



Homosexuality and Review of Traditional Hindu Narratives

RESEARCH PAPER

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Abstract

Hinduism comes from various beliefs that originated and developed in the south Asian subcontinent over four thousand years. 'Hinduism' can be understood as the collection of philosophical and metaphysical views that share a textual connection to certain main Hindu scriptures, which might include the Vedas, the Bhagvad Gita, the epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Therefore, Hinduism is understood as a concept which includes doctrines and beliefs emerging from various sources- from dialogues of seers to poetic meditations, from reselection of sages and sacred chants. The major aspect to the Hinduism is of 'Dharma' which is closely linked with the concept of 'Karma'.

Homosexuality is an attraction, romantic or sexual, between the same sex or gender. The homosexuals are also commonly called as 'gay' for males and 'lesbian' for females. The term gay commonly is also used for both same sex males and same sex females. The word homosexual comes from the Greek word 'homo' meaning 'same' thus referring to the emotional and physical relation of the same sex males and females.

Michel Foucault in his study *History of*

Sexuality examines sexuality, as a discursive object and a separate aspect of life. Foucault says that ‘Homosexuality is a social, medical and ontological category invented in the 19th century’. He wanted to look at the aspects and govern the system and mechanisms that resulted in homosexuality as an abnormality and homosexuals were considered as ‘dangerous individuals’ because as per Foucault, the idea of sexuality, power is exercised. Homosexuality was against the laws of nature and the homosexuals who were also called the dangerous beings were sent to the prison.

Sigmund Freud viewed homosexuality as deterministic, where he says that one would impute psychological and biological factors to explain the main cause of homosexuality. Freud’s main work done on homosexuality was between 1905, when he published ‘*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*’. Freud further states that heterosexuality and homosexuality both develop from the original bisexual disposition, which he explains by saying that all humans were bisexual, everyone incorporates aspects of both sexes and everyone is sexually attracted to both the sexes.

Hindu doctrines such as rebirth and the genderlessness of the soul are often interpreted to legitimize socially disapproved relationships, including same-sex ones. In a 2004 survey, most — though not all swamis said they opposed the concept of a Hindu-sanctified gay marriage. But several Hindu priests have performed same-sex marriages, arguing that love is the result of attachments from previous births and that marriage, as a union of spirit, is transcendental to gender.

Despite the laws has changed and Article 377 is scraped, the law has accepted the homosexuality but the truth remains the change in the society comes from what people do and still think, because the laws often change after the public opinion has changed.

Introduction

Homosexuality is an attraction, romantic or sexual, between the same sexes. The homosexuals are also commonly called as 'gay' for males and 'lesbian' for females. The term gay commonly is also used for both same sex males and same sex females. The word homosexual comes from the Greek word 'homo' meaning 'same' thus referring to the emotional and physical relation of the same sex men and women.

One's overall outlook is majorly shaped by one's religion. Person's beliefs, ideology, customs, and traditions everything is interconnected. Religious and cultural diversity creates the society. Individual's prejudices, beliefs are also governed by the religion, other than political and economic reasoning. Rules of morality are defined by religion. Morality decides the rules of one's sexual orientation and how one life in a society and its civility, to what is normative and what is not normative. Homosexuality is not accepted by the society. Hence, it becomes non normative.

It is said that Hinduism is the oldest of all the religions and the third largest religion of the world. Hinduism comes from various beliefs that originated and developed in the south Asian subcontinent over four

thousand years. 'Hinduism' can be understood as the collection of philosophical and metaphysical views that share a textual connection to certain main Hindu scriptures, which might include the Vedas, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Therefore, Hinduism is understood as a concept which includes doctrines and beliefs emerging from various sources- from dialogues of seers to poetic meditations, from reselection of sages and sacred chants. The major aspect to the Hinduism is of 'Dharma' which is closely linked with the concept of 'Karma'. The cultures Hindu allow polytheism; monotheism and henotheism are different belief and practices. Hindu traditions and narratives, oral or written, there is always a god figure which tells how to lead a good life.

In Hinduism, everything is a demonstration of Divine. Everything is the manifestation of 'aatma' the self, spirit, the god. The degree of realization in each entity is different but there is nothing which is outside. Even the demons in Hindu thought are not from the outside of nature, they also are the manifestation of divinity.

In the Hindu classical schemes of goals of life the Purushastraape one's goal is

‘Kama’ which means desire, individual erotic desire. Kama should be based on Dharma (duty). There are two types of Dharma’s. First is ‘Nivriti Dharma’ which aims at liberation where every individual is consciously or unconsciously striving towards ‘Moksha’ that is liberation and second is ‘Praviti Dharma’ which is the social dharma where an individual fulfills one’s dharma in the society as a parent, child, and individual and so on. And it is when these two dharma’s come in conflict, raises the question of how to balance them. The relations which are socially illicit like homosexuality inter caste and inter religion relationships are frequent explanations in ancient texts. Hindu Philosophies and various Hindu schools approach the desire in general of which same sex sexuality is one criterion.

Hinduism comes from various beliefs that originated and developed in the south Asian subcontinent over four thousand years. ‘Hinduism’ can be understood as the collection of philosophical and metaphysical views that share a textual connection to certain main Hindu scriptures, which might include the Vedas, the Bhagvad Gita, the epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Therefore, Hinduism is understood as a concept which comprises of doctrines and beliefs emerging from various sources such as dialogues of seers to poetic meditations, from reselection of sages and sacred chants. The major aspect to the Hinduism is of ‘Dharma’ which is closely linked with the concept of ‘Karma’.

Homosexuality has not been overtly spoken about or referred to in pious texts significant to the religion Hinduism. *Dharamshastras* have no mentions of teachings and rules on same sex union. *Vedas* have explained numerous affairs in eccentric way. *Rig Veda* particularly, the most important *Vedas* says “Vikruti Evam Prakriti”, which means anything that does not seem natural and normal to is as normal as it can be, which some scholars assumes is the recurring reliability of homosexual and transsexual dimension of life.

Many references of the same sex can be witnessed through the ancient Indian written texts. Same sex pairing and dual motherhood in the *Rig Veda* is one of the most important references to existence of homosexuality in the ancient India. “Agni described as the child of two mothers and occasionally child of three mothers.” (Vanita 2008) “The two mothers of Agni sometimes

are heaven and earth or the two sticks from which the fire was generated for the sacrifice. It is believed that Agni is not just only born from two mothers but is also nourished by several mothers.” (Vanita 2008) *Rig Veda* celebrates individual deities but when one celebrates pairs it is generally same sex pairs- twins, friends, co-mothers, sisters.

Sex change, undoing of gender are some more significant examples which talk about same sex love. The major example of sex change in former India is that of Shikhandi where Amba becomes Shikhandini. The tale of two women marrying and one had to change the gender and cross dress to bear a child. In ancient texts the forest is significant of a place where the transformation took place between order of beings, species and genders. It is in the forest where Amba is reborn as Shikhandi. It is not always true that one must go to the forest to undergo the transformation as in the puranic story of Lord Vishnu when he transformed as Mohini.

Hinduism

Religion plays a crucial role in sculpting one's faith, traditions, ideology, customs and standpoint of a person and the society. Our

prejudices, beliefs and pride are also moulded by religion. Though social, economic and political reasoning are not directly affected by religion, rules for morality are placed down by the religion. Further virtue lays down rule of civility and sexuality. Sexuality and civility categorizes behaviour as to what is normal and abnormal. Same sex love is regarded as abnormal behaviour because it is believed that majority of religions of the world is against homosexuality. This chapter is written with a purpose to have an understanding of Hinduism as a religion only with the purpose to learn, and uncover its stand on homosexuality.

Hinduism can be understood as the amalgamation of philosophical and metaphysical views that share a textual connection to some certain Hindu scriptures, which include the Bhagvad Gita, the Vedas, the epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Thus, Hinduism is understood as a concept which comprises of doctrines and beliefs evolving from various foundations such as from dialogues of seers to poetic meditations, from reselection of sages and sacred chants.

Hinduism is the religion followed by the Hindus; it is one of the ancient of all

dwelling religions. Mohammedanism, Buddhism and Christianity owe their starting place to the soothsayers but Hinduism was not made by any seers. Their dates are constant but at the same time, for Hinduism, there is no such constant date. Hinduism isn't always born off of the lessons of the precise soothsayers. Hinduism's primarily not centered on fixed views preached through a selected set of teachers. It is loose from spiritual devotion and passion. There is no particular founder of the religion like Buddha, Muhammad or Abraham and Jesus in particular to say. Hence, there is no particular or a precise date to when Hinduism as a religion was born. Different facts, practices and beliefs that were orally present later written down is the foundation of Hinduism. For instance, the earliest text of Hinduism, the Vedas dated around 3000 BC, but some believe that it was even dated back to 8000-6000 BC as there is no precise date given and some even believe these sacred texts to be of heavenly origin, and therefore eternal.

Hinduism can also be identified by their designations *Vaidika-Dharma* and *Sanatana-Dharma*. *Vaidika-Dharma* is the religion that evolves from the *Vedas*. The earliest philosophers of India have articulated their intuitive mystical

experiences known as *Aparoksha-Anubhuti* in the *Upanishads*. These practices are reliable, trustworthy and direct. Experiences of the Rishis are considered to be the authority in Hinduism. The invaluable facts that have been realized by the Hindu thinkers through ages institute the beauty, exaltation and grandeur of Hinduism.

Sanatana-Dharma's true meaning is timeless religion. Hinduism is believed to be as long-standing as the world itself. It is also called as the birth giver of all religions in the world. Sacred texts of Hindu's are considered to be the most ancient in the world. *Sanatana-Dharma* is not just believed to be eternal, but also secured by God and that it can make us eternal.

In Hinduism, everything is a manifestation of Almighty. Everything is the manifestation of 'aatma' the god, spirit, self. The degree of realization in each entity is different but there is nothing which is outside.

There are two types of *Dharmas*. 'Nivriti Dharma' which aims at liberation where every individual consciously or unconsciously is striving towards '*Mokasha*' that is liberation and second is 'Praviti Dharma' which is the social dharma where an individual fulfills one's dharma in the

society as a parent, child, and individual and so on.

There is not any authoritative textual content in Hinduism that features like the Bible for Christians, or the Quran for Muslims. But there are numerous texts, all categorized under key categories. The first and most vital is referred to as ‘Shruti’- “what’s heard”. This classification of texts includes the Vedas and the Upanishads and is the maximum authoritative.

Hindu traditions had reached parts of South East Asia centuries ago. Migration of large groups of Hindus to various parts of the world could also be seen in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Enormous Hindu Diaspora societies have settled in the United Kingdom and the United States also.

Drawing from various layers of its long history, as “Hinduism” can be observed from time immemorial, it includes diverse elements of thought and practices both in India and throughout the world in present day. Some of the Vedic rituals are still performed widely, locally, domestically and publically. Practices of these rituals are generally worshiped or performed in large temples or before an image of the deity, idol on a small domestic platform. These Hindu

practices have been there in the society since the mid-twentieth century.

Homosexuality as referred in Narratives of Ancient and Modern Times

In a country like India, religion is inseparable from the core of lives of individuals. Hence, a person’s dictums, belief system and ideologies are interconnected. Morality therefore, plays a crucial role in framing rules of one’s sexual orientation and civilized behavior, Any behavioural tendency in tandem with morality is considered to the normative whereas it becomes non normative otherwise such as the case with homosexuality.

Religious texts of Hinduism do not overtly mention same sex love but still many references can be seen. Many sexual beliefs have been expounded through *Vedas* in an eccentric way. “Vikruti Evam Prakriti” is talked about through *Rig Veda* which indicates that unnatural is also natural. It means that all that is non-normative is also something natural, usual and normal. Therefore, homosexuality and transgender become natural which as per the society is not natural and is not normative. Some scholars also believe and have recognized that this is a constant cycle of transsexuality

or homosexuality. Many examples of homosexuality can be seen throughout the ancient Indian culture.

Mahabharata, Vyasa's epic is one of the important texts when we talk about sex change in the ancient India. The story of 'Sikhandi' is famously known for sex change. Sikhandi term later became synonymous with eunuchs. Sikhandi's anecdote is related to change of sex and rebirth.

Another event is where Bhishma abducted Amba from her swayamvaram along with her two sisters. In ancient India swayamvaram was a tradition to choose grooms of one's own free will. Bhishma did this, because he wanted them to be the wives of his brother. Amba conveyed to Bhishma that she should be allowed to go as she loved some other king. After hearing this Bhishma didn't force her to stay and allowed her to go her beloved. After reaching her beloved, she had to face refusal because he assumed her to have lost her chastity during kidnapping.

Amba had no other choice than to return to Bhishma. She had earlier told that she loved someone else. Bhishma himself couldn't wed her because he had sworn of celibacy. Amba then asked for help from

many including the majestic *Parshuram*, to teach a lesson to Bhishma because Bhishma was too strong and powerful of his resolution. Finally Amba went in the woods worshiped Shiva, he appeared to her. "Amba told Shiva that she just wanted revenge from Bhishma because he barred her from fulfilling her duties as a woman, though she had no womanly desires left within her then." (Vanita 2008:45)

She requested to be blessed to be converted into a man so that she could take her revenge. Shiva accepted that her prayer had been accepted and would be fulfilled in her next birth where she would obtain manhood and remember all her past life events. Amba then finally self-immolated herself. Later she took birth as Sikhandini who was initially a girlbu transformed into a male later on.

Sikhandini exactly means 'the crested one'. Although Sikhandini has taken birth to take revenge from Bhishma but this is not the objective of her sex change. Here, gender enhances the conundrum in the light of sexuality of youth.

"Panchatantra literally translated as five tantras i.e. narratives, strategies or theories. It is believed to be composed by an

scholar named Vishnu Sharma. It is believed Panchatantra was made on request of a king whose sons were averse and least interested in learning. The text was framed as an instructing manual for the princes, where arts were requisite to being good rulers.”

Marriage between the Same Sex and Love Death

Loves Rite by Ruth Vanita demonstrates that marriage between same sex is a social reality in the west as well as India. It has always had instances and roots in the past. This book focuses on the instances of love death also known as joint suicides *before legalization of article 377.*

Marriage is the officially documented blending of two people as couple or partners in a private space. In some jurisdictions it is directly mentioned that it is the act of physical, mental and emotional synthesis between a man and woman. There are different kinds of marriages among different communities and cultures. Inter caste marriages, Inter religion marriages, same sex marriages, inter race marriages are some among different kinds.

Hindu Marriages Act 5 states that there are certain conditions for a Hindu

marriage to take place, where a wedding may be formalized among two Hindus, if the following circumstances and conditions are satisfied, explicitly: at time of the wedding ceremony, neither one should be mentally unstable, providing an applicable authority that none is suffering from any mental disorder of any kind or else one is not fit for the ceremony and reproduction. It is necessary for the bride to have completed eighteen years of age and that the bridegroom should be of twenty one years of age at the occasion of the marriage ceremony. Neither the bride nor groom should have a living spouse at the time of the ceremony. Both the groom and the bride cannot prohibit relationship unless the custom or usage governing permits. The bride and the groom should not be sibling or cousins of each other. Unless the custom allow sapinda marriage that is marriage between the real siblings or cousin siblings

The institution of marriage is considered to be sanctimonious in the society- to the extent that any deviation from accepted norms of male female relationships within the marital ties is considered to be questionable although maximum marriage statuses use gender impartial language. But with the advent of growing number of

jurisdictions that have decriminalized such acts, the recognition of homosexual marriages has been on steep rise. However the statutory prohibitions have not completely replaced existing norms and acceptability. Some jurisdictions have retained the prohibitions on gay marriages.

There is a strong opposition of this by communities and persons who think buggery regulation is outdated and ought to be done again. Due to such retention of prohibition of homosexual marriages, identical intercourse relations are not lawfully accepted in most nations. As a consequence of this, there are numerous legalities and financial rights which the gay partners are denied.

These are the rights which a couple with marital reputation is entitled to, hence reflecting the biased system. Some of these rights include employment benefits, filing joint tax returns and rights arising out of the death of a companion including interstate inheritance and many more. These rights are automatically bestowed upon heterosexual partners once they enter the institution of marriage.

Indian society and Homosexuality: In typical Indian society, homosexuals continue to be the victims of violence and hatred. The

society so far has not taken cognizance of the plight of homosexuals and their social reputation. Homosexuals continue to proliferate gradually in India and are an evolving as a growing community with their own on line and offline networks spanning metros as well as semi urban societies.

This extensive variety is slowly growing with many sex people, coming out of the closet. Mumbai and Delhi had five lakh homosexual men each before legalization of article 377 and to a smaller quantity. Whereas, Calcutta and Bangalore are the heart of the Indian homosexual movement. Many natives from minor cities in Bihar, Maharashtra and Gujarat also popped out. These Indian gays were looking for inspiring associates, falling in love, having intercourse at the internet and going to towns to be with every different in actual world.

Although same sex relations had been there in a hushed up space, they are now being articulated more candidly in metro cities where people are more open and frank about their sexuality. Cities like Delhi, Lucknow, Mumbai, Karnataka, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune, Chennai, Patna, Calcutta, Akola, Trichi and Gulbarga have guides, journals, newsletters, health facilities and

social areas for homosexuals. Events like gay satisfaction have also been recorded which clearly indicates at the winds of change with regard to the acknowledgement of homosexuals as normal individuals.

Section 377, of the Indian Penal Code, was influenced from British penal code dating 19th century. Section 377 stated:

“Whoever voluntarily has carnal sex against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for existence, or with imprisonment of either description for a time period which might also make bigger to ten years and shall additionally be vulnerable to high-quality.” (Constitution of India) — PUBLIC POLICY | LAW | GOVERNANCE —

Phase 294 Of Indian Penal Code penalizing any form of “obscene behavior in public” is also hostile to homosexual men and indicates the perversity in their being so. It may be noticed here that the crime of homosexuality among parents who gave approval to it, was eliminated through Sexual Offenders Act 1967. In India, Phase 294 still continues to consider it as an offence. Article 377 makes same sex love attraction unlawful, life imprisonment or ten years of imprisonment depending on the scenario.

From 1860 to 1992 there have been many cases registered; thirty instances were registered in the Supreme Court and the High Court. Eighteen were not even consensual, eight had been unspecified and fifteen out of thirty cases which were recorded were attack on minors. “In a judgment -Fazal Rab Vs State of Bihar; the Supreme Court became coping with a case wherein a man had homosexual relations with members of the family, a boy with the consent of the boy.” (TOI) In 1983, the Supreme Court saw that the crime is under section 377, Indian Penal Code which says any sexual awkwardness will not be accepted. Considering that the boy had given approval for the same. The Supreme Court decreased six month imprisonment to three month imprisonment. Section 377 had also been used to subdue women, mainly to the cases where women ran away jointly. The example of Tarulata changed her sex to male then was named Tarun and then married Lila in 1989. Lila’s father was not happy with this marriage and filed a appeal at the Gujarat High Court saying that it still is a lesbian marriage and therefore the marriage has to be canceled.

There is a small narrative of the two wives taking bath. Both of the ladies

survived together with great compassion. Both knew each other's intention behind staying together and therefore enjoyed the foreplay with each other. They found out one woman was pregnant as the other was menstruating. After some time passes by a boneless lump of flesh was born. Seeing this two women decide to leave the child behind and let it flow in river Sarayu. Ashtavakra finds the lump and transforms it into a beautiful human body. The two queens on seeing the transformation of the child the two decide to take him back. That child then was named Bhagiratha as he was born out of two vulvas.

Conclusion

Homosexuality has always been present in India which can be seen through different ancient narratives. It was colonization that influenced India's culture and ideologies. What these days is categorized as queer was never queer or odd in the ancient India. Concept of lesbians, gays, transgender, sex change, transsexual and bisexuals has always been there in the country. Narratives both ancient and modern have references of homosexuality. *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Purana*, *Vedas* are some of the ancient narratives which portray sane sex love.

Same sex pairing and dual motherhood in the *Rig Veda*, is one of the most important references to existence of homosexuality in the ancient India. "Agni, described as the child of two mothers and occasionally child of three mothers." The two mothers of Agni sometimes are heaven and "earth or the two sticks from which the fire was generated for the sacrifice. It is believed that Agni is not just only born from two mothers but is also nourished by several mothers." Changing of the sex to attain the same sex union and undoing of gender are some more significant examples which talk about homosexuality. Another example quoted above, is an example of sex change in ancient India, of Sikkhandi. Tale of two women marrying and one had to change the gender and cross dress to bear a child. In ancient texts the forest is significant of a place where the transformation took place between order of beings, species and genders. It is in the forest where Amba is reborn as Sikkhandini.

The *Mahabharata* also has a mention of similar kind of instance where princess Sikkhandini is raised as a man. "Later her father who is a king marries her off to another woman. When the bride finds out the groom who actually is a woman

(Shikhandini) is shocked.” Shikhandini out of embarrassment rushes to the forest to commit suicide. While she was in the forest a male Yaksha was observing her and finally talks to her and exchanges his sex with that of Shikhandini and temporarily becomes a female. And, Shikhandini’s sex is changed into that of a male and takes the name Shikhandin and stays married to the bride. It is vital to observe that female-female marriage remains valid as Shikhandini stays married to the bride and Shikhandin doesn’t marry the bride again.

Section 377 though is straight product of Victorian social customs. British colonial rulers imposed on law on homosexual in India in 1860. Finally significant decision was made by the Supreme Court on 6th September 2018. Where the gay sex with consent was not a crime, elaborating the idea that sexual direction is natural and therefore can’t be forced on anyone by anyone. The court made the British era section 377 of Indian Penal Court ineffectual. Which stated that homosexuality and same sex intercourse is as a private matter.

A journey of homosexuality has been shown in the paper from homosexuality widely and openly talked concept of ancient

India to muted concept of medieval and to finally acknowledging it in the contemporary India. Ancient India has always been very open about homosexuality. Hence, homosexuality is not a western concept introduced in India. Rather the west influenced in making it queer.

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