity of interrogating constructs of post-queer modernities in India. Regarding the 'post-queer' in the Asian context, Jackson informs that the "key notions in cross-cultural inquiries are hybridity, complexity, and syncretism, […] these terms remain empty without detailed accounts of the precise articulation of discourses and practices at actual sites of cultural intersection" ("Pre-Gay, Post-Queer" 2). In the context of contemporary India, Dave's project seems to have provide one of the first such accounts that are so very crucial towards understanding the multivalence of post-queer modernities, and akshay khanna's research makes another key contribution in this field.

In his monograph titled *Sexualness* (2016), akshay khanna, based on extensive anthropological fieldwork and equally critical analyses of theoretical perspectives, posits an idea of 'sexualness' (as distinct from West-informed/centric notions of sexuality) as a "'modern' phenomenon […] through which 'sexuality' becomes intelligible in the registers of governmentality" that interrogates and problematizes the constructs of sexuality in the context of quotidian praxis of identity politics and cultural praxis in contemporary India (7). In the context of India's contemporary modernity, khanna considers "the multiplicity of idioms and metaphors through which gender diversity and sexualness are spoken on, transacted and experienced in India" (6) as requiring new discourses and methods of enquiring into the dynamic politics of queer modernities in India. Dealing with the domains of epidemiology and law, the book critically investigates the underlying politics in the socio-politico-legal discourses that have helped form/construct the identity of the community called the 'queer'/sexual minority/LGBTQ+ in India in the past two decades – especially in relation to HIV-AIDS and the debate on Section 377 of the IPC. The refraction that occurs in dealing with such praxis of sexual identity politics and performed queer sexualities reveals sexuality as specifically ontological while sexualness as especially diverse/erotic, and thus strategically subversive and problematically agential. This 'sexualness,' khanna claims, "escapes the frame of sexuality, desire and eroticism that flows through people without constituting them as subjects" (12) and functions in a paradigm that is already always constituted by "a multiplicity of ways in which to imagine both selves and subjects" (26). Ranging from issues like men holding hands in India to the questions of subject positions, subjectivity, criticism, and diversity of/in queer terminologies and idioms in circulation in India, the book revises the constructions of 'queer' and gender itself in analytical and socio-political contexts and performances in terms of social, cultural, and legal contestations. As such, it provides a new critical re-conceptualization with respect to its focus on the ways in which representations of queer sexualities and same-sex relations re-present, subvert, and problematize contemporary notions about the same and about post-queer modernities in India.

Drawing from khanna's framework in the context of multivalent queer modernity in India, Akhil Katyal, in his monograph *The Doubleness of Sexuality* (2016), theorizes on what he terms the 'doubleness of sexuality' in the context of modern and contemporary Indian queer scene and provides observations, commentaries, and discussions on issues ranging from the idioms of same-sex desires prevalent in North India to the sense of belonging and community in LBGTQ+ activism and gay chat websites. Katyal claims, like the researchers discussed earlier, that "no matter how much the 'gay' or 'lesbian' subject is given specific contours, [… the] subject's position will remain, in actual experience, always open-ended and contested, always forming and unforming" (1). Katyal interrogates multivalent socio-cultural idioms of same-sex desires and subjectivities in India – terms such as '*yaari,*' '*masti,*' '*laundebaazi,*' '*ishq,*' '*dosti,*' '*shauk,*' '*gaybaazi,*' etc. and categories such as '*kothi,*' '*panthi,*' '*do-parantha,*' etc. – as critical constructs to approach the 'doubleness' (the ambiguity and fluidity) underlying and underlining the sub-cultures of same-sex relations and queer subjectivities. The intersectionality of these two discourses of critical thinking is discussed in the context of the praxis of queer sexualities and sexual subjectivities in the refracted politics of experiential and performed identities, for example, in the way categorical terms like 'queer' and 'gay'/'lesbian' can be and are utilized within same contexts of sexualities and sexual politics. Building upon akshay khanna's idea of 'sexualness,' Katyal looks at and reads the oxymoronic and agential doubleness that defines and sustains queer and same-sex desires and relations in India, especially in terms of the crossroads between activist rhetoric and literary representation. Though

limited mostly to a North-Indian-centric context of queer 'modernity,' the various insights on and problematization of the cultural markers and idioms of queer sexualities presented in this project encompass the idea of post-queer modernities that I have formulated and discussed in this paper.

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Post-queer considerations effected towards representing and reclaiming same-sex and 'queer' cultural dynamics in both the literary and sociological projects seem to be in tandem with the literary historicization of the pre-modern for/by a queer modernity as discussed with regard to the anthologies. From an anthropological point-of-view, Arjun Appadurai theorizes the dialectic between the local and the global as a politics of emergent 'locality' – as a relational and contextual idea – that "itself is a historical product and that the histories through which localities emerge are eventually subject to the dynamics of the global" in a globalized world (18). Similarly, in the context of the contemporary post-queer literary cultures, the politics of locality vis-à-vis the global can be understood as being translated into a conversation between the pre-modern and the modern within the larger framework of alternative modernities, as put forward by Gaonkar and Taylor, where Indian queer modernities are represented and construed as both a temporal development through Western modernity and an ontological derivation from non-Western pre-modernity, and in the process asserting an alternative model of queer sexualities, their constructs, and dynamic politics. In this politically agential re-imagination and re-construction of queer literary and cultural traditions, I have found an overarching and underlying reclamation strategy, which also gets reaffirmed in non-literary sociological/ethnographic ventures. If Ruffolo and Green's arguments are to be considered in this context, the projects envisaged by the likes of Merchant, Sukthankar, Vanita, Kidwai, Pattanaik, Bhaskaran, Shahani, Dave, Hajratwala, khanna, and Katyal provide examples of the post-queer considerations and interrogations of contemporary Indian queer modernities. It is in this sense that texts like that by Merchant, Sukthankar, and Vanita present to the Indian reader a literary history that demands alternative insights into queer modernity through a re-visioning of same-sex love, relations, and narratives. It is also in a similar sense that a texts like that of Shahani, Dave, and khanna present to the Indian citizen a culturally grounded contemporaneity of 'queer' lives and relations in the framework of multivalent Indian queer modernities. All such forms and examples of arriving at alternative modernities have come to inform contemporary research on queer sexualities and cultures of/in the Indian contexts and, I believe, will continue to influence queer studies in India in the future too.

Notes

[1] Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), in the context of "Unnatural offences" states that "[w]hoever 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 a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine" (Indian Penal Code 88). Though not explicitly stating that the Section refers to same-sex sexual activities, Section 377 has been considered and has been used to censure and criminalize homosexual acts, even in private, and subsequently, to criticize, otherise, and stigmatize individuals who identify as

LGBTQ+. Following the long legal struggle, that began in the 1990s, against this Section, Delhi High Court finally read down the Section on 2 July, 2009 in its judgement on the "Naz Foundation v. Government of NCT of Delhi and Others," effectively decriminalizing homosexuality; this is considered a landmark judgement in the history of LGBTQ+ rights movement in India. However, following the Special Leave Petitions filed against the High Court's judgement, in the "Suresh Kumar Koushal vs. Naz Foundation" case, the reading down of Section 377 was overruled by the Supreme Court of India and homosexuality re-criminalized on 11 December, 2013. As a result of the curative petitions filed against this particular judgement, in the "Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. v. Union of India thr. Secretary Ministry of Law and Justice" case, the Supreme Court overruled the 2013 judgement and decriminalized Section 377 again on 6 September, 2018. For a more detailed history of and discussion on Section 377 of the IPC, see Dave 172-182; Narrain 58-61; Narrain and Gupta xxviii-xxix; Rao 127-141; Satish 267-276; Vanita 14-16.
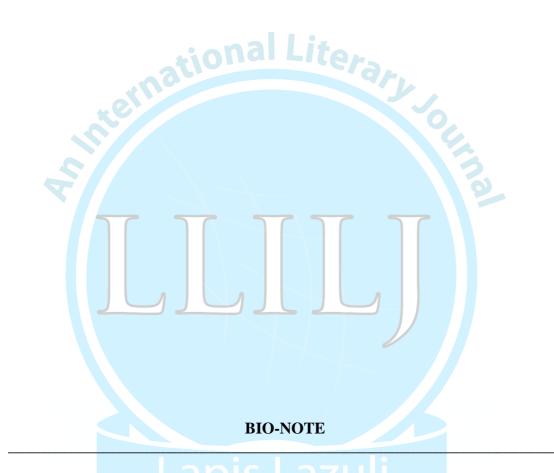
[2] The anthology arranges the stories in sections titled as such: "as I stood before the mirror, in the harsh yellow light," "the oil for my hair, gleaming green and jewel-like in the golden fluted bowl," "wrapped in an oversized green gown, lying on a stark white sheet," "under the white T-shirt, where her skin begins to talk," "his makeup palette: traffic-stopping red mouth, blue azure eyelids," and "placed my cardigan on the pane, and smashed it open."

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BIO-NOTE

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