

Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies

Volume 24

Issue 1 *Asian Feminisms and Youth Activism:
Focus on India and Pakistan*

Article 7

11-1-2022

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Recommended Citation

Singh, Aakanksha (2022) "Reflections on Queer Literary Representations in Contemporary Indian Writing in English," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies*: Vol. 24: Iss. 1, Article 7. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/wagadu/vol24/iss1/7>

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CHAPTER 7

Reflections on Queer Literary Representations in Contemporary Indian Writing in English

Aakanksha Singh¹

ABSTRACT

This reflection piece explores the importance of thinking beyond labels and categories for queer desires and queer expressions of love. Knowability and visibility of these desires through labels and categories has the potential and indeed does create awareness. This visibility, however, can inadvertently also create borders and perpetuate rigidity about queer desires, confining them to certain norms and limitations. The piece then reflects on mass media's role in creating these borders, particularly through the coverage of Pride Parades in India. Then by examining contemporary texts such as Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008), Himanjali Sankar's *Talking of Muskaan* (2015) and Parvati Sharma's short story, "The Quilt," (2010) the piece argues how nuanced literary representations in contemporary Indian writing can allow readers to look beyond those labels and imagine myriad possibilities, leading to what Spivak calls, "sustained uncoercive rearrangement of desires". However, the article then concludes that existence of a body of literary work mustn't lead to complacency but to broadening of horizons and forging avenues for formation of queer literary writing in India through diverse forms: one example of this is bringing intersectional queer political themes within the ambit of literature as well.

Keywords: Queer women, India, contemporary Indian writing, queerness, literature, representation

Introduction

Queer visibility has been a significant aspect of asserting the right to merely exist in India, which becomes more so true for queer women. When the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Manohar Joshi stated that Deepa Mehta's film, *Fire* (1996), was "alien to our culture," it erased a reality of queer desire among Indian women (Jain and Raval n.pag.). Media's focus on these queer desires has been sporadic, often sensational or what Ashwini Sukthankar calls, "like scattered fireworks" that emphasise on events such as suicides or marriages of queer women (xv). While Sukthankar talked about media reportage in the 1990s' the trend has continued well into the 21st century where reports, albeit in a slightly optimistic manner instead of using a startling or surprising tone, continue to highlight expressions of these desires solely through heteronormative events such as marriage. These occasional news reports do bring in an iota of comprehension around queer desires, yet because of the patchy nature of the reports, they simultaneously also continue to 'other' these desires and frame their perception through distinct normative structures and connotations.

In this reflection piece, I would therefore take a moment to think about how media reports coloured my own awareness about what queer desires mean and placed it into narrow confines. Using that as a jumping-off point, I argue then that literary representation of Indian women's queer desires in contemporary Indian writing can allow for what Gayatri Spivak terms as "sustained uncoercive rearrangement of desires" ("A Conversation" 615). What I put forward is that nuanced literary representations lead to such a rearrangement enabling individuals to look beyond and push against the borders of categories and connotations of queerness and the expression of desires. The literary representations can reorient the way individuals think of queerness to being borderless which makes room for exploring different queer subjectivities.

Invisibility Through Visibility

Putting the spotlight and creating awareness about queer individuals in India happened not only through erratic focus by media outlets but also through binary gender divides. Queer activism in India gained ground in 1990s' and is "inseparable from the history of neoliberalism, nongovernmental organizations (ngos), the politics and anti-politics of development, and the agendas of a modernizing state and a transnational public health apparatus" (Dave 10 - 11). Indian queer activism directed the media's attention particularly toward gay men and the issues associated with the spread of HIV/AIDS (Misra 22).

While it was transnational queer activism that concentrated on gay men's rights and violations, it was most possibly the vehement attack on the film, *Fire*, mainly by Hindu Right forces in 1990s' that led to an outpouring of outrage by queer women activists and members of different queer women's organisations, compelling them to show up and make themselves known. Hence, the placard proclaiming the two allegedly incongruous identities, "Indian and Lesbian" at the candlelight vigil in 1998 at Delhi's Regal cinema against the crackdown of the film, *Fire*, has become iconic (Dave 138). The conflation of two hitherto incompatible identities on this placard directly challenged not only the assumptions around what constitutes 'Indian' culture but also the alleged non-existence of queer women in India.

This new focus and visibility brought in repeated accusations from politicians and activists alike that queerness is a Western influence on Indian culture. The global and translational origins of this activism do not help in tackling these accusations. Moreover, the influence of global discourse on queer rights and activism is seen in the proliferation of Pride Parades in India. The first one was held in 1999 in Kolkata what was then named as Calcutta. This event was more like a walk than a Pride Parade, with participation of 15 men (Periwal n.pag.). After this event, Pride Parades have taken place in major metropolitan cities in India and since 2010 onward have been organised in smaller towns as well.

Pride Parades and Me

Pride Parades are a pivotal point for queer individuals and allies to exhibit their presence and continuing fight for their rights. The Parades do form a salient space for challenging the heteronormative structures of desire and love by expressing a plurality of desires. Needless to say, they bring in visibility and recognition, which is crucial in a nation that continues to arrange its socio-economic systems around heteronormativity. However, this positive visibility “curdles into representation” when media coverage, (both tv news channel and newspaper reports) though vital, diminishes the plurality of expressions within the Pride Parade to specific stereotypes about queer subjectivities: it is colourful, loud and flamboyant (Brighenti 333). Until I read books featuring queer characters, that was what I thought about queerness too. It seemed like an artifice, a performance, just a spectacle. Pride Parades perhaps need that quality of being a spectacle because “the spectacle is an *affirmation* of appearances” (Debord 9; emphasis in original). For much too long, queer individuals in India perpetually encountered only shame, ostracisation or denial and putting up a space such as the parade would offer an opportunity to celebrate themselves, their appearances and revel in the visibility never bestowed on them. The Pride Parade, indeed, do magnificently create a space where queerness could be voiced and proclaimed, yet the media coverage to a large extent reduced that space to nothing but a spectacle that only articulated and, in a way, emphasised upon selected appearances alone. The selected images propounded notions about how queer individuals looked like externally, perhaps unintentionally seeking to postulate certain us versus them narratives. The concentration on exteriority in these images solidifies that narrative that there are differences not just innate ones but also external ones: that somehow queer individuals will look, behave and function differently from those who are not queer. Why must these lines, these borders be drawn at all?

The media’s endorsement of selective images often led to “a visible *negation* of life - a negation that has taken on a *visible form*” (Debord 9; emphasis in original). In my case, the visible form of negation came because I refused to participate in the Pride Parades as they had come to symbolise merely a one-sided representation that I could not inhabit. In retrospect, I think I felt that negation of life because when watching the coverage of the Parades on TV channels, I never felt connected to it, never understood the depth of the jubilation. My negation then took on the visible form of disconnectedness. Guy Debord adds that a negation leads to a further hierarchising of particular appearances and ways of being such that the spectacle becomes “a court where no one is allowed to speak” (12 – 13). Hence, though the Pride Parades in various Indian cities and towns were a uniquely 21st- century celebration, when reduced to a spectacle, they did not feel freeing to me by any measure. Questions running in my head remained unanswered and in the hierarchy of appearances in the Parade spectacle, it did not seem the questions would find a voice to speak or articulate themselves. Did queerness, its desires and subjectivities always mean out there and loud, or imply a more colourful attitude? What would it mean for it to be introverted and queer? In hindsight, I

believe I felt what Suparna Bhaskaran refers to as “Curdled Otherness”, because I was constantly trying to fit into versions of what others thought queerness is and should be (15). Suparna Bhaskaran uses this term to refer to people of colour in the US anthropology field and how for them, it is solely their race that marks their work and that it is the only category in which they are made to feel paradoxically caught between and having to justify their work through that constantly. In the scenario outlined about Pride Parades though, it wasn’t colour or race that caused me to feel excluded and negated from those representations but on an analogous level, those media representations and their focus on certain symbols and moments of the Pride Parade, led me to feel constricted by those symbols, categories such that I felt that I could never belong. The negation was compounded because I perpetually failed to “recognize the potential limitations of using insider versus outsider in any pure organic sense” (Bhaskaran 15-16). It has only been a very gradual enlightenment (ironic, isn’t it?) that has finally allowed me to understand how both differences and sameness will always exist simultaneously and it is important to grasp the potential and limitations of both these realities.

Here, I would like to mention briefly, that I do not have the same wariness for Pride Parades as I did earlier. I think I have learnt how and why they are essential, particularly in fomenting ties and communal spaces. Moreover, Pride Parades and other forms of activism have enabled greater acceptance of queer identities in India, legally, socially and often on individual and familial levels. Initially though, Pride Parades used to seem alien and something I could never connect to, simply because I didn’t see myself as this flamboyant out-there person who could flaunt anything, let alone sexuality. I didn’t possess a show-off kind of personality in general, and I wouldn’t know how to do that in a Pride Parade. Images of the Parades streamed on news channels and appeared in the newspapers. These images focused on the joyousness of the occasion and its participants and of course the vibrancy of it, because there existed an association of the Parade with the rainbow and hence the colours were possibly emphasised. All this just only achieved in creating a disconnect because those were the only signs concentrated upon which is why such curdled representations had evacuated Pride Parades of any plurality of desires, expressions. I could not see myself fit neatly into that colourful and joyous crowd because I was still learning and understanding the various subtleties of my own self.

Going Beyond the Law

This is also where Spivak’s conception of humanities as being about “sustained uncoercive rearrangement of desires” holds true (“A Conversation” 615). What she asserts by this is that quick solutions require sustainable and ceaseless work alongside, and the rearrangement she supports is one of understanding the importance of this work. Not just desiring an easy, stopgap solution but shifting that desire to acknowledge that a long road is ahead, even after the stopgap solution is implemented. One can think about laws through Spivak’s paradigm that though changing laws is

necessary, it shouldn't be the only recourse to change. In 2009, the Supreme Court of India decriminalised homosexuality by reading down the archaic Section 377. This verdict was appealed by private individuals and groups which eventually led to the regressive recriminalising of homosexuality by the Supreme Court in 2013. Five years later, the Supreme Court in a landmark judgement read down Section 377 (Dixit 1022). A reading down means that the entire Section 377 has not been struck down, but the part that criminalised consensual sexual acts has been declared as unconstitutional as it is "violative of Articles 21, 14 and 15 of the Constitution." (India Supreme Court 3). The provisions of Section 377 that criminalise non-consensual sex between adults, intercourse with minors and bestiality continue to remain applicable (India Supreme Court 46). These legal pronouncements undoubtedly led to moments of celebration and an eager expectation about changes that could now be ushered in among the population about desires different from heteronormative ones. Pride Parades are just one example of those moments of celebration.

However, the changes that laws bring do not happen overnight and sometimes, as seen in the 2013 verdict, laws can stand "ready to revert any moment" (Spivak "Can There be a Feminist World?" n.pag.). Hence, at this point, I must mention that I wholeheartedly agree with Spivak that it is fields within the humanities that can do the requisite slow, steady work of bringing about that reorientation in the mindsets and attitudes of the public. The desire for change shouldn't just simply be that the law is enforced fairly, but the rearrangement should be one where more long-term work is envisioned, one which involves imagining "the borderlessness that attends to borders" (Spivak "A Borderless World?" 47). In the case of Section 377 and queerness, the long-term work should therefore continue to labour toward imagining and giving life to a borderlessness of non-heteronormative desires rather than resorting to confining those desires solely inside certain categories and letters. Though the categories, like the legal verdicts, are beneficial in their own rights, they can and do, especially abetted by media representations, proliferate stereotypes, connotations and empty symbolisms too. They can generate borders and boundaries of paradoxically both belonging and non-belonging (the latter was the case with me!), by including individuals who can keep up certain appearances and excluding those who don't or cannot. The terms and media representations of queerness manufacture a forced kind of otherness, that also paradoxically is what upholds heterosexuality as an ideal, as a natural occurrence: "the signification of heterosexuality is made possible not simply by motivated analogy but through motivated opposition as well". (Baset 94). The exteriority that viewers and readers gaze at through media representations can thus become pregnant with reductive meaning/s and present a clear exposition of how queerness must be different from the natural, the so-called heteronormative. This is another reason for that disconnect that I felt from Pride Parades because of the reductive representations: I was made to feel othered when I felt that I just want to be; that I just am. I am no 'other' but was coerced to believe exactly that.

Should terms and representations be absolutely abolished then? When James Baldwin mentions in an interview to Richard Goldstein about his fantasy where, “No one will have to call themselves gay” and of course his idealist notion is in relation to United States of America, he does not automatically imply that it is easy to escape the limitations of language (73). Still, what continues to remain important is both accepting language’s limitations and its function of tying you to a specific language just so that the one section of the population can validate their own existence, but also accepting that these limitations do not always entail enacting stereotypical iterations of queerness and its desires. Thus, though the Pride Parades form a focal point, and though the 2018 Supreme Court verdict was exceptionally historical, my own imagination and insights that queerness can go beyond designated borders occurred only when I read books that featured queer characters, who explored their desires and difference quietly and slowly and not necessarily always in outward, external manners. Those fictional characters, rather than the selected images broadcasted on the media, seemed more realistic and closer to how I felt and explored my own difference/s.

Chughtai’s Urdu short story “Lihaaf” or the translated version in English titled, “The Quilt”, introduced me for the first time to how desires different from a heterosexual one can exist. While it was when I read Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* and a translation, *Cobalt Blue* by Sachin Kundalkar, translated from Marathi to English by Jerry Pinto, that a series of epiphanies erupted within my mind about how it’s alright to not burst onto a scene of visibility immediately, how desires can take their course in their own time and yes, how your feelings and sexuality are fluid. Chughtai’s “The Quilt” is the only one in the aforementioned texts that depicts or rather brusquely hints at two women’s sexual escapades beneath the quilt, but the story is set in a completely different milieu. These three texts formed the beginnings of my exploration into a world away from the limelight of mainstream media’s conceptions of queerness.

Literary Representations that Embraced a Borderlessness

It was a random bookshop browsing stint that led me toward Amruta Patil’s *Kari* (2008). I felt a heady mix of excitement because firstly, I randomly came across the book; secondly it was a graphic novel that was produced by a local writer and artist; and lastly, when I began reading it, I found out that the story was of a queer relationship between two characters, Ruth and Kari. It was a thrilling feeling to know that this was not just an indigenous graphic novel by a woman but also that the story was about a queer relationship. It was contemporary and chronicled the multiple realities of Kari who lived in Mumbai. The dominant colour tones that Patil uses in the graphic novel are grey, black and red. The former colours were ostensibly used by her to portray the grimness and pollution that perpetually engulfs Mumbai which she aptly renamed as ‘Smog City’. They are far from the rainbow-coloured joyousness of the Pride Parades. Once again, I would like to add

a caveat here that I am not some dour academic who wants queer individuals to live out their lives in some colourless smog city alone. Undoubtedly, there are moments of colour, of fantasy and joyousness in all queer lives and Patil also captures this in her graphic novel through the bursts of colour especially when the eponymous character thinks of her partner, Ruth. Moreover, the narrative showcases the character inhabiting spaces other than that of protest or demonstration. Kari works in an advertising agency and her close colleagues are aware of her relationship with Ruth. The same is true of Kari's flatmates. Patil also shows a glimpse of a younger Kari watching the singer, k.d lang's 1997 Grammy performance and marvelling at the genderlessness of the performer. Patil presents a quiet reflective moment for the younger Kari who felt mute "with no way to explain myself to myself or to anyone else" (Patil 80). Yet despite Kari's avowed inability to explain herself, watching the performer evoked strong feelings within her. Patil, thus, creates a character in this graphic novel whose queer subjectivity is formed through personal and individual moments and in spaces that do not necessitate acceptance only through a visible coming-out moment or participation in other forms of visibility. Kari participates in and allows her queerness to be visible through her own means and her own agency.

Therefore, representation matters, not curdled representations but vibrant and varied ones because a multiplicity in representation allows for subjectivities, including queer ones to form through a plethora of means and not through a set-in-stone means alone. Kari's different ways of showcasing her queerness helped me to understand how inhabiting a category need not mean you must box yourself inside a checklist set up by outside forces. While categories are important for administrative and legal processes, there should be occasions and moments for unboxing oneself too. Literature can aid in this unboxing, particularly through diverse representations. Variation in representation gives the reader looking at those representations a chance to belong differently, to understand at their own pace and to know how to navigate their own desires and emotions. Literature may not be the panacea to problems faced by queer individuals in India and may not always bring in social justice movements to fruition. But it still possesses the potential and power to steer and initiate silent, quieter moments of resistance.

For example, in Himanjali Sankar's 2013 Young Adult (YA) novel, *Talking of Muskaan*, Sankar depicts two female characters, Muskaan and Aaliya. The former is sure of her queerness while the latter is just beginning to understand the myriad shades of how her desires and attractions operate. Sankar portrays Aliya, through negotiations and reflections, coming to a tenuous clarity of her attractions being based on the person, rather than the sex. With this, Sankar then can throw light on the fluidity of sexual attraction and that queerness need not necessarily always be an innate feature. In an interview, Sankar, notes that she received feedback from a teenager that the book helped them understand their "own sexual orientation" (Banerjee 170).

Furthermore, Sankar has deftly utilised the setting of the 2013 Supreme Court decision to emphasise on how broader legal discourses impact the way young adults view relationships and

categories of sexualities. For example, in the text, when Aliya's family discusses the Supreme Court's decision, Aliya's earlier clarity about accepting her varied attractions coagulates to vitriolic hate toward queerness. This hate is manifested when, over a phone call, she viciously brands Muskaan, her best friend, as a criminal too: "You know that you're a criminal? That you should really be in jail? You do know that right?" (Sankar 138). This climactic moment negates Aliya's earlier clarity about her own desires and the reader is bemused about whether Aliya would also label herself as a criminal in the light of the Supreme Court judgement.

The transformation of Aaliya's thoughts and actions from clarity to ironic cruelty toward Muskaan unpeels the burgeoning influence of homophobia. This one moment, one slip toward hate by Aaliya leads to damaging consequences for Muskaan. Furthermore, throughout the narrative, Sankar shows that Muskaan was horridly bullied by her school and classmates as rumours about her queer desires spread among them. Muskaan's bullying is another example of the vicious and vice like grip heteronormativity has within urban Indian societies. It is so prominent, that despite Aaliya accepting her fluidity earlier, she still reconciles to training herself to be heteronormative, "I could let the boy attractions grow [...]. It would make life that much easier if I could just do that" (100). Her declaration immediately follows the clarity she had which is why I termed her clear comprehension of her desires as momentary and tenuous. The momentariness abets her easy transformation toward hate for Muskaan, in spite of her avowal of her queerness. Sankar's tackling of the sensitive issue of how young adults navigate relationships and their queer attractions is commendable. The representations in her novel not only allow the readers to discern the nuances of and the problems of heteronormativity but also hold up a mirror to social mores and legislations that make heterosexuality normative in India.

Chughtai in her short story "The Quilt" had slipped into the narrative the existence of different forms of desire (although much debated whether what is portrayed is healthy sexual desire or a desire stemming from depraved self-loathing). Parvati Sharma's retelling of the story (also titled "The Quilt") highlights an acceptance of queer love among women. While Chughtai only insinuated at the potential of the two women characters underneath the quilt to be engaged in sexual activity, Sharma portrays precisely that in all its glory: two women making love to each other underneath the quilt and conversing and debating about Chughtai's original short story itself. This trajectory from the 1940s to 2010, exhibits the vast changes that conceptions and representations around queerness has gone through. Chughtai was charged for obscenity by the British Indian government in 1944 for merely hinting at a homosexual love (Sukthakar xiv). Sharma wasn't. Not that this should make us all complacent and blindly believe that yes being queer is now accepted, particularly with the regressive turn in Indian politics that are premised on divide and rule policies and on hate. But my intent in highlighting this retelling by Sharma, is to emphasise on how her positive representation is itself quite invigorating since it focuses on the sexual aspect of queer women's relationship; an

aspect that is often missing because of the predominant use of the metaphors of friendships that are deemed more acceptable when comprehending queer women's relationships.

These are just three examples of how literary representations of queer women characters in contemporary Indian writing can enable diverse imaginations of queer desires' expressions and of living queerly. José Esteban Muñoz notes, "Queer cultural production is both an acknowledgment of the lack that is endemic to any heteronormative rendering of the world and a building, a 'world making,' in the face of that lack" (118). Denial of queer existence was a norm so deeply entrenched that it emboldened political representatives (as in the case of the film, *Fire*) to make blanket statements about its non-existence, about its nothingness within India. Aided by transnational economic and cultural flows, Pride Parades emerged to proffer one form of world building. However, it is literary representations that have gone beyond the worlds constructed by those spaces, stretched the borders further, jettisoned stereotypes into the sea, so that newer ways of thinking about queerness and queer desires can arise and continue the process of reorienting and pushing perceptions about what queer lives can be.

Ashwini Sukthankar in the "Introduction" of the edited collection, *Facing the Mirror: Lesbian Writing from India*, exhorts the readers and queer women to refrain from thinking about silence and invisibility as a safe haven that allows for queer desires to blithely exist without any questions asked. She notes: "Silence is a zone we inhabit on sufferance. Easily invaded, easily demolished, it leaves us at the mercy of people who can simply choose whether or not to know and care" (xv). Yet Sukthankar's call for more visibility and claiming of public spaces is balanced on careful considerations of what those prior silences can also offer and have built over the course of time. Consequently, she furthermore emphasises on "how to negotiate an alternative" rather than only resolutely decide to "relinquish the safety of silence" (xviii). What the fiction texts discussed earlier also do, is throw light on formations of queer subjectivities, precisely at those gaps where visibility and coming out is not a solution at all or not within the framework of being, of existing; or where a flamboyance performative stance alone does not always validate one's existence. The authors' portraiture of the characters in those texts accomplishes a combination of both reclaiming public spaces but doing so also through alternatives that the characters negotiate at their own time and pace rather than by imbibing categories that can tend to fossilise into the universal and hence become exclusionary.

Literary representation must avoid falling foul of this tendency to crystallise categories into set definitions. Instead, it must continue playing with the amorphousness that is inherent within the terms and continue to "make up genealogies and worlds" (Muñoz 121). It is actually easier to envision the indeterminacy of these terms as Akhil Katyal shows in his analysis where he lays bare that the definitions of what constitutes 'gay' or 'lesbian' writing are by their very nature amorphous. One instance where he demonstrates this is when he mentions about Hoshang Merchant giving a call for this anthology on gay writing (which ultimately was published as *Yaarana: Gay Writing*

from India), Merchant was clear on who could qualify as a gay writer: someone who is out as gay (Katyal 239). Yet over the course of editing the submissions, Katyal notes that the term ‘gay’ “itself metamorphosed into a more flippant version in Hoshang’s head – gay-shay [...]” (Katyal 252). There was a blurring of that earlier seemingly crystal-clear understanding of what can be termed as a ‘gay writer’. Both Sukthankar and Merchant acknowledge the slipperiness of the terms in their respective anthologies and this acknowledgement is a good point at which literary representations can help to understand the different inflections of queer subjectivities within India rather than only perceive them through a lens of a media and Pride Parade spectacle.

The Way Forward

So, what can representation do from here on? Has it achieved all that there is to achieve? Literary representations have assuredly taken the lead in bursting out of curdled media representations about queer individuals in general and queer women in particular. But perhaps now is the time to take a cue from the intersectionality of queer politics in India. A few queer activist organisations such as PRISM in New Delhi in the 2000s adopted an intersectional ethos to understand and parse the different axes of power such as caste, region, religion, language and sexuality that converge in India (Sharma and Nath 87). By adopting such an approach, queer politics in India intended to mitigate the presumption that sexuality issues are problems only organisations dealing with sexuality, and not other rights-based organisations, have to tackle. An intersectional approach permitted for a dismantling of an ‘us versus them’ paradigm that had earlier alienated queer activists from other movements in the 1990s in India.

However, this adoption of an intersectional ethos by queer activists has been criticised by Ashley Tellis for being “only at the level of words” and that nothing substantial has been done in this regard through solidarity for different movements and problems affecting several sections of Indian queer individuals together (Tellis 150). Tellis’s criticism is valid because queer activism has often been confined to upper- and middle-class English-speaking people residing in metropolitan Indian cities. Though an intersectional approach is important, an invoking of a queer Indian community is not free from its own issues. “To invoke community is immediately to raise questions of belonging and of power” (Joseph xxiii). This is exactly what Tellis calls into question: to confront the power dynamics in these parades, groupings and queer communities that can be skewed toward a particular demographic alone. Communities can bring in that much needed and much coveted visibility, but they then allow for the proverbial double-edged sword to raise its ugly head as any form of community, any form of visibility does create certain curated exclusions and inclusions. For example, Naisargi Dave, remarks on how organisations such as Sakhi and Stree Sangam in 1990s and 2000s India forged the path to create communities for queer women. Yet the moment communities came into fruition, so did a plethora of divisions. In this case, it was based on how politically active the women were. This division, Dave termed

as “the politically competent and the politically incompetent” (46). These two terms themselves speak of how women could be in either of these categories depending on different axes of privilege and power they had access to including time and mobility.

The fact that communities and visibility can give birth to such strange paradoxes does not in itself form a sound reason to thoroughly dismiss or devalue communities. But then, is there a solution at all then? Solutions are coming in slowly and surely. In terms of intersectionality of queer movements in India, some progressive strides are becoming slowly prominent with Pride Parades. Pride Parades are being held in smaller towns too and queer groups are using Pride Parades in recent years as a site to voice their dissent about pertinent issues such as protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (2019) and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019 (Pathak n.pag.; Desai n.pag). Although, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019 had a progressive provision of self-determination, the Bill mired this “right to self-perceived gender identity” in bureaucratic red tape as the Bill stipulated that an identity certificate must be obtained from the District Magistrate (India Lok Sabha 3). Thus, even though the bill was touted as bringing in much-needed change, protestors and activists called for more nuanced changes to the bill. Pride Parades offered a platform, in such cases, for dissenting voices.

Like nascent Indian queer activism of the 1990s and early 2000s, literary representations of queer women so far have also largely been limited to English writing, urban settings and middle- or upper-class characters. Along with a focus on amorphousness of queer subjectivities in literary representations, one direction that authors in India must take is to embrace intersectionality in their writing too. Authors from different backgrounds must write stories that speak of diverging identity intersections, how characters function and understand their differing realities through them. This is a need both in English and non-English speaking contexts or in contexts that inhabit more than one language. An intersectional approach in literary writing would have profound implications for undoing assumptions that queerness in India is a Western import alone and this may very well pave the way for establishing numerous more modes of queer subjectivities that aren't invariably rooted in visibility, globalisation and transnational hegemonies.

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ENDNOTES

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