DECONSTRUCTING THE BINARY OF HETERONORMATIVITY THROUGH THE ANALYSIS OF SELECT FEW POEMS FROM 'THE WORLD THAT BELONGS TO US- AN ANTHOLOGY OF SOUTH ASIAN QUEER POETRY'

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BY

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Declaration

I declare that the work presented in the Dissertation entitled **'Deconstructing the Binary of Heteronormativity Through The analysis of Select Few Poems From 'The World What Belongs to Us: An Anthology of South Asian Queer Poetry''** being submitted to the Department of English, School of Languages, Doon University, Dehradun for the award of Master in Arts (English) is my original research work.

The Dissertation embodies the results of investigations, observations, and experiments carried out by me. I have neither plagiarized any part of the dissertation nor have submitted same work for the award of any other degree/diploma anywhere.

Date: Aanchal Chauhan

Place: Doon University, Dehradun   M.A. English,

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SLE- 1268

Certificate

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled **'Deconstructing the Binary of Heteronormativity Through The analysis of Select Few Poems From 'The World What Belongs to Us: An Anthology of South Asian Queer Poetry''** submitted by **Ms. Aanchal Chauhan** has been done under my supervision. It is also certified that the work in this Dissertation embodies original research and hard work of the candidate.

The assistance and support received during the course of investigation and all the sources of literature have been fully acknowledged.

Dr. Richa Joshi Pandey   Mr. Mehul Rawat

Supervisor   Co-Supervisor

Dr. Chetna Pokhriyal

Head of Department

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Abstract

The present study aims to deconstruct the binary of heteronormativity in society by analysing select few poems from 'The World That Belongs to Us: An Anthology of Queer Poetry From South Asia'. This is done with the aid of four questions prepared by the researcher that encompass various issues faced by the Lgbt+ community in society. The questions are as following: 1) How are the stereotypes and dominantly propagated images of particular sexualities tackled within and outside the Lgbtq+ community? ; 2) Exploring how people with hetero-divergent sexualities/genders struggle with reconciling with their subjectivity personally, and within society. ; 3) What are the ramifications of drawing a distinction between 'real life' and 'queer lifestyle'? ; 4) How does the pressure to 'fit in' further alienates the lgbt+ community from their own body and society in general?

The study tries to analyse the position of the lgbt+ community in history and present world, and try to understand and highlight the influence of society on the lgbt+ community at a large and as individuals. The study points out the lgbt+ community is a fully fledged community and deserves recognition and acknowledgment in society. The major issued faced by the lgbt+ community are highlighted in the poems and discussed in the study respectively.

The research recognises one of the biggest reasons for the stigmatisation is the lack of awareness and inept sex education. The study suggests positive reforms in the education system to become more sex and gender inclusive. The development in education and language usage can have great positive effects for the lgbt+ community.

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Introduction

Introductions are one of the most complicated courses of action for anyone and everyone. How do you summarize your multiple years of existence into a 50-word blurb? What do you consider the most crucial information about yourself? What is the most agreeable piece of knowledge about you? What is it that you consider *safe* to tell others? These questions might seem absurd, but we all make similar decisions in a split second before we make introductions. Names, age, demography, religion, educational qualifications, music taste, clothing preferences, coffee orders, favourite shows, the books we like, similar tattoos, and a billion other things. Most people also make great efforts to omit the most important details about themselves, mainly to 'fit in', or to be as 'normal' as society deems appropriate. These standards have been set in place through years of meticulous omission and construction of a dominant narrative. The LGBTQ+ community is one such part of the society which fell victim to the twisted game of natural selection. Despite being a reality for as long as humanity itself, it is still considered taboo.

1.1. What is LGBTQ+? A Quick Review:

The LGBTQ+ community refers to broad coalitions of groups that are diverse with respect to gender and sexual orientations. The visible acronym stands for 'Lesbian', 'Gay', 'Bisexual', 'Transgender', and 'Queer or questioning'. These identities often tend to digress from the cis-gendered hetero-normative distinctions. Sexual orientation and gender identity are defined differently by International researchers. Sexual orientations largely involve the sexual desires or attraction of a person and gender identity encapsulates the essentialist aspect. In simple words, sexual orientation pertains to an individual's relations with others, and gender identity deals with

intrapersonal relations. While LGBTQ+ is an umbrella term used to address the community, it consists of a variety of identities denoted by the '+' sign. These include Intersex, Asexual (or Ace), Aromantic, Pansexual, Non-binary, Gender-fluid, Gender neutral, Two-spirit, Demisexual, Transsexual, Omnisexual, Polysexual, etc. to name a few. The list is forever expanding and hard to quantify, though efforts have been made to include as many as possible. These terminologies are fairly recent even on an international front. Gay identity as a personal and political classification didn't gain acknowledgement till the mid-twentieth century. British Sexologist Havelock Ellis categorized gay and transgender as 'sexually inwards', which he defined as "persons who exhibit same-gender attraction and a gender presentation socially contrary to the sex one was assigned at birth." (Iovannone)

Though today 'gay' refers to men that are attracted to men, it was an underground term in the early twentieth century and came to become a popular umbrella term among the Stonewall generation. The term was on the forefront of movements related to the lgbtq+ community, often regarded as 'Gay rights'. For example, STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) founders, and activists Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson often mentioned: "gay right" or "gay power" with reference to their liberation as 'Street queens of colour' (or transgender as we refer to them now). While the term 'gay' remained a shorthand to refer to the whole spectrum of gender and sexual minorities up until the '90s, the usage shifted with the rise of bisexual, trans, and queer movements, giving way to the LGBT acronym. This further expanded into including 'Q' as in queer, which even evolved to become derogatory for some individuals based on their age, demography, or experiences with homophobia. The term remains to simply denote someone questioning their sexuality (or gender identity) or being content in not defining it. As discussed above, the '+' sign aims at including the range of the spectrum that might not be in popular usage but is a reality for even a select few. One thing to note about these movements from the 90s is

that, while they differed in many respects, all of them tried to articulate a sense of identity that was fluid, complex, and changing.

1.2. India's Relations With The Lgbt+:

In the Indian context, the apex court decriminalized sexual conduct between two consensual same-sex adults in the Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India ruling on Sept 6, 2018. The verdict to strike Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which declared "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" punishable by imprisonment for life, was welcomed after years of fighting against it. The Supreme Court justified that it violated the constitutional right to equality and dignity. (Supreme Court) While the ruling came out about four years ago, it was still later than it should have been. In fact, during a long-running High court case from 2008, calling for reading down Article 377, the Ministry of Home Affairs submitted an affidavit in support of section 377, claiming that the "law does not run separate from society" and the Indian culture has "no such tolerance" for the "practice" of homosexuality. This becomes an interestingly audacious argument since it was originally an imposition by the British colonial government and only reflected "the Judeo-Christian values of the time". It was the first 'Sodomy law' to be integrated into the Penal code and became a model anti-sodomy law for other colonies. While Britain decriminalized most homosexual activities in 1967, most colonies had already been declared independent and maintained the law. (This Alien Legacy)

1.2.1. LGBT+ Through Ancient India:

While most Indians believe that homosexuality (or LGBT+ identities) is a western import, Indian literary and historical archives have several visible examples of discourses around queer sexuality (Dasgupta, 651). Several ancient sculptures discovered across India confirm the existence of homosexuality in ancient times and while it was not always approved of, it was

considered a minor inconvenience at worst. The texts dealing with homoerotic love in ancient India are few but extant. However, they do not reveal much about how "women loved women or men loved men but rather how such love was represented or expressed in writing" (Vanita and Kidwai, xiii)). Vatsayana's most celebrated ancient text 'Kamasutra' dedicates an entire chapter to erotic homosexual behaviour. In reference to 'non-normative' sexual practices, the text expounds, "in all things connected with love, everybody should act according to the custom of the country, and his own inclination" (Burton, 127). Kamasutra not only described but even prescribed 'queer' sexual practices such as 'auparishtaka' or mouth congress (Dasgupta, 654). An interesting point to note is that the practices described in the text prioritize pleasure over pro-creation, a traditionally encouraged conclusion of indulging in sexual activities.

1.2.2. Lgbt+ in The Legal Battle:

Contemporary India has been fighting for decades for the recognition of the rights of the lgbt+ community. Many are actual legal battles that cemented the foundations of the movement and promote confidence in realizing equality for the community. Five major cases among the countless efforts are discussed below to demonstrate a loose timeline of lgbt+ rights in India. The Naz judgment of 2009 (Naz Foundation v Govt. of NCT Delhi) by the Delhi High Court declared Article 377 to be 'Unconstitutional' for the first time. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed by Naz Foundation (a Delhi-based NGO, which has been at the forefront of the movement). After the setback of the 2013 Supreme Court Judgment in Suresh Kumar Koushal v Union of India case, where homosexuality was once again re-criminalised, Supreme Court passed the National Legal Services Authority v Union of India or NALSA judgement in 2014. It is a landmark judgment in transgender rights in India. The court recognised transgender as the citizens of this nation giving them the identity of the third gender and extending all fundamental rights. A comprehensive set of guidelines was laid down for all states to follow and become more

inclusive of the Trans population. The Justice (Retd) K S Puttaswamy v Union of India judgment held the Right to Privacy to be integral and included in Article 21 which grants the Indian citizens Right to Life and Liberty. The right to Privacy was extended to everyone regardless of their gender and sex. The previously discussed Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India ruling of 2018 is one of the biggest accomplishments for the lgbt+ community. The judgment decriminalized same-sex consensual sexual acts between adults, declaring Article 377 to be unconstitutional. It should be noted that most of these landmarks are obtained through court rulings, either from High Courts or Supreme Court. The government has had little to no contribution in nudging the movement forward, often even protesting against it in the name of religious sentiments and India's cultural values as noted in section 1.2 (the affidavit submitted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare). India also abstained from voting at UNHRC (United Nations Human Rights Commission) for a resolution that would extend the term of an independent expert on the prevention of violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, the resolution ultimately passed with 23 nations in support of it. India cited Article 377 in 2016 and has abstained every time the resolution was proposed even after the 2018 ruling.

1.2.3. Lgbt+ Statistics in India:

According to IPSOS's LGBT+ Pride Global Survey, about 17% of the Indian population are lgbt+, out of which 3% identify as homosexual (including gays and lesbians), 9% identify as bisexual, 1% identify as pansexual, 2% identify as asexual, and the remaining others include categories like 'do not know' or 'prefer not to say '. Furthermore, 44% population feels that same-sex couples should be allowed to be married legally, and 14% believe that same-sex couples should be allowed to obtain some kind of legal recognition, but not marry. This is still promising in the context that since 2016, there has been a 56 % change in people's outlook toward gay marriage and a lot of work is being put into making same-sex marriage legal in India. The

mentioned figures are an upgrade from the previously available information provided by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare which estimated the population of the lgbt+ community in India to be 2.5 million, as not even official data.

1.2.4. Indigenous Lgbt+ Communities in India:

Along with the internationally recognised terminology and identities for the lgbtq+ community, India houses an abundance of ambiguous indigenous identities. For example, *Aravani* or *Thirunangai (*in Tamil Nadu), *Kothi* (in North India), *Jogappas* (in Maharashtra and Karnataka), *Meyeli Chele* and *Shomokaami* (in West Bengal) or *Nupi Maanbi* and *Nupa Maanba* (from Manipur) and so on. It must be noted that most of the terms listed above are vernacular terms for only transgender people; hence an interesting observation comes to light that despite the history and diversity Indian languages still lack inclusive terms for a wide spectrum of non-conforming genders and sexually variant expressions. There is, however, a loose categorization based on sexual roles (mostly for males and transgender) namely:

- *Hijra* (also known as *Ali* in some places) are assigned male at birth but transition into the third gender and mostly assume a 'feminine' appearance. They are mostly known to have sex with males (but don't have specified sexuality). Their blessings are considered auspicious in the Hindu texts and tradition.
- *Panthis* are men that have a 'masculine' identity. They have sexual relations with men and women, though mostly females. While having sex with men they usually assume the 'top' position.
- *Double-deckers* are versatile (during intercourse) men who are sexually attracted to men. They are mostly associated with a 'masculine' or neutral identity.

- *Kothis* are 'feminine' men who are most likely to cross-dress and have sexual relations with *Panthis*.

There are no specific demarcations for women's homosexuality and the likes, which is ironic since even while most homosexual acts were punishable in India, same-sex loving women were not really included in that category. One could say that the patriarchal notion of consistently ignoring women's rights granted them a loophole this once.

1.3. The World That Belongs To Us: An Anthology of Queer Poetry From South Asia

The primary text focused in this study is an anthology of South Asian queer poetry edited by Aditi Angiras and Akhil Katyal. The anthology has more than a hundred contributors, poets, and people who translated some of these poems. The anthology took about two years to go into publication after the initial call to submit entries was issued by the editors. In the long text of the call they had invited entries from "Transmen, Transwoman, Lesbian, Hijra, Kothi, Gay, Aravani, Khawaja Sara, Intersex, Jogappa, Bisexual, Drag King/Queen, GenderQueer, Non-Binary, Meyeli Chele, Butch, Femme… and other poets" (Angiras and Katyal, preface). These might seem like a lot of categories at one look but as discussed earlier, the lgbt+ community is fairly expansive and the editors received messages enquiring about including other identities and entries like asexuals, pansexuals, diasporas, allies, etc. to the fold. Efforts at understanding the importance of being inclusive and heeding new information were among the more significant tasks of putting together the anthology. Santa Khurai, a nupi maanbi activist and writer urged while submitting her poem that "[p]lease do not indentify me as Indian transwoman or a northeastern transwoman. Please use: indigenous Meetei transwoman from Manipur to stand for nupi maanbi, in case the need arises." (Angiras and Katyal, preface) The statement highlights the

pride of belonging, belonging to a place, belonging to a community, belonging to an indigenous identity, and not compromising its authenticity.

The editors of the anthology have been vocal about wanting to reach out to a diverse set of contributors from the conception of the project. In terms of language, region, caste, gender sexuality, class, and individual publication history, the book does a decent job at being a piece of literature for a heterogeneous set of queer writers and readers from South Asia. The contributors were given the option of remaining anonymous or using pseudonyms if they chose to not disclose their identity (since lgbt+ community is still a taboo in most of South Asia), some have even exercised it. Though most of the poems in the anthology are printed in the English language, many of them originate from more than ten languages including Bengali, Nepali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi, Malayalam, Marathi, and Urdu. The translators for all these individual poems were meticulous in maintaining the larger context and the granular meaning of all the poems. The variety in languages, ethnicity, particular cultures, and different nuances would've posed a challenge in preserving the inherent meanings of the poems, but constant communication between the poets, translators, and editors resolved it to a great extent.

The preface of the book also poses a question about the meaning of 'Queer poetry'. Is it poems written by queer people? Does it entail topics around 'queer themes'? Is it poems written *for* queer people? There are different responses, mostly contradicting each other, but the editors have taken the approach of being mostly inclusive about every definition. The poems featured in the anthology have a range of forms and subject matters the poets experiment with. The themes in the poems are of a large variety, ranging from desire and loneliness, sexual intimacy and struggles, caste and language, body and gender, activism, families, and heartbreaks among others. The editors acknowledge that the commonly circulated meaning of the word 'queer' only "pretends to signpost" the complex slew of names, identities, and gestures, but it is just a

convenient pretence "meant for book covers, not for all its contents." (Angiras and Katyal, preface)

The present study will focus on analyzing seven selected poems from the anthology namely, 'Queer as in' by Riddhi Dastidar who is non-binary/femme disabled poet and journalist from Delhi; 'After Pulse' by Mary Anne Mohanraj, a clinical associate professor of Fiction and literature at the University of Illinois; 'Body/ Lost in Translation' by Fatema Bhaiji, a writer and founder of their queer literary magazine *Outcaste*; 'Genderfucke(ed)' by Sam(ira) Obeid, in her own words a poet, intersectional resistance activist, lesbian, scholar who moved to the US at twenty three and speaks to the tensions of immigration, gender and sexuality; 'I know' by Arina Alam, who identifies as a woman, and is a blogger as she mentions in her brief introductory note; 'This world isn't for you' by Prabhu Tashi is based in Nepal and wishes for a more considerate and accepting environment for the queer lives in Nepal (translated by Rohan Chhetri, whose first boo Slow Startle was a winner of the 'The (Great) Indian Poetry Collective's Emerging Poets Prize, 2015), and 'Do you want to get to know me' by Sahar Riaz, a psychiatrist from Pakistan, currently living in Dublin and believes that any form of self-expression should be an integral part of everyone's life.

The study aims at analysing the selected poems and deconstructing the binary of heteronormativity in society. It will try to explore four questions prepared by the researcher to understand the themes of identity and prejudice attached to the lgbt+ community in South Asia (particularly India). The questions are as follows:

Ques.1) How are the stereotypes and dominantly propagated images of particular sexualities tackled within and outside the Lgbtq+ community?

Ques. 2) Exploring how people with hetero-divergent sexualities/genders struggle with reconciling with their subjectivity personally, and within society.

Ques. 3) What are the ramifications of drawing a distinction between 'real life ' and 'queer lifestyle'?

Ques. 4) How does the pressure to 'fit in' further alienate the lgbt+ community from their own body and society in general?

1.4. Review of Literature

Tracing an exact starting point that marked the beginning of the queer movement is a complex task, especially since every culture experienced its own pace of development and history. There is a lot of literature still unknown that could be privy to the queer movement of particular regions. Some contributions are considered more significant than others, if only because a wide portion of the population is aware of them. Since quite a few decades back, theorists have expounded on the subject of gender, sexuality, and identity in various capacities. Some of these major theories and theorists are discussed in this study to understand the progress made in queer theory and to apply relevant parts of some of these theories and ideas in the present study.

1.4.1. Essentialism and Constructionism:

Two theoretical positions that have been prevalent in discussions about sex, gender, and sexuality are Essentialism and Constructionism. Essentialism (mostly referring to biological essentialism) regards to desire and identity as a result of natural, fixed, and innate human characteristics. Essentialist theorists consider sexuality as an unchangeable entity. That is "today's sexual desires, behaviours, and identities have existed in the same basic form in all times

and places."(Prescott) They believe that a person's sexual desire, sexual behaviour, and sexual identity all correspond complimentarily with each other. While they might agree that an individual's sexual expression might be affected by external factors, the point remains that every culture has a fixed percentage of people (minority) who are essentially LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) who can be clearly differentiated from the essentially heterosexual(s) (majority). The essentialist claim homosexuality is an innate biological predisposition is used in the fight for lgbt+ rights movement, asserting that if homosexuality is not chosen but assigned by nature, then they should be extended the rights and protections without having to plead for them.

Constructionists on the other hand believe "that sexual desires, acts, and identities are bound by particular social, cultural, political, and historical contexts, and that these contexts produce, shape, and limit our experiences of sexuality." (Prescott) They believe that different aspects and experiences of an individual's society dictate their relationships with sexual expression. There might be certain rules or accepted social behaviours of a society that is inculcated within an individual either through prolonged exposure or direct education.

> "Cultural classification systems, Constructionism argues, shape not only sexual identities but also sexual desires and acts, and so it can be anachronistic and historical to refer to homosexual and heterosexual people in contexts in which these concepts did not exist. Constructionism also recognizes that desires, acts, and identities do not always line up as one might expect and highlights the differences, rather than the similarities, between sexual actors in the present and sexual actors in the past. Rather than assume that every culture has relatively fixed percentages of homosexual and heterosexual people, constructionists believe that sexual desires, acts, and identities are constantly changing." (Prescott)

Both these positions are taken up and criticised by the lgbt+ community with change in time and understanding of the topics. Constructionism is waived as an academic theory and is not supported by the Lgbt+ community who believe themselves to have been born lgbt+. They disagree with the notion that sexual desire and acts are influenced by society, history, politics, or culture. Furthermore, social processes like capitalism, urbanisation, and class and race relations have no effect on constructing sexualities. Essentialists on the other hand have been criticised for universalizing experiences that are generally constructed through an individual's interaction with the circumstances cultivated through history and culture and that differ on the basis of class, race, and other categories. Some homophobic professionals have even cited Essentialism to justify surgeries and hormonal treatments to 'cure' people of Homosexuality.

1.4.2. Foucault and Modern Sexuality:

In 'History of Sexuality ', Foucault provides a historical narrative of the formation of modern sexuality. He does this by analysing the history of sexuality from ancient Greek times to the modern era. It starts with a concept he calls, the 'repressive hypothesis', wherein he states that since the rise of the bourgeois class was based on hard work and industrious methods- as opposed to the aristocrats- wasting time and energy on pure pleasure-seeking activities was unacceptable. Sex became a private affair that could not even be discussed outside the confines of marriage. The repressive hypothesis maintains that there must be an outlet of confession where these 'improper' sexual feelings could be realised freely and Foucault identified prostitution and psychiatry as those outlets. During the Victorian era, a similar situation led to the formation of 'other Victorians' a group of people who turned to psychiatrists or prostitutes to create their own space for discourse on sexuality. Even in the 20th century, despite Freud's psychoanalysis theory, the discussion about sex and sexuality is mostly academic.

Foucault's insistent discussion on discourse is closely related to his idea of the relationship between knowledge and power. The bourgeois exercised their power to create a discourse about sexuality that only validates marital sex. Any discourse about sexuality outside the confines of marriage was effectively banned in culture. "Under the authority of a language that had been carefully expurgated so that it was no longer directly named, sex was taken charge of, tracked down as it were, by a discourse that aimed to allow it no obscurity, no respite" (Foucault, 20). Foucault takes the view that the diverse forms of human sexuality are brought into being by the way they are discussed: the biological basis of sexuality is elaborated and shaped by the language we use to describe it. Indeed, the very concept of someone having a 'sexuality' is a very recent idea, which did not exist before the eighteenth century. (Benson)

Foucault took a constructionist line and argued that homosexuality is a modern formation because even if similar acts of sexuality existed in earlier times, there was never an identification specified for such acts. The modern homosexual is different from the previous sodomites according to Foucault. "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault, 43). Foucault explained that while a sodomite is regarded by the 'act', homosexuals refer to a type of person with an identity defined by their desire for people of the same sex.

The present study will focus on the specification of the identity of a person of the lgbt+ community. Many theories since Foucault's time have corrected or at least critiqued some of the assumptions made by him. There will also be some discussions on the significance of discourse in the study of sexuality even in present times, though it differs in some amount from what Foucault based his arguments on.

1.4.3. Gayle S. Rubin's 'Thinking Sex':

Rubin discusses the importance of discussing sexuality openly; even at times when it might seem not important enough in the face of more important issues. Her essay 'Thinking sex' is considered one of the fundamental texts of Queer theory. Rubin's essay follows Foucault's rejection of the essentialist explanation of sexuality in order to explore how sexual identities and behaviours are organised into a system of different powers for which certain people are encouraged and rewarded while others are punished and condemned. She notices three different periods in time when sex was heavily policed in America. In the late 19th century, homosexuality, prostitution, pornography, and even birth control were criminalised in America. In the 1950s a witch hunt by local, state, and federal officials intensified the policing of homosexuality in particular. 1980s saw a series of campaigns against 'obscenity', including discrimination against homosexuals, that evolved into a panic over AIDS all culminated in further marginalising the lgbt+ community. She calls for recognising the "political dimensions of erotic life" as she demonstrates how certain forms of sexual expressions are valorised over others, licensing the persecution of those who fall outside the narrow frame of what constitutes sexual legitimacy. (Rubin, 35)

Rubin argued that gender oppression could not fully encompass the oppression of sex and sexuality. She sidestepped the feminist assumption that "sexuality is a derivation of gender" (Rubin, 33). Though she admits that while gender relations have been important for the articulation of sexual systems, she emphasises that sex and gender cannot be used interchangeably. They are not synonymous so the rubric of gender cannot account for sexuality in its entirety. Rubin demands "an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality" (Rubin, 34) to study the variations in sexualities that far exceed mere hetero-homo differentiation. Rubin provided much of the language and framework for advancing this line of thought before it even had a name.

The study will take into account Rubin's argument- that are also further explored in other works of queer theory – about gender and sex(and sexuality) being inherently different and the variations in sexuality as an individual experience explored in a few of the selected poems. The study expands on the diversity of the community.

1.4.4. LGBTQIA and Mental Health in India- A Review of Research From 2009 to 2019

The review conducted a study on the existing research carried out to study the mental health of the lgbt+ in India between 2009 and 2019. The authors listed all the relevant research included in the study and explored them to review the nature of these studies. They reported having found 22 reviews and reports, 4 viewpoints and comments, 7 editorials, 1 conference proceeding, and 60 original articles. The authors extracted the data and coded them into themes and subthemes. The study reveals that the lgbt+ community shows high mental health concerns and tries to expound on the reasons for such revelation. The study tries to justify the results with relevant theories and proceeds to study lived experiences, societal attitudes, and other factors related to the mental health of the lgbt+ community. It explores the imbalance in the representation of different identities in the research which led to the exclusion of some identities. The authors identified the gaps in the accumulated and recommended some suggestions for future research in the area.

1.4.5. Love Simon (Fox 2000 Pictures)

The lgbt+ representation in media has been steadily increasing in the past few years. Hollywood has been on the train longer than the Indian film industry, though many independent Indian filmmakers have started picking up more gender/ sexual orientation inclusive scripts. Love Simon is the first movie produced by a major production house, Fox 2000 Pictures to feature a gay teenage protagonist. The film plays out like any other romantic comedy and that adds to the

credit of the film, for not treating the lgbt+ aspect of the story any different. One particular aspect of the film that is most relevant to the present study other than keeping his sexuality a secret and facing covert, sometimes blatant discrimination, is the expectation of some of the heterosexual characters that they are owed an explanation about the protagonist's attempts at protecting his own and his internet friend's identity. This study tries to recognise the pressure (from close relations, acquaintances and strangers) that people from the lgbt+ community face to adjust their identity to fit the hetero-normative narrative.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework lays the foundation for any research work. Following are some of the theories prevalent in the present study. Some of these theories are important to understand and explore many aspects of the study, however, not all dimensions might be relevant or agreeable to the analysis.

1.5.1. Jacques Derrida (Deconstruction):

In the late 1960's Structuralism gave way to a new literary movement that derived its name from the former, called Post Structuralism. Deconstruction, which was a part of the movement was created and heavily influenced by French philosopher Jacques Derrida. The theory arose as a response to Structuralism and Formalism. Taking a simple reading of how Derrida described a general strategy of Deconstruction as:

Every philosophical argument is structured in terms of opposition and in this "traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful co-existence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), and occupies the commanding position. To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment to

reverse the hierarchy". He implies that all texts are inherently laid with hierarchical oppositions and deconstruction not only exposes them but also reverses the hierarchy.

Structuralists believed that all elements of human culture, including literature can be understood if seen as a structure, i.e. a system of signs. Drawing on Saussurian literary and linguistic theory, structuralism focuses on the structure of the item being studied (Finnegan, 36) structuralism provides a framework of methodology to represent signs that make up the signified of a piece of literature. Saussure declares the relationship between signified and signifier is arbitrary. The individuality of the text disappears in Structuralism as it focuses on the system, pattern, and structures. While Formalist critics assume that a text is self-contained and freestanding, whose entire meaning can be derived from the relation between the various parts (symbols, images, rhythms) of the text. Formalists ultimately make sense of all the ambiguities they encounter in the text, claiming that all the ambiguities serve a 'definite, meaningful, and demonstrable' literary function. Both structuralism and Formalism advocate the belief that texts have an identifiable "centre" of meaning.

The most characteristic feature of deconstruction is its notion of textuality, a view of language since it does not only exist in a book but also in speech, in history, and in culture, especially the written language (Ellis, 84). There was "nothing outside the text" for Derrida (Derrida, 158). According to Derrida deconstruction is not a critiquing method or technique, but a means to explore more than what is immediately understood about the text at first reading. There is an ongoing replacement of meaning and representation in a text which can be traced to more texts. Derrida's deconstruction dismantles the conceptual opposition and takes apart a hierarchical system based on thoughts that then re-inscribe a different order of textual significance. Deconstruction constantly seeks out aporias, blind spots, or moments of self-contradiction in the text that involuntarily betray the tension between rhetoric and logic, what the

text says and what it is supposed to mean. (Norris, 19) Derrida adds: "But undoing, decomposing and de-sedimenting of structures was not a negative operation" (Derrida, 85-87).

Every system is made up of certain beliefs, some dominant ideals, and practices, and all of them are assembled through social construction. It's essential to note that these constructions also entail a certain amount of exclusion at different levels. Deconstruction seeks out those cracks in the system, where it fails to disguise that the system is not whole or self-contained. Deconstruction does not lead from a faulty to an accurate way of thinking or writing; rather it exposes the limitations of human thought operating through language even while harbouring the same limitation itself. Fundamentally, it is a way of understanding the structure of discourse, locating its controlling centre, and identifying the unfounded assumptions on which it relies to function as a discourse.

1.5.2. Eve Kosfsky Sedgwick:

Gayle Rubin's call for an analytical distinction between gender and sexuality resonates in Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* which combined Feminist and Anti- homophobic methodologies. Sedgwick argues that the homo-hetero distinction at the heart of modern sexual definition is fundamentally incoherent. She gives two reasons for this: on one hand there is a constant contradiction wherein homosexuality is represented as a minority (she refers to it as 'a minoritizing view') and a sexual desire that is potentially experienced by everyone including heterosexuals (she calls it ' a universalizing view'). On the other hand, there is another contradiction in thinking of the gendering of homosexual desire is both transitive and separatist. In simple words, transitive understanding locates the origin of desire in some threshold space between gender categories while a separatist understanding takes a purist stand and tries to categorize them on the basis of 'masculinity' or 'femininity'.

Sedgwick understands that the crucial task at hand was not to decide which of these contradictory models describes homosexuality accurately, but rather to analyse the knowledge effects it propagates. "The most potent effects of modern homo/hetero sexual definition tend to spring precisely from the inexplicitness or denial of the gaps between long-coexisting minoritizing and universalizing, or gender-transitive and gender-intransitive, understandings of same-sex relations" (Sedgwick, 47). She tries to denaturalise the complacencies about what it is "to render less destructively presumable 'homosexuality as we know it today'" (Sedgwick, 47–48). For this, she focuses on the historically circumstantial and conceptually un-nuanced way in which modern society defines one's sexuality in terms of the gender relations between an individual, and those they are sexually attracted towards. She notes that "sexuality extends along so many dimensions that aren't well described in terms of the gender of object-choice at all" (Sedgwick, 35), and urges to give closer attention to "the multiple, unstable ways in which people may be like or different from each other" (Sedgwick, 23). Sedgwick gives a fine-grained description of sexual variations that differ from the monolithic homo/hetero definition. She presents several reasons that could distinguish people sexually but are not epistemologically significant. They cannot be subsumed into major cultural differentiation (like sex, class, and race).

Sedgwick's insistence on analysing the current definitions of sexuality and consideration of the myriad of reasons for one's sexual behaviour is a major contribution to queer theoretical projects that work against the normalising discourse of heterosexuality and homosexuality. It pushes forth the idea of sexual formation being outside the mentioned binary and emphasises the heterogeneous, non-linear elements of particular gender identities.

1.5.3. Heterosexism:

Heterosexism is a system of attitude bias and discrimination in favour of female-male sexuality and relationships. (Jung and Smith) It presumes the superiority of heterosexuality or male-female attractions and relationships, by appointing it as the 'norm'. The term derives directly from the feminist creation of the term 'sexism' during the late 1960s. Gay and lesbian groups within and outside feminism began to feel the need to distinguish between sexism (directed at all women) and heterosexism indicating the prejudice faced by hetero-divergent individuals and the assumption that heterosexuality is the sexual choice of all people. It also indicated that lesbian feminists in particular felt that a majority of feminist discourse accepted the centrality of 'heteroreality'. A major concern of the gay and lesbian groups was that even if a patriarchal ideology was successfully challenged, it would do little to nothing to alter deeply seated homophobic prejudices.

Heterosexist attitude is not exclusive to heterosexual individuals; people from any sexual orientation can hold a certain bias that propagates hatred towards their own or someone else's sexual orientation. Heterosexism posits gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and other sexual minorities as second-class citizens with regard to various legal and civil rights, economic opportunities, and social equality in many of the world's jurisdictions and societies. (Wikipedia) It differs from Homophobia in the context that homophobia is an unreasonable fear or antipathy towards lgbt+, whereas heterosexism denotes a system of ideological thoughts that appoints heterosexuality as the social norm.

1.5.4. Judith Butler (Performativity):

Claiming that "identity is performatively constituted", Judith Butler formulated a postmodernist notion of gender that resonates with the deconstructive ethos and contradicts the traditional notion, that genders are fixed categories. Butler considers gender as a social construct

whose meaning depends on the cultural framework, within which it is performed. It is not a fixed notion, since it is a continuous performance and hence every repeated performance or citation depending on the context in which it occurs, acquires a new meaning. This view also rejects essentialism and stable identities and meaning. Gender is "a stylized repetition of acts . . . which are internally discontinuous . . .[so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler, 179)

Butler draws inspiration from Austin's description of 'performative' and Derrida's criticism and claims that the power of the performative comes from how they can be iterated. "The Derridean notion of iterability, formulated in response to the theorization of speech acts by John Searle and J.L. Austin, also implies that every act is itself a recitation" (Butler, Bodies That Matter 187). To say that gender is performative is to argue that gender is "real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler, Imitation and Gender Subordination, 314). Butler says that it means that nobody is a gender prior to doing gendered acts. Butler states that "identity is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality" (Butler, Gender Trouble 23). This might be interpreted as a reference to gender performativity. She claims that certain acts of an individual can be interpreted as an expression of gender identity. "It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in way" (Butler, Performative Acts and Gender Construction 527)

Chapter 2

Analysis

'The world that belongs to us' is a contemporary anthology of queer poetry from South Asia. It contains a multitude of personal experiences that are personal, and in the same breath incredibly relatable. The collection of poems in the book ranges from social commentary to personal confessions. The South Asian elements (mostly Indian) are very visible in most of the poems, even those that are written by people of South Asian descent residing in the west. The selected seven poems in the present study elucidate some of the issues that the lgbt+ community has had to face for decades. Some are universal; many are at least a little integral to their own culture. 'Queer as in' talks about the various facets of being queer in a world far away from the west, about being brushed off as 'just a phase'. Prabhu Tashi asks, "Dear lord, by being who I am, what is the worst that I've done" in 'This World Isn't for You '. (Tashi, 197)

Society and culture form the biggest influences in an individual's life, and every society, either universally or limited to its jurisdiction imposes certain rules that one is expected to abide by. Those rules are not always strictly for the larger good of everyone that participates but a select few. More often than not this privileged group is consisted of cis-gender heterosexual males. The roots of this privilege can be traced back to the system of patriarchy that basically evolved to reject anything that threatens to break away from a set definition of 'normal'. The present study sets to deconstruct the Heteronormative binary of straight/queer (used as a representative term to denote all hetero-divergent sexual orientations interchangeably with the' lgbt+' or 'lgbt+ community') by trying to analyse the selected poems through four questions prepared by the researcher.

'Heteronormativity' is one such definition of 'normality' that assumes everyone is 'straight'. It presupposes that heterosexuality is the default sexual orientation, the only normal and natural way to express sexuality and attraction. The terms 'heterosexuality' and 'heteronormativity' were defined in the nineteenth and twentieth century by Karl Maria Kerbeny in 1868 and Michael Warner in 1991 respectively. Michael Warner was a queer literary critic and social theorist who took inspiration from an essay by Adrienne Rich called "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence". This is not to imply that heteronormativity didn't exist prior to that. The dominant discourse has propagated the superiority of heterosexual ideals in society. Heterosexuality or Lesbianism (or other sexual orientations) are not 'choices' made equally available but that heterosexuality carries with itself, an assurance of normality. Till someone 'comes out' and exerts their homosexuality (sexuality), they are assumed to be heterosexual. (Adrienne Rich) This illustrates that heterosexuality acts as an institution rather than a sexual choice or practice.

2.1. How are the stereotypes and dominantly propagated images of particular sexualities tackled within and outside the Lgbtq+ community?

The treatment of the stereotypes about the lgbt+ community can be understood loosely in the same way Edward Said talked about the prejudice around the Orient. They are propagated by people outside the community on the basis of being exotic or out of the ordinary realm of understanding. For a very long time, any sexuality sideways from heterosexuality was considered unnatural. It was only in 1973 that the APA (American Psychiatric Association) removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. Before that, it was recommended to use conversion therapy or shock therapy to 'treat' people of homosexuality.

In South Asian culture (particularly Indian), people cite traditional values to stigmatize the lgbt+ community. Historical/ mythological figures like Shikhandin- Draupadi's transgender brother, who even fought in the battle of Mahabharata-, are conveniently sidestepped to maintain the narrative. It is still a prevalent reality for most of the lgbt+ community to countenance a plethora of stereotypes in their daily life. For example, APA slashed homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses but numerous people in India are taken to shady occultists (not even certified psychiatrists) to rid them of this 'strange spirit'. Most of these stereotypes have sustained and circulated through the misguided representation of the lgbt+ community in the media. A certain popular image propagated about certain sexualities and genders make them vulnerable to discrimination based on multiple reasons. It could be the way people look, the way they dress, the colours they prefer in their wardrobe, or even the way they talk or walk. Every little detail is scrutinised and compiled to form a portfolio of stereotypical behaviour that is then set in a metaphorical stone and becomes the definition of said sexuality (or gender). As mentioned earlier the already menial representation in popular culture propagates these images and refuses to take responsibility. The few times they do, it becomes a problem. For example, the very numbered advertisements featuring even a minimal amount of positive lgbt+ representation witness an outrage among the general public. Be it Dabur's Karwa Chauth ad with a same-sex couple or Sabyasachi's mangalsutra campaign featuring males donning the piece of jewellery, all received backlash. Petitions are signed to remove them, often citing that they hurt religious sentiments or promoted corrupt values that don't align with the Indian culture.

Contrary to the alpha heterosexual male, a stereotypical gay man is defined as a flamboyant, feminine promiscuous person who has no regard for 'respectable' culture. The lgbt+ community is often represented as someone entirely too rich (or too poor especially the transgender people), with stereotypical professions, addicted to substance abuse, with too many

partners, and no regard for sexual health, to name a few stereotypes. Interestingly the prejudice is categorised too. There are separate stereotypes to attribute to gay men, lesbian women or bisexual people, etc. A butch lesbian is categorised as a rebel with a difficult personality. They are not even considered women a lot of times because they are not 'appropriately feminine' enough. In Genderfuck(ed), (Sam)ira Obeid states, "We are both women/ I just wear mine differently than / you yours" (Obeid, 178)

This discrimination is double-edged, because women as a marginalised group have had to sustain metaphorical and many a time physical injuries to earn their place in society. A woman loving (or at least sexually attracted to) other women is subject to increased stigmatisation. Their journey towards independence in any capacity is reduced to an imitation of men. Their personal choices and preferences are constantly compared to their male counterparts. The expected behaviour of a woman is being docile, hare-brained, and submissive individual in the patriarchal order. Decades of feminist movements to smudge the demarcation of gender discrimination fades with the imposition of sexuality-based stereotypes because you can't have the freedom of being a woman and loving one too.

"If maybe I looked more feminine

She may have had a different opinion or

If maybe she would've respected the independence

... By consequence of being a woman" (Obeid, 177)

Obeid talks about being an independent woman but being labelled 'sexist' by one of her closest friends when she shares that while she has no problem if her partner decides to not work for the rest of her life, she personally feels uncomfortable being financially dependent on a significant other. "I am an independent woman/ But one of my closest friends see it fit to call me sexist" (178). The gender performativity Butler mentions stems from cultural expectations and is

challenged when someone appears or acts 'out' of the set definitions of their gender. "Please know I am not honoured by the look of surprise on your face/ When I tell you my pronouns are female" (178). A woman's financial independence will only be respected when that independence is from a heterosexual male who can obviously take care of more than one individual. But on the same wavelength, supporting a lesbian woman who chooses to not work and is financially dependent is seen as disregarding the feminist movement.

Another prominent stereotype plaguing the lgbt+ community paints them as promiscuous and incapable of maintaining a steady relationship. The varied sexual orientations- which are a leap from heterosexuality- already paint the community as immoral individuals who only care about fulfilling their sexual desires without any regard for the designated norms. The continuous misrepresentation in media and unfounded rumours broadcast the negative characterisation of the lgbt+ community that strips them of the opportunity of being treated with basic human decency. They are often objectified for simply expressing their sexual or gender identity. Obeid calls people out on that:

> "Please know
>
> I am not honoured
>
> By the look of surprise on your face
>
> When I tell you consent applies to me too" (Obeid, 178)

One particular community in India that is stigmatised with this stereotype more than the others is the transgender community. Including the indigenous variations, transgender people in India are recurrently associated with prostitution and heckling. The recent Supreme Court decision of including sex workers and their children within the protection of Article 21 aside, the profession of prostitution gives the people an illusion of ownership of the sex workers. People consider it their right to demand and expect sexual favours out of everyone they perceive to be

sex workers and that includes the transgender community. Arina Alam pens this dehumanising experience in 'I Know', where she is aware of "when unwanted eyes will rip off my clothes, expose my genitalia" (Alam, 193) or "which smile is asking for sexual favours" (194). What is alarming is that even after committing a hate crime, people victimize themselves because 'it's not their fault', they were 'seduced', 'the lgbt+ community cannot be considered humans' etc. "...because my rapist thinks/ raping a eunuch   body is disgusting" (193).

2.2. Exploring how people with hetero-divergent sexualities/genders struggle with reconciling with their identity personally, and within society.

It is no secret that every individual who resides in society goes through some kind of existential crisis, be it regarding their jobs, social circle, or even college workload and career plans. Everyone is entitled to some confusion about the direction they want to steer their lives in. The lgbt+ community is no different. Their existential crisis is slightly more exponential since it encompasses their entire identity sometimes. It is fairly common among the lgbt+ community to be confused about their sexuality, hence the terms 'queer' or 'questioning'. In many recent pieces of research, it was expounded that sexual orientation is not stable or rigid in any form; many people experience a change in their sexual interest due to various factors. It is possible for a person born in the female body to transition into a male body if they feel comfortable in it. The core of the problem is though, that the notion of fluidity of gender and sexual orientation baffles people. It seems incomprehensible for people to not be branded in a certain position in society. Sam(ira) Obeid considers in her poem 'Genderfuck(ed)' that, "The thing about identity is we're always ready/ To check each other into boxes/ Even when there's no paperwork to be done" (Obeid, 177). It rings true, especially in the South Asian culture where hustle and achieving something is the end goal. The journey is never given its due importance.

One of the major reasons for this conflict with identity is the lack of awareness about sexualities and genders other than the heteronormatively prescribed ones. For a very long time, the authority figures have been gate-keeping information that might shift the patriarchal narrative and expose the generational hegemony. It is considered taboo to talk about sexuality or even sexual health. "I know/ on which corner I will hear whispered speculations/ about my gender" (Alam, 193). Sex education in India and most South Asian nations leaves a lot to be desired. The majority of the lgbt+ population is confused about their identity because there is little to no provision for dissemination of information among the general public. Adults refuse to change their ideologies on principle and children are considered to be 'too young ' to learn about something that would 'corrupt' their worldview. An argument to negate this claim can be made with the help of a fairly recent proceeding in Madras High Court on 28th April 2021 where Justice N Ananda Venkatesh passed an interim order in response to a petition filed by two young women from the lgbt+ community. He decided to receive psycho-educative counselling on queer issues to help shed his personal ignorance and prejudices. He stated, "It was I (us), who has to set off on a journey of understanding them and accepting them and shed our notions, and not they who have to turn themselves inside out to suit our notions of social morality and tradition" (Justice N Anand Venkatesh, 50).

More often than not, however, the lgbt+ community is left somewhere in the gaps within, questioning their existence, and trying to get people to acknowledge their individuality. Riddhi Dastidar tries to answer the questions about her identity in her poem 'Queer As In':

"Queer as in how do I identify?

Not straight, not gay, not girl enough,

miles away from man. Just queer, man,

as in queer.

I dentif i

as queer." (Dastidar, 91)

She tries to separate herself from the binary of genders and sexualities, even the mainstream hetero-divergent ones. For once she wants to own that maybe she doesn't want to give herself a badge of identity. Numerous in the lgbt+ community struggle with coming to terms with the fact that they do in fact, belong in the community. As mentioned earlier it could be due to a lack of information, or not being able to reconcile their beliefs with their own reality. It could also be because they fail to identify with an image they have of the identity. Mentioning this dilemma in their poem 'Body/ Lost in Translation', Fatema Bhaiji writes, "Speaking of sense, I say 'other women' as if it is a *we*/ but the other is so strong I am left cold in the outskirts" (Bhaiji, 136). They reveal their doubts about belonging to a certain identity with the added pressure of society's and their own expectations.

Once a person does somehow figure out this one facet of their life, they have to go through stringent trails set in place by society. Being judged for absolutely everything else, every other decision is questioned and met with suspicion on the grounds of one's chosen sexual orientation/ gender. Obeid expresses her frustration with these situations in her poem:

"All of a sudden I'm not woman enough to understand

All of a sudden I am not my mother's daughter

But my

father's son" (Obeid, 178)

Everyone seems to have a problem with the word 'choice'. A person's choices regarding their own lives are dictated by the expectations of society. It is a matter of great offense if someone's reality doesn't align with their rulebook of values and beliefs. It becomes pertinent for them to have their opinions known and imposed. "The thing about identity is we are always

ready/ To tell someone who they are/ So we can see ourselves in them" (Obeid, 178), though it especially becomes a challenge for someone who has already struggled their way through navigating it once or twice before. Obeid points out this uncomfortable situation when she writes, "So quick to label me in your own image" (178). It could lead to them losing whatever confidence they had conjured to admit to their identity. They are made to feel as if they are taking too much space in an already cramped room. "It appears I impose my identity upon you" (178) seems like a whispered confession by every member of the lgbt+ community who has had to face such meddling. Straying from the supposed norm seems unacceptable and people are made to wonder what their fault is. "Dear lord, by being who I am, what is the worst that I've done" (Tashi, 197) Prabhu Tashi is looking to know in his poem 'This World Isn't For you'. The constant badgering pushes a person to feel as if they are in the wrong. They are made to apologise for choosing themselves for once. Riddhi Dastidar promises, "I will be a good girl tomorrow, I will not like girls tomorrow" (Dastidar, 90) resonating with the pleas of numerous lgbt+ individuals who try to bribe their identities into remaining under wraps.

This poses a serious threat to the mental health of the lgbt+ community. Despite the lack of research on the lgbt+ issues in India, a good number of studies and reviews have been carried out regarding their mental health conditions. Poor mental health could be instigated by several reasons, but in every study, the biggest one remains the stigma they have to face in society and even in their own homes. In one of the studies, third-fourths of respondents felt it was imperative to keep their identity a secret. (Mimiaga M. J., et al) It has also been observed that the lgbt+ community especially the youth is more vulnerable to mental health issues than others, even the suicide rates among the lgbt+ youth are higher than the average Indian statistics. It could be argued that the numbers are only increasing because it is being reported more and that it has always prevailed, but that does not make the situation any better than it is.

2.3. What are the ramifications of drawing a distinction between 'real life ' and 'queer lifestyle'?

"Queer as in just a phase" (Dastidar, 89) is a line of conversation that almost everyone from the lgbt+ community has been on the other side of. It is always brushed off as a 'quirky' trait one picks up while exploring new things, one that's bound to fade away. Some of them gently accuse with "you just think it makes you interesting." (89) The 'well meaning' advice and 'understanding' glances condescendingly try to ground them from the exotic charms of an existence that is so far removed from the monotony of everyday life. Queerness is associated with fantasy, an adventure one embarks on while all their inhibitions are dialled down. "Queer as in only at parties, as in only when drunk/ as in only that one time at that party when drunk" (89) reflects a prominent image of expected queer behaviour.

It is supposed to remain hush in society since it betrays the long-standing tradition of promoting cis-gender heterosexual culture, the only acceptable reality. The idea of "queer as in secret" (Dastidar, 89) is encouraged by the adherents of heteronormativity, wherein it is absolutely bizarre to imagine someone openly proclaiming to divert from the natural and social order. "This isn't nature's fault, these are your own desires" (Tashi, 197). All the blame is supposed to be shouldered by the 'deviants' for subscribing to foreign ideals. There is a clear bifurcation of 'real life' and 'queer lifestyle' in society. It reduces someone's sense of identity and belongingness to a mere preference of habits and behaviour. "You know, queer as in not in real life// Queer as in not really, no." (Dastidar, 89- 90) It sums up the argument presented by the society where they simply reject the idea. If it is not the nature of the majority of the population, it doesn't exist at all. India's legal system has, on multiple occasions refused to extend basic human rights to the minority on the grounds of 'not enough people ' to protect.

The will to ignore the reality of the lgbt+ community runs deep in society. The whole community is clubbed together as one entity instead of divulging into the distinct nature of, at least the different genders and sexual orientations if not the individuals. One can observe that even among the lgbt+ categories, people are only aware of the ones visible in the acronym or the more popular ones in the media, which mostly coincide. Only a select few are open to admitting that "I don't understand/ Tell me more" (Obeid, 178). The quote is, however, interestingly used in the poem to illustrate the reluctance of the general public to widen their horizon of knowledge and acceptance. There are set standards of achievements in life and none of them include empowering a marginalised group. The lgbt+ 'lifestyle' is labelled as a dangerous move of going against this system that posits heterosexual matrimony in the highest regard. That is considered the 'safest' form of existence, especially in the South Asian (or Indian) community. Mary Anne Mohanraj describes this 'safe' sought-out life in her poem 'After Pulse', where the narrator admits to being Bi and poly but leading a household with a husband and two kids, a dog, and a house in the suburbs. She admits to "living as safe a life as might wish for, / as parents might hope for their children." (Mohanraj, 122) India's diverse population and much more diverse cultures make it impossible to establish a unified marriage law save for some fundamental rules, hence different communities have their own rules set out for marriage. These communities aided by the government have been adamant to prevent the lgbt+ marriages from being given legal sanctions in the country.

The irony of society's insistence on drawing a distinction between 'real life ' and 'queer lifestyle' is that despite presenting a list of reasons to invalidate a whole spectrum of sexual and gender identities no one can deny that it does exist. It is as naturally occurring in nature as photosynthesis. A lot of people fail to realise that there is a living individual associated with these terminologies and the 'lifestyle' is just the truth of their reality. In a sense, there are two

definitions of truth for the lgbt+ community, one that the society imposes and the other that belongs to the individual. Most often than not, the latter is hidden behind an image that the people from the lgbt+ community are coerced into creating so that it does not clash with the hetero-normative touchstone. Sahar Riaz gives a glimpse of those few moments of respite a hetero-divergent person can afford, out of a hectic day of performing their assigned role in her poem 'Do you want to get to know me '. She waits for the nights "so I can wipe off this mask, / reveal something real, / if only to myself" (Riaz, 200). It becomes a constant battle between avoiding confrontation and living as quietly as possible, lest someone ridicules them for being themselves ("when I escape into my room to avoid the scornful crowd" (Alam, 194)), and revealing the truth and hoping to be acknowledged without prejudice.

2.4. How does the pressure to 'fit in' further alienate the lgbt+ community from their own body and society in general?

It is fascinating how the entire world and India, in particular, is studded with cultural, racial, ethnic, physical, mental, and sexual diversity, but the benchmark imitates a particularly narrow category. It could be traced back to a long history of oppression of the numerous identities by a considerably small group of authority figures who have continued to remain in power over the years. Historical movements of resistance and reclaiming their positions in society have extended some power to the marginalised groups, but the society is far away from being an equal opportunity structure. Dominantly propagated ideals like Heteronormativity have been set in place as the only norm acceptable in society. Anything sideways is promptly discarded. Sam(ira) Obeid uses a slightly gruesome metaphor to describe the reality of the treatment many people are subjected to, for various reasons:

"So we take different and fit it into a box

One size fits too small – we peel back its skin

rip through its flesh, until we break

its every bone and bleed it soaking wet" (Obeid, 179)

The earlier sections in the study have repeatedly mentioned society and its attitude towards the lgbt+ community. And while it is a broad term with multitudes of definitions and implications, the study focuses on society in relation to queer individuals. An average individual interacts with different facets of society in a day or in general. It consists of the relations in their immediate vicinity like family, friends, colleagues, or institutions like schools, religions, beliefs, media, etc. All these relations and interactions come with little checkboxes of terms and conditions regulated by social standards modelled after an idealistic image that only a select few possess. Sahar Riaz ponders about the world:

"where you are shunned for being too fat

too smart, where you're gunned for

a skin too dark or showing who you are

where your wings are set on fire

for flying too close to the sun" (Riaz, 201)

It explicates the difficulties of being a little 'different' than the image that is circulated as the prototype of 'normal'. It could range from someone's physical features to social behaviour; people can judge and be judged for a number of parameters. These judgments can come from some close places like one's family and acquaintances constantly nagging them to 'watch what you eat ' or 'don't act like a girl ' or 'your shirt makes you look gay' or 'all your friends are

married' and other seemingly harmless observations. Institutions like schools, religion, and media are bigger and indirect tools for conforming to hetero-normative standards. The promise of punishment for committing a 'sin' or straying from a defined path effectively cements the notion. "Her Muslim heritage has taught her well" (Obeid, 176). A point to note here is that the study does not intend to attack any one community or set of beliefs, but rather explore the culmination of reasons and collectives of impositions that have contributed to the alienation of the lgbt+ community.

"They say This world isn't for you/ Why then was I born into it, if it wasn't for me" (Tashi, 197). Prabhu Tashi recounts being told outright that the lgbt+ community has no place in the world, on account of being different, "You are different, your manners are different too" (Tashi, 197). Being discriminated against is one of the biggest reasons that facilitate alienation within the lgbt+ community. It could come as direct confrontation, subtle commentary, or even physical and sexual violation in a lot of cases. Subtle commentary occurs as part of everyday conversations, discussions, and jokes. They claim to be harmless and accuse people of being uptight and too full of themselves, and for not being able to take a joke if they question the arguments. It singles people out and paints them as weird social rejects. Other means are excluding the lgbt+ community from legal and economic benefits. Earlier sections in the study have revealed the long legal battle fought over the years to grant the lgbt+ community some recognition and protection as citizens, yet they are still deprived of the majority of rights as a community. Most of the government schemes (legal and economic) are directed toward benefiting, legally married heterosexual couples or already financially privileged individuals. There are no economic provisions introduced for the lgbt+ community despite recurring research studies around their precarious financial positions.

Violence against the lgbt+ community is another under-reported and under-investigated form of discrimination against them. The lgbt+ community is vulnerable to the more malicious opinions of people that often translate to sexual and physical molestation against them. "You should be hacked to death and thrown away" (Tashi, 197). It could be personal frustration or deep-seated hatred for the lgbt+ community based on their beliefs. Arina Alam presents the terrible reality that a queer individual has no idea when their seemingly normal day could take a violent turn. "But I don't know/ when I'll be smacked because my androgynous face disturbs haters/ when petrol will be poured and lit..." (Alam, 193). But she makes it clear that they know to expect it. The violence is so normalised that it is a given at this point, they are just not sure what form it will take. They know "which hands will beat me in a crowded train// which hand will try to touch my breasts in a dark corner" (Alam, 193-194). The eternal irony of being disgusted by their existence and objectifying them in the same breath creates a doubly edged unsafe environment for the lgbt+ community.

The incessant argument of branding the lgbt+ community as disgusting or sex-driven heathens has shaped the mindsets of the majority- even the lgbt+ community- to despise them. The queers are insecure about features that are regularly targeted. "That this body is no ground for pride" (Obeid, 176). Particularly the gender non-conforming individuals, who are expected to look a certain way but feel like the other. They feel alienated from their own physical manifestation, "Body, all these foreign curves beautiful on other women/ is an unfamiliar geometry that does not make sense to me" (Bhaiji, 136). The hetero-normative standards of ideal body image leave them feeling like an outsider in their own body, "Body, you feel like a stranger occupying the same space" (Bhaiji, 136). Some even try to reconcile with their physical selves, either out of genuine acceptance or the fear of being lost, "Body, I am trying to come home to you" (Bhaiji, 136), but a staggering number of individuals simply regard it as an entirely different

entity. Sahar Riaz asks, "Do you want to get to know me/ or the person whose body I wear?" (Riaz, 200) Failing to identify with their own body might seem absurd to some people, but being born with certain sets of organs have nothing to do with identifying with a particular gender or sexual expression.

The lgbt+ community is terrified of claiming their identity for a number of reasons, as mentioned above. It is very common for queer individuals to fear being disowned by society at large and their friends and family in particular. More than a few cases come out every year, where a person lands homeless because their family wouldn't approve of their sexual or gender expression. Other than being a material and semantic setback, it puts a tremendous indentation on a person's emotional state.

> "This is what I was afraid of:
>
> that my parents would somehow hear,
>
> that they would stop speaking to me
>
> would cut me off. That my sisters,
>
> friends, would turn away, repulsed
>
> by thoughts of what two girls might do." (Mohanraj, 120, 121)

They are always afraid of being too loud in their expression or seeming too bold and promiscuous, not decent or proper enough. There is always a divide that they are too afraid to cross, always afraid to offend someone with their existence. "His father said: he saw two men kissing/ in the street, and it made him angry." (Mohanraj, 120) Disappointing parental figures is one of the most frequently cited reasons for not confiding in them. "As in how can you hurt us like this?" (Dastidar, 90). Their values and expectations of raising a 'normal' child, who might defy them in a fit of teenage rebellion but will ultimately uphold the family name, are a forever present reminder. Riddhi Dastidar's 'Queer as in' gently quashes these expectations when she

makes clear that there would be no "..boys taking me home to their mother/ while Everyone We Know's daughters marry, Ma."(91) Or queer "As in grandchildren won't fill the frame." (90) The narrator pleads forgiveness from her mother for not turning out the way they wanted. She tries to make her realise that this is not something they can change by prayers and offerings. "but it's going to take more than flowers-prayers-proshaad because/ I am never going to be any less abnormal, Ma, / sorry I couldn't be more normal, Ma."(90)

The concept of being 'normal' is the biggest determinant of alienation among the lgbt+ community. Everyone has to strive to just be 'normal'. The simplest definition of being 'normal' in society in the context of heteronormativity has been oft repeated in the study, it is the suggestion of conforming to the hetero-normative standards of being heterosexual and performing their birth-assigned gender roles in society. Almost all of the lgbt+ community deviates from this 'normal' and are constantly reminded of it. "...The word 'normal'/ is diamond hard in the palm of my hand." (Riaz, 201) Their whole life either turns into a sham of imitating normalcy or constantly looking over their shoulders while they try to live their truth. "In love and defiant, knowing enough to worry." (Mohanraj, 122)

CONCLUSION

"I didn't know we'd have to worry about this." (Mohanraj, 122) Mohanraj echoes the lgbt+ community with these words when she speaks of the desire to live life freely but keep constant vigilance in case it violates someone else's peace. Belonging to the lgbt+ community has meant to ratio the truth about one's identity, for a long time now. A long history of establishing and preserving the patriarchal and hegemonic notion of putting hetero-normativity at the centre of society has led to the marginalisation of hetero-divergent people. Recent attempts at correcting it have inspired some revisions in the law and mindsets of the people, but it is still a long way to undo centuries of discrimination and prejudice.

There have been many debates and theories to quantify the reasons for the existence of as many sexual orientations and gender identities in the world, as do. Some have proved to be important in understanding the spectrum of the varying identities; others have lost their grounds with the changing times and emergence of more sensible explanations. Nonetheless, each of them is a valuable contribution to gender studies. The present study has attempted to deconstruct the binary of heteronormativity in society by analysing select few poems from 'The World That Belongs to Us'. The poems are used to explore four questions pertaining to different aspects of the lgbt+ community like identity, stereotypes, alienation, etc. the study tries to demonstrate the influence that society commands over an individual from the lgbt+ community. This influence often bleeds into their perceptions about the world at large and even themselves.

It is rather clear that society does not have an inclusive outlook towards difference, even if millions of people share this difference. The set norms of hetero-normativity are the standard and those who don't adhere to them are either included very reluctantly in the society or not at all. Therefore, it is imperative, that society starts adjusting its standards according to these

differences rather than the usual norm. It has already been discussed that gender/sexuality inclusive education is pertinent to spreading awareness about the natural existence of the huge spectrum of genders and sexualities. It is due to the lack of awareness and education about the lgbt+ community that a considerable number of people don't realise their sexuality or discover it fairly late in life. A lot of lgbt+ youth spend their childhood or adolescence confused about their identity because they are not familiar with any sexuality or genders other than the heteronormatively propagated ones. The lgbt+ inclusive literature and media are on the rise these last few decades, though there are still some issues with problematic representation, it is a step forward. The appropriate pieces of literature need to become a part of the curriculum to eliminate or at least diminish various stigmas around the lgbt+ community. It needs to promote free dialogue about sexualities and gender identities, rather than reading between the lines since the latter encourages the notion of sexuality/ gender identity being covertly implied rather than an occurrence in nature. The taboo around lgbt+ validates the idea of the 'closet' and 'coming out' which again posits heteronormativity and heterosexuality at the centre of society.

An easily overlooked agent of promoting heteronormativity in society is the use of language. While languages like Bengali and Odia are gender neutral, the majority of languages in India and around the world, especially the more popular ones have gendered intonations. For example, Hindi has assigned genders to even inanimate objects and abstract feelings. There is no space for inclusion even within the subconscious or digital interfaces. It can be easily noted that when one mentions issues regarding lgbt+ community, they put a lot of emphasis on certain words or phrases so that it is not interpreted incorrectly, since conversations about lgbt+ community and such are not normalised enough in society. The present study has tried to avoid emphasising those words and phrases as much as possible to prove the importance of inclusivity in language. Instead of fashioning a puzzle and assigning pieces that are supposed to fit in,

society needs to make space to accommodate everyone. Using someone's preferred pronouns is one of the smaller initiatives toward inclusivity since it is hard to amend the rules in a language that has developed for years. However, most of them are also evolving and can develop to become more gender inclusive or gender neutral if such efforts continue to be in use.

This study has tried to stitch the past, present, and the anticipated future of the lgbt+ community in its relation to society. It has tried to analyze the facets of the identity struggle among the lgbt+ community and society's role in encouraging prejudice and eventually eliminating discrimination. It even tried to validate the existence of the community by citing historical evidence, but the fact remains that we shouldn't have to pull out historical receipts to get rid of what is wrong with the present.

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