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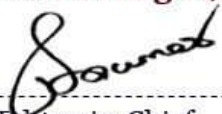
**“QUEER AESTHETICS AND THE POETICS OF IDENTITY: A LITERARY  
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## QUEER AESTHETICS AND THE POETICS OF IDENTITY: A LITERARY REAPPRAISAL OF LGBTQIA NARRATIVES

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### ABSTRACT

The rainbow representation of LGBTQIA identities in Indian and global literary traditions underscores literature as a vital domain for negotiating visibility, resistance, and cultural relevance. Even though LGBT lives have often been disregarded, erased, or hidden in mainstream texts, they have also survived in ways that challenge traditional ideas about desire, gender, and physical identity. This study examines the changing frameworks that influence LGBT identities, scrutinizing their formation, challenge, and reclamation across various historical periods. Employing queer theory, intersectionality, and postcolonial critique, the study highlights the tension between indigenous expressions of gender diversity and the heteronormative frameworks imposed by colonial modernity. The research compares South Asian narrative traditions with global gay literatures, encompassing ancient philosophical works to modern activist writings, thereby highlighting both the similarities in narrative techniques and the uniqueness of local histories shaped by caste, religion, and nationalism. The study, utilizing significant ideas from esteemed scholars, asserts that LGBTQIA literary production is neither peripheral nor accidental; it is essential for understanding cultural histories, identity formation, and the politics of representation. The study underscores the transformative role of narrative in creating more inclusive queer imaginaries, demonstrating literature's ability to record marginalized experiences and envision alternative futures.

**Keywords:** LGBTQIA, Storytelling, Resistance, Intersectionality, Cultural Representation, and Queerty

## Introduction

For a long time, literature has been a space where people may show, question, and transform their identities in numerous ways. Literature provides visibility to LGBTQIA groups in contexts where public discourse sometimes mandates silence. The queer texts contest normative frameworks by emphasizing experiences of desire, embodiment, and self-determination that diverge from heteronormative standards. Sedgwick accurately claims that queer writing "destabilizes the epistemology of the closet" and challenges the rigid binaries utilized by civilizations to classify desire. (7)

The Indian literary tradition has a long history of acknowledging gender variety, even though it is currently facing problems with LGBTQIA rights. The Mahabharata is a famous Indian epic that features characters like Shikhandi, whose change in gender is an important aspect of the plot. The Kama Sutra recognizes same-sex desire without judgment, countering the colonial and postcolonial view of queerness as deviant. The British moral code, however, led to laws and social norms that limited Indian sexuality for more than a hundred years.

Queer representation has existed for a long time all throughout the world, from ancient Greek philosophy to Renaissance plays, modernist art, and queer activism today. These works collectively

demonstrate the concurrent marginalization and celebration of LGBT life. This research situates gay literature as a transnational field shaped by intersecting historical forces and cultural tensions. The research underscores literature's role in fostering inclusive imaginaries and challenging restrictive frameworks by analyzing Indian queer literature alongside global traditions.

## Review of the Literature

The scholarly examination of LGBTQIA identities in literature has advanced significantly during the past few decades. This is due to theoretical shifts that transformed our understanding of sexuality, gender, and power. Early queer theory, particularly the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, emphasized that sexuality transcends personal concerns, serving as a framework that shapes cultural output. Her analysis of homosocial desire illuminated the extent to which literary traditions are designed to control, obscure, or misinterpret queer potentiality. (1) Judith Butler made it tougher to understand identity by saying that gender is performative, which means that it is a series of actions that occur over time rather than something that is always there. (2) These frameworks challenged the presupposed naturalness of heteronormativity and established novel approaches to literary interpretation. Michel Foucault's examination of the history of sexuality presented a crucial viewpoint, clarifying how discourses regulate bodies



and desires. He argued that sexuality is produced by authority, surveillance, and institutional norms, claiming that resistance inevitably emerges wherever power is applied. (3) This point of view is important for understanding gay literature as a way to go against the culture.

Numerous instances of LGBT expression exist in Western literature, spanning several genres. Walt Whitman's celebration of male closeness in *Leaves of Grass* put homoerotic desire at the center of a democratic poetic ethos (4), while Audre Lorde's work focused on Black lesbian identity as a source of political power. (5) These works show how literature can express sorts of desire that are not usually seen in stories that people tell.

The history of Indian literature reveals a quite different story. Pre-modern South Asian texts, including the *Kama Sutra*, temple erotica, and narratives like *Ardhanarishvara*, demonstrate a native acceptance of fluid gender expression and same-sex relationships. Wendy Doniger and other well-known scholars argue that these writings show that various sexual practices have always existed, which goes against the concept that queerness is a new thing. (6) But British colonial rule brought Victorian ideals, made same-sex partnerships illegal, and transformed how people thought about culture through education and law.

Contemporary Indian authors have engaged with these intricate histories by reviving marginalized perspectives and confronting contemporary concerns related to caste, religion, and nationalism. Ismat Chughtai, Vikram Seth, Suniti Namjoshi, Mahesh Dattani, and Akhil Katyal are just a few of the bright and interesting writers who have made queer subjectivity a big part of literary discussion. Their work exemplifies how Indian queer literature addresses intersecting identities and experiences of discrimination. Global and Indian studies collectively establish LGBTQIA literature as a crucial field that illuminates the intersection of human experience, political struggle, and cultural memory.

### **Methodology**

This study utilizes a qualitative, interpretive methodology, incorporating close reading, comparative analysis, and theoretical synthesis. The primary writings examined are novels, poems, plays, and autobiographical works that concentrate on LGBT experiences across various historical and cultural contexts. Secondary materials encompass theoretical frameworks such as queer theory, intersectionality, and postcolonial critique, with historical and sociological analyses of gender and sexuality.

Certain close readings focus on common themes—visibility, erasure, desire, performance, and resistance—and their unique expressions in Indian and global

literatures. The comparative analysis is employed to identify parallels and contrasts in narrative strategies, particularly examining the impact of colonialism, religious discourse, and modern legal frameworks on literary representations of gay life. The scholarly sources are included throughout the investigation to validate interpretative claims and situate the work within current academic discourses. The methodology highlights the dialogic relationship between literature and social reality, demonstrating how queer texts function as conduits of cultural memory, political critique, and imaginative possibilities.

#### **Historical trajectories of LGBTQIA in global contexts.**

In ancient Western literature, same-sex desire was frequently incorporated into intellectual debate. In his Symposium, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato famously defines love between men as a way to become more intelligent and spiritual. He writes, "love is the desire for wholeness." (8) These kinds of beliefs illustrate that queerness wasn't always looked down upon; instead, its worth altered with changes in society and politics.

The rise of Victorian morality had a big impact on how these ideas and interpretations were understood. Jeffrey Weeks is right when he says that "the nineteenth century was the great age of sexual classification." This was a time when

non-heterosexual desire was seen as a disease, a crime, and a medical condition. These kinds of classification systems made writers use subtext or metaphor when writing about LGBT themes. James Baldwin, one of the best historians, brought stories about gay people back into modern literature. Baldwin's assertion that "love takes off the masks we fear we cannot live without" (10) situates queerness within the framework of a fundamental human necessity for authenticity.

#### **LGBTQIA in Indian Contexts**

India's written traditions illustrate a long and intricate history of gender and sexuality. The Kama Sutra is one of the oldest classical texts that talks about sexual pleasure. It discusses same-sex attraction without moral condemnation. Doniger adds that the book "recognizes multiple forms of desire and same-sex intimacy" (11), but these feelings changed a lot when colonial rule came up. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code put "unnatural" sexual acts against the law, which meant that being against gay people was against the law. Edward Said eloquently states, "texts create not only knowledge but the reality they describe." (12) As a result, Colonial discourse reshaped Indian self-perception around sexuality.

Some postcolonial writers tried to bring back voices that weren't being heard and to challenge accepted moral norms. Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf*, published in 1942,



was revolutionary in its depiction of female homosexual yearning. Vikram Seth, Suniti Namjoshi, and Mahesh Dattani also broadened the breadth of LGBT experiences in Indian writing. These historical trajectories underscore the dynamic interplay between cultural memory, state authority, and literary expression.

### **The World Canon**

Queer literature from all over the world reveals how sexuality fits into larger political and cultural structures. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which won the American Poet Laureate prize, celebrates "the manly love of comrades" (13), giving homoerotic desire both democratic and spiritual meaning. Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* looks at how people feel when they are stuck in social structures that don't let them be themselves. It shows how cultural conventions limit individual truth. (14)

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* goes against gender stereotypes by showing a major character who changes sexes while keeping the same identity. The narrative suggests that identity is mutable and contingent upon the past. (15) Postcolonial queer fiction, such as Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, incorporates complexities of ethnic, national, and familial conflict to elucidate the relationship between sexuality and systematic brutality. (16) These works show how queer literature breaks down old narratives and gives us new ways to think

about who we are, who we love, and where we fit in.

### **Literature on queer people from South Asia and India**

Queer literature from South Asia has been shaped by its legendary past, colonial history, and present socioeconomic challenges. The character of Shikhandi in the *Mahabharata* exemplifies gender fluidity before modern discourse, illustrating what one scholar describes as "gender as performance within mythic imagination."

The modern writers built on these ideas. Ishmat Chughtai's *Lihaaf* addressed the patriarchal silence surrounding female sexuality by asserting that concealed spaces, like the quilt, are replete with longing. (17) Mahesh Dattani's plays bring LGBT voices that society has shoved to the side into the open. He asserts that "we must articulate the inexpressible to exist authentically." (18)

Suniti Namjoshi examines the interplay of sexuality with myth and narrative authority through satire, feminism, and queer poetry. At the same time, contemporary authors such as R. Raj Rao and Akhil Katyal articulate queer identity within urban, multilingual, and politically salient contexts. In this setting, Indian queer literature provides a place where people can fight back, be creative, and grow their culture.

### **Dominant Themes in LGBTQIA Literature**

LGBTQIA literature continuously revisits prevalent themes such as identity, desire, prejudice, and performance. Sedgwick's analysis of the closet as an epistemic space (19) illustrates how hiding influences various narratives. One of the Indian works that illustrates people attempting to be authentic while dealing with these problems is Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend*. (20)

Desire, often constrained yet fruitful, emerges as a critical element. Lorde's depiction of the erotic as a source of power clarifies the inclination of various queer tales to convert personal desire into political dialogue. On the other side, global writers like Winterson admire how desire can change things up. Indian writers like Arvind Krishna Mehrotra carefully weave gay connections into areas where morals are strict.

The themes of exclusion and resistance come up again and again. Halperin's claim that LGBT lives are constantly negotiating norms (22) reflects the social milieu that literature explores. Butler's claim that gender does not have a distinct origin (23) highlights the instability portrayed in many texts. Indian literature often interweaves gender nonconformity with themes of caste, community, and national identity.

### **Close Readings**

The thorough examination of the text demonstrates how each piece addresses the intricacies of the LGBT experience. The characters in Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* deal with the pressures of society, as shown by the line "We walk on lines that tremble under our weight." (24) Suniti Namjoshi, another famous writer, uses her poetry to show that love is a power that knows no bounds and that queer delight can thrive despite limits. (25)

Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* shows how internalized homophobia may create emotional pain, showing that identity is shaped by both want and fear. (26) Woolf's *Orlando* sees gender change as a normal part of life that breaks down traditional boundaries. In contrast, Raj Rao's fiction focuses on the search for LGBT visibility in Indian cities, saying that "our voices cannot be erased." (27) These close readings show that queer literature does more than just show things; it makes us think deeply about identity, agency, and social membership.

### **LGBTQIA in cinematography**

The inclusion of LGBTQIA+ themes in film has been a major source of cultural tension in both Indian and global film cultures. Indian queer film, which became popular in the 1990s with movies like *Fire*, featured visual stories that stress proximity, being on the outside, and fighting back against heteronormative ideals. (28) After that, more and more filmmakers started



using realistic styles and documentary techniques to represent real LGBT lives. This was part of a larger conversation about gender and sexuality in society.

New Queer Cinema used experimental styles, fractured narratives, and images that went outside the norm to question common ideas. This has transformed how LGBTQIA+ movies are made all around the world. (29) Contemporary foreign films significantly integrate intersectional perspectives, highlighting race, class, and transgender identities within visually innovative contexts. Indian and global cultures together create a lively cinematic world where queer representation is more than simply material; it is also a way of talking about things that changes how we see them.

### **Concluding Reflection**

LGBTQIA+ literature offers incisive criticisms of cultural norms and ultimately creates a sanctuary for marginalized voices. Queer theory "opens spaces for new literary imaginaries," as Jagose correctly says. Indian writers like Chughtai and Katyal show how writing can free people. Narrain said that writing "has always been a refuge for voices denied in public discourse." (31) Globally, queer writings question what we think we know about gender, sexuality, and power. This supports Sedgwick's claim that examining the definitions of homo and heterosexual is essential for a comprehensive analysis of contemporary

culture. (32) These stories help us understand what it means to be human by showing us how different, changing, and strong we can be.

### **Conclusion**

The LGBTQIA literature from India and across the globe serves as a significant chronicle of resistance, identity, and cultural transformation. Sedgwick's claim that the omission of queer critique reduces cultural research "damaged in its central substance" (33) underscores the imperative of integrating queer perspectives into literary studies. Lihaaf and other Indian masterpieces show how literature may bring to light facts that are hidden by social norms. This supports Narrain's assertion that writing protects voices that are not heard.

Queer literature is an important part of understanding how identity and power work when you compare it to stories from around the world. In the end, queer works are not only cultural records; they also help us imagine more inclusive futures by making sure that voices that are not often heard continue to have an impact on literature, politics, and society.

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