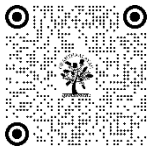


NATURALITY IN 'UNNATURAL' HUMAN DESIRE: CONCEPTUALIZING HOMOSEXUALITY IN ANCIENT INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In the urge to keep the society in equilibrium with 'natural order', all the human behavior were measured in the fulcrum of morality, as good and bad, natural and unnatural, higher and lower ends throughout the history of human civilization. The evolving trend and the conception regarding the human desire, especially the sexual needs, through the prism of liberal sense in the present days are really a ray of hope. The current mood all over the world regarding the sexual behavior largely is, as a personal choice, biological need and normalized individual instinct. This moderate approach is the byproduct of several movements and debates against the classical social conditioning and cultural construction about sex, which was conservatively approved act, strictly under conjugality. The historical discourses handed over regarding this topic is dynamic and still relevant and explorable pertaining to each space, time and context. The western conception would be different from south Asian concepts, progressive, sometimes regressive, rewriting, modifying, sometimes reminding parallel to each epoch. The location of homosexuals or any 'unnatural' categories of sexual dysfunctions are always at the lower ends of social morals. The early Indian trends are of no excuse but they handled it in a different way in different contexts. In order to understand this positioning, we need to analyze thoroughly the early Indian literature through critical lenses. This article is mainly looking and analyzing the texts of early India to decode the al-time vāda of homosexuality, mostly based on the primary sources.

Keywords: Desire, Homosexuality, Kamasutra, Normative Texts, Puranas, Un-Naturality

1. INTRODUCTION

Society, all the time exerted its power in curbing the behavioural patterns over its population through normalization. From ancient times till contemporary, we can witness these sophisticated structuring entering into the private spaces of individuals. Everywhere societal pressure and norms monitor a person as a guide in how to exhibit her/ his 'self'. This process has contributed a lot in categorizing the personal behaviours both in the private and public realm. Knowledge branches like, Psychology, Psychiatry, Behavioural science, Psychoanalysis understand and explain scientifically the expressions of one's 'unnatural' behaviour. The multiplicity of human desires, complex liaisons, monitoring of the society over human relationships, sanctioning of certain bonds and normalizing relations for structuring society is what has been looked into so far. The acceptability of the 'public' about this 'private' entity is always oscillating depending upon the spatial and the temporal theatre. When it comes to bodily relations, society endorses conjugal sexual relations which is meant for progeny, while every other expression of sexuality is badged as sinful. There are various kinds of sexual practices that are forbidden in modern times which co-existed abreast in the historical eras without fundamentally being qualifying or disqualifying. There are rich variety of materials pointing to the instances of homosexuality in ancient

world. Shakuntala Devi opines that "Homosexuality is as old as human race."¹ It is adequately found in early advanced civilizations and cultures.

The word 'homosexual' is defined as: of, relating to, or characterized by sexual or romantic attraction to people of one's same sex. The term has been by and large replaced by gay, which can particularize sexual or romantic attraction or activity between men. In between women the term is lesbian, or altogether abbreviate such as LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender). 'Queer' is a comprehensive term that to someone who is not heterosexual or cisgender (denoted gender identity corresponds with birth gender). The term 'homosexuality' is coined by Hungarian psychologist, Karoly Maria Benkert and has been exclusively used and popularized by activists like Karl Heinrich Ulrich, who was a pioneer of the modern Gay movement. Homosexual activity has been universal throughout the history. Looking into the prominent ancient Greek culture, we can trace the exclusive evidences of homosexuality from the Dialogues of Plato such as the Symposium², plays of Aristophanes, and the celebrated Lesbos Island and poetess Sappho's expression of her desires along with Greek artworks, vases etc. Stephen O. Murray points out, the sexual behaviour of Roman females was more closely examined than that of female Greeks. There are few strewn Roman references to sex or love; which he terms as the 'splitting of heterogender role', between women, which were all portrayed by men. The Plays of Titus Maccius Plautus, *Perso* and *Truculentus* and Labelling the character Folia as *masculae libidinis* in Horace's Ode are some of the examples.³

The theoretical framework for the modern-day analysis on this particular theme majorly derives from Michel Foucault's earnest attempt to conceptualise the diverse sexualities, dissecting the historical and theoretical explanations on institutions, power relations, imagination and representation of self. The western historiography has taken this topic in particular and studied through the prism of behavioural and medical science. That is, the earlier theoreticians of homosexuality were moved with the objective to uplift homosexuals from suppression and believed that elucidation of biological underpinnings would support the emancipation of homosexuals.

The 18th CE power-social theatre finds hermaphroditism and homosexuality as illegal and against nature and sent homosexuals to jail tagging them as 'dangerous social types'. By the 19th CE, the psychiatric study results rendered the homosexuals, beings in ill terms of their sexual proclivity associating them with the insane. When homosexuality became a locus for medical studies, it was interpreted in the canvas of power, putting homosexuality as a wound over the skin or the ill behavioural signs which need to be essentially cured.⁴

The emerging voices during the 1960s were against the prejudices and for penal regulations that sanction individuals for who they are, despite their behaviour. Foucault became the flag bearer of struggle for minorities who were marginalized and categorized as 'others' or shall we say victims of 'normalization'. His works and protests were mainly to destroy the dogmas and representations that existed. Diverse discourses and counter-discourses emerged after Foucault's efforts, especially studies on madness, cultural 'dividing lines', transgression system, power struggle, freedom etc., which are commendable. The historical exploration on homosexuality in the western societies, he found that sexual activities and pleasure were problematized through practices based on 'aesthetics of existence'.

Foucault analyses the sexuality of ancient west, interpreting the three historical moments. Socratic-Platonic moment in the fifth century BCE, and the second century AD Hellenic moment. The Greek antiquity envisaged a liberal space where the homosexuality was widely discussed and debated and concluded like 'excessiveness' had to be avoided with self-control. Therefore, Foucault elucidated it further as humans have the power and freedom to master their pleasures. The classical thinking, moral reflection on sexual behaviour did not solicit to justify prohibitions rather it approves the liberty. In these two moments, the practice of freedom exercised a range of specific relation; relation with body and health, with opposite sex, with friends of the same sex, and finally with the truth in which the spiritual conditions that enable access to wisdom were sought. The third historical moment is which he termed as the ascetic- monastic moment of fourth-fifth AD. During that period, governing conduct was fundamentally drawn from the moral dictums of Christianity which curbed and strictly scrutinized the sexual behaviour and exhibition of desires. The liberation struggles

¹ Shakuntala Devi, *The World of Homosexuals*, New Delhi, 1978, p.20.

² Symposium is a philosophical text by Plato dated approximately 385-370BCE. Symposium also means a convivial meeting, usually following dinner, for drinking and intellectual conversation

³ Stephen O Murray, *Homosexualities*, The University of Chicago press, Chicago, 2000, pp.224-226

⁴ See, Carlos Andres Orozco, Arcieri Virdiana Molinares Hassan, Julia Sabdra Bernal Crespo, 'Foucault and Homosexuality; From Power Relation to Practice Freedom', *Revista de Derecho*, no. 46, 2016, pp 111-130.

and the practices of freedom were obviously in response to those impositions, a call for conscious actions in order to exhibit the self the way one is.⁵

Though ancient Indian texts do not exclusively focus on the homosexual expression, give enough instances of its indication which can be picked up. The instance of Bhagavata Purana, where Brahma is seeking help from Vishnu, in order to protect him from the lusty demons approaching; is indicative that the issue of homosexuality has been discussed at the level of creation. The eyes of society have always monitored heavily on the heterosexual relations and severe punishments were awarded for the illegal relations. Society has always preferred that person of the same sex stick to each other, as it will not lead to any form of sexuality or sexual behaviour. There is no possibility to perceive the same sex relation until and unless the 'unnatural' aspect is foregrounded. On the other hand, the relation of a male and female who are not tied by the knots of marriage is questioned, as to the society, this is objectionable, or in a sense going against the prescriptions of the society. The fines prescribed in the Manusmriti, Yajnavalkya smriti and Arthashastra, the foremost ancient Indian treatises, reveal about the societal response in an implicit way. Kamasutra of Mallanaga Vatsyayana, a compendium of refined sexual experimentations, also gives detailed descriptions on homosexual as well as sexual techniques handled by Tritiya Prakriti or third nature. The ancient sources throw light to the pendulating approach by the society towards the homosexuality. We can find the acceptance and at the same time puzzling of the society in sanctioning. There are ample evidences on the celebration of gender fluidity in the mythological instances where Gods and Goddesses become the centre of theme.

Studies specific to ancient Indian homosexuality is almost absent, though gender history in general receives primacy.⁶ Therefore, an attempt is made here to discuss this issue as the sources provide us with indications about the prevalence of homosexuality in ancient India. We intend to read the primary sources largely in translation, categorize them according to the nature of the sources. Though there are quite a number of texts for early India, we would focus on texts like Manusmriti, Yajnavalkyasmriti, Arthashastra, Kamasutra, Bhagavatapurana and epics Ramayana and Mahabharata to analyse the gender fluidity and response of the ancient times. Along with this we would also try to juxtapose the secondary literature which are not too many. The critical analysis of the primary and secondary sources on the expression of the homosexuality hopefully will help to investigate conceptualizing the naturality in the 'unnatural', 'unusual' expression of love, its actual placement in the then society and how it was celebrated and parallelly dissuaded in the ancient Indian context. This will also help the present in understanding the theme which is optimally relevant.

2. LOOKING THROUGH NORMATIVE TEXTS

A norm can be defined as "a principle of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behaviour".⁷ Another explanation can be, "Norms are a fundamental concept in the social sciences. The term is also sometimes used to refer to patterns of behaviour and internalized values. Norms are important for their contribution to social order".⁸

In a broader sense, the norms were written, codified and implemented for the 'protection of social order'. It has been always an ideological instrument in the hands of ruler or those who had written it down, systemized and executed for the protection of 'natural' social order. The 'natural' social equilibrium had been monitored constantly through these regulatory codes right from the beginning. We can see how the earlier Dharma shastras were the codes of conduct for the then society. Dharma shastras are not only for the external social pattern, but it also acted as a guide to conduct a dharmic private life. One of the important concepts in Hindu Dharma⁹ is four Purusharthas constituting Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Among all four, Dharma or the righteousness, acquires primacy. Generally, society monitors the sexual relationship between a man and woman who were not married, precisely saying, the heterosexual-illegal

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 111-130

⁶ The early contributors in the field of gender study, who put forth many pathbreaking discourses are Sukumari Bhattacharji, Uma Chakravarty, Kumkum Roy, Vijaya Ramaswamy etc., Shalini Shah through her work 'Homosexuality in Ancient Indian literature' checks into the earlier studies which essentially deals with the primary sources including Buddhist, Jain and also Sanskrit literature, on this topic and analyzes it well providing a glimpse of the initiatives by different authors on the pertinent topic we are discussing.

⁷ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/norm>

⁸ <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0091.xml>

⁹ In Hinduism, dharma is the religious and moral law governing individual conduct and is one of the four ends of life. See more; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dharma-religious-concept>

relations. Even though these kinds of relationships were very common, and there were extensive laws to curb these relations, the texts/prescriptions never point it as 'unnatural'. The prevalence of homosexuality is pretty sure, but, the visibility of the same might be less in the society or may be the then society didn't count the theme as a discussable or celebrating matter.

In the normative texts there are very scarce mention of homosexuality but all the verses or provisions vehemently condemn the act and denounce it as 'unnatural' and 'sinful'. The texts prescribe punishments for the offender in the form of annulments and corporals. In all religion there are certain configurations regarding the conduct of an Individual and accompanying punishments or results for it. The Saddharmasmṛtyapaśthana sūtra, a 4th century text which is a compendium of early Buddhist, Abhidharma and nascent Mahayana scholastic elements, mentions the furious punishments on the sexual misconducts.¹⁰ In his work Cabezon provides a detailed account by analyzing wide range of Buddhist works and give scattered but heavy datum on the mentioning of homosexual/unnatural behaviors contextually.

Manu's Code of Law or Manava Dharmashastra popularly known as Manusmṛiti is the most discussed and debated law code among the ancient Indian treatises. The importance of Manu and his dharmic principles are visible from the commendation of Brihaspati; another law giver as "Manu is authority, and any text contradicting Manu has no validity".¹¹ Therefore, among the important four ancient treatises, apart from Manusmṛiti, Yajñavalkya Dharmashastra, Nārada-smṛiti, Viṣṇu-smṛiti and Law code of Brihaspati, perceptibly Manava Dharmashastra occupies the first place.

The authorship and composition period of Manusmṛiti are debated among the scholars. Buhler, one of the important translators of Manusmṛiti suggests unitary authorship for the text. Patrick Olivelle, another editor and translator, agrees to Buhler's proposal and gives further elucidation, pointing primarily to the structure of the text which codified systematically. Despite that, he is not disputing in the alterations that might had been done through ages. He further adds, "this text was authored by a single individual or at least by a strong individual with a committee of research assistants."¹² The sophisticated structuralizing of Manusmṛiti makes it impossible to have been composed "either through unconscious accumulation or through a series of editorial interventions spanning long intervals of time."¹³ The composition period of Manusmṛiti also through scholarly debates, dates comfortably in between second and third century CE. ¹⁴ Patrick Olivelle has come to this conclusion because, Manu talks about 'suvarṇas' the gold coins, which arrived and much circulated with Kushanas. From Manusmṛiti we can trace five verses exactly regarding homosexuality and 'unnatural' acts like bestiality which were treated as condemnable and prosecutable. The major important verses which correspond to our topic of discussion come under the chapters eight and eleven, titled 'Justice System', 'Sins and Penances' respectively.

Chapter eight titled 'Justice System' discusses vividly regarding various offenses and punishments. In that comes the section of female sexual assaults, which gives us two verses regarding the topic.

"If a virgin violates another virgin, she should be fined 200, pay three times the bride-price, and receive ten lashes". (8.369). ¹⁵

Another one reads as:

"When a woman violates a virgin, however her head ought to be shaved immediately-alternatively, two of her fingers should cut off and should be paraded on donkey". (8.370)¹⁶

Chapter eleven in Manusmṛiti is important, because it discusses various categories of sins and required atonements. Mainly it talks of grievous sins, secondary sins causing the loss of caste and further minor sins. It describes the penance methods in committing such sins.

The classification of sins:

- "1) The five grievous sins that cause the loss of caste mahapataka (11.55-9)
- 2) Large category of secondary sins that also cause the loss of caste called upapataka

¹⁰ Jose Ignacio Cabezon, *Sexuality in Classical South Asian Buddhism*, Wisdom Publications, 2017, pp.47-50.

¹¹ Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law- A Critical Edition and Translation of the Manava Dharmasastra*, New York, 2005, p. 3

¹² *ibid.*, p.19

¹³ *ibid.* p.19

¹⁴ See the Introduction; *ibid.*, pp. 3- 25

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 186

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 187

(11.60-7)

3) four further classes of sins (11.68-71) that cause a man a) to be excluded from caste (jatibhramsakara), b) to become mixed caste (samkarnakara), c) to be unworthy of receiving gifts (apatrikarana), and d) to be impure (malavaha).¹⁷

In the 'further categories of sin' the chapter says,

"Making a Brahmin cry, smelling liquor or substances that should not be smelt, cheating and sexual intercourse with a man-tradition calls these sins that cause exclusion of caste". (11. 68)¹⁸

Under this section comes the 'penances for sexual offences',

"If someone ejaculates his semen in non-human females, in a man, in a menstruating woman, in any place other than vagina, or in water, he should perform Santapana penance". (11.174)¹⁹

What is Santapana penance? It is cited in the same chapter in verse 213 while describing various generic penance. It says,

"Subsisting on cow's urine, cow dung, milk, curd, ghee, and water boiled with kusa grass, and fasting during one day." (11. 213)²⁰

Another verse describing homosexuality comes immediately after verse 174.

"If a twice-born has sexual intercourse with a man or a woman in an ox-cart, on water or during the day, he should bathe with his clothes on." (11.175)²¹

While interpreting Manu's two chapters, categorizing Sins and penances and Justice system, we can draw some general conclusions or explanations. Sin is related to a 'person' whereas crime is detrimental to the 'society'. Sin always has its religious significance, whereas crimes are connected to societal realm. Atonements were instructed to absolve the sin and laws were formulated to maintain social equilibrium. Atonements and fines always allow a space for a person to perform/engage in the act, whatever it is. But the character of corporals is like; it diffuses a fear to the person thereby dissuading him/her from committing it. More precisely, sins are to be cleansed and crimes are to be punished.

Interestingly, the sexuality of men is handled in the private realm, whereas the desires of female were trailed in public, treated as a social problem (because it is discussed in justice system)

and awarded corporal punishments. From these verses we can understand the polarised outlook of society in treating the sexuality of both genders.

The question of un naturality and abnormalities were handled strictly as we see through Manu's Samhita further elucidating the fact that law giver were very keen in seeing the societal normalcy being uninterrupted. We can see the strict laws of Manu, being continued through Yajnavalkya Dharmasastra. He draws heavily from Manusmriti apart from Arthasastra, Manava Grihyasutra, Caraka Samhita etc.²²

Partick Olivelle pointed out that, Kane commented on Yajnavalkya's attitude regarding borrowing verses/ideas from Manusmriti by stating "The correspondence of Yajnavalkya's words with the text of Manu is in most cases very close so that one cannot help feeling that Yajnavalkya had the Manusmriti before him and purposely made an attempt to abridge the somewhat loose expressions of Manu."²³ This indicates how the lawgivers borrowed from the earlier versions of customs and usages and it was a common practice in ancient India. Yajnavalkya gives a verse on homosexuality in the chapter two 'Brahmacariprakaranam':

Satam stri dusane dasya dve tu mithyabhisamsita

Pasun gacchan chatam dasya hinastrim gam ca madhyamam (2.293).

The verse defines that "a woman who causes a virgin to lose her virginity, should be fined."²⁴ When we come from Manu to Yajnavalkya, the severity of punishments comes down for female offenders. We can also see more silence in

¹⁷ ibid., p. 16

¹⁸ ibid., p. 218

¹⁹ ibid., P. 224

²⁰ ibid., p. 226

²¹ ibid., p. 224

²² Patrick Olivelle, *Yajnavalkya Dharmasastra: The Textual History of a Hindu Legal Code*, Delhi, 2020, pp.13- 14

²³ ibid., pp 13- 28 See the General Introduction

²⁴ ibid., p. 281

Yajnavalkya in explaining and elaborating on these 'un naturalities'. Despite the severity of punishment coming down, Yajnavalkya remains as a strict law giver and his laws being toughly formulated in order to preserve the social equilibrium. But the intensity of punishment become a mere fine may not be understood exclusively as a change in attitude towards issue of 'un naturalities'. The silence of Yajnavalkya in not giving prescriptions for male-to-male relations which was categorized by Manu as a sin, is also a question remaining parallelly. Was it a way in under weighting the profanity/irregular behavior of male through the caliper of patriarchal lens, is another minute question. But we all know, that was a trend continuing from Manu, therefore it is not surprising.

The next text to be looked into is Arthashastra. The primacy of Arthashastra, as an important early text dealing with Artha one among the trivarga -Dharma, Artha and Kama- in Indian context is widely accepted. Artha refers to the pursuit of worldly goods, personal success, stability, and social status. Arthashastra, also debatable on the origin and authorship, is an Indian treatise on politics, economics, military strategies, state functions, social functions, and social organisation. It is generally attributed to philosopher Kautilya also known as Chanakya as well as Vishnu Gupta.²⁵

The book four of Arthashastra discusses many important themes like protection of artisans, protection of merchants, remedies against national calamities, suppression of the wicked living by foul means, detection of youths of criminal tendency by ascetic spies, seizure of criminals on suspicion or in the very act, examination of sudden death, trial and torture to elicit confession, protection of all kinds of government departments, fines in lieu of mutilation of limbs, death with or without torture, sexual intercourse with immature girls, atonement for violating justice. Apart from providing the information regarding the vivid amercements for many offences, one of the amercement in the Arthashastra gives indication of homosexuality.

In the chapter XIII 'Punishment of Violating Justice' in the book IV titled, 'The Removal of Thorns':

"A man having sexual intercourse with another man shall also pay the first amercement."²⁶

The 'un-naturality' even in heterosexual relationship is also pointed out in another verse which is also prohibitory in nature, which follows the above verse.

"When a man has connection with a woman against the order of nature (a-yonau), he shall be punished with first amercement."²⁷

More elaborately, Chapter XII of the book IV gives,

"A virgin deflowered by a woman of similar status should pay a fine of 12 panas if she is consented; the woman who deflowered her should pay double that amount (20)

If she did not consent, the woman should pay a fine of 100 panas for satisfying her passion, as well as the bride price.(21)."²⁸

In Crime and Sex in Ancient India, Suresh Chandra Banerji points, "Vishnu Dhramashastra

(V 44) and the Narada Smriti (XV 76) regard unnatural sex-acts as offence."²⁹ Therefore, analysing the ancient Indian treatises majorly through translations, it is very much evident that nowhere the same-sex sexual acts and 'unnatural' acts were admitted or allowed.

Well, by looking at the ancient Indian context in particular and world context in general, the major conclusion we can see is through the prism of righteousness (Dharma) or shall we say through the verses of religion, society controlled the social affairs. Therefore, everywhere religion was instrumental in curbing the personal or private realm of an individual. Not only the homosexuality in particular, but all kind of 'un naturalities' were curbed strictly. Despite these

²⁵ It is understood that the treatise was a kind of handbook for Mauryan king, how to rule over a kingdom and encouraging direct action in political disquiets. The Arthashastra is influenced both by Hinduism and the pragmatism of the philosophical school of Charvaka which disdained the supernatural components of the faith and preferred a completely materialistic view of the universe and human existence. Charvaka argued that only direct perception of any given phenomena could establish truth and so encouraged a feasible approach to life which embraced logical, reason-based, action in response to circumstance. see more on <https://www.worldhistory.org/Arthashastra/>

²⁶ Kautilya, *Arthashastra*. Eng Trans. R. Shamasastri, Bangalore, 1915, p. 335

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 335

²⁸ Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, New Annotated English Translation by, Patrick Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, p. 248

²⁹ S Chandra Banerji, *Crime and Sex in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1980, p. 142

Dharmic principles, we can see the prevalence of the act in one way or the other. The early records give a higher degree of visibility in the western context. We can't trace the historical explanation of same-sex lovers in ancient India, because, in a way we don't have a Sappho or Aristophanes, to sing, discuss and debate.

3. TRACING HOMOSEXUALITY THROUGH KAMASUTRA

The word 'Kama' means 'desire/love/pleasure/sex', and sutra is 'treatise'. Kamasutra among the ancient Indian treatises occupies a special position because of the theme which it deals with. It acquired worldwide attention as an extant compendium of centuries of experimentation on the techniques of lovemaking. The composition of this Sanskrit text has been debatably put in the second half of third century CE.³⁰ There is a paucity of information about the author, although scholars, including medieval commentator of Kamasutra Yashodhara, opine that Vatsyayana might be from north of India, probably from Pataliputra.

The text Kamasutra as pointed by its author itself testimonies that it is a "distillation of the works of a number of authors who preceded him, authors whose text haven't come down to us; Auddalaki, Babhravya, Charayana, Dattaka, Ghotakamukha, Gonardiya, Gonikaputra, and Suvarnanabha."³¹ Therefore, we can't see Kamasutra as the first among the text dealing with eroticism in ancient India. Later texts such as Ratirahasya of Kokkaka (Kokashastra) dated pre-thirteenth CE, Anangaranga of Kalyanamalla dated fifteenth CE are other illustrative texts belonging to this genre. In the later centuries many erotic texts based on Kamasutra like Panchasayaka of Jyotishvara came into the literal realm making the Indian literature more splendorous with diverse themes. The foremost commentary comes from Yashodhara, the 'Jayamangala'. Another important commentary is in Hindi by Devadatta Shastri. Sanskrit commentary to point is Sutra Vritti by Narasingha Shastri in the eighteenth Century. Other important works mentioned by Vatsyayana include, Manusmriti, The NyayaSutra by Gautama, The Markandeya Purana attributed to Bhargava, The Natyashastra by Bharata, The Niti Shastra by Shukra.³²

The social condition of the then India which is vocal in Kamasutra is predominantly urban and cosmopolitan. Kamasutra also deals with the homosexuality here and there. More precisely, the text gives scattered but detailed explanations regarding the particular theme. Vatsyayana; giving respect to the moral codes and standard social customs, parallelly talks about the personal choices considering the tastes and preference of an individual. It would be appropriate to quote what Devadatta Shastri opines, at the end of the chapter on unnatural sexual acts:

"In writing his treatise, Vatsyayana was always vigilant in paying due attention to the character and inherent principles of a treatise. He has also made it clear in this section that unusual sexual acts are base. Even when the author of a treatise considers something as base, he gives it a place in his treatise because there are all sorts of people in this world with different characters and inclinations. Some have an animal nature; they get enjoyment from unusual sexual acts. The Bhagavata Purana (11.5-11) says that it is necessary to be free from such tendencies: 'At the times of marriage, sacrifice and other such occasions, we may need to engage ourselves with these inclinations. But our goal should be freedom..."³³

The pursuits of Dharma, Artha, Kama and finally Moksha which term as four purusharthas of life were well examined and given instructions and regulations for the same through early Indian texts. Among the four, the more sensitive theme is the Kama. However, texts like Kamasutra and the visual archives of early India, stretching to early medieval and medieval, testimony the fact that, the theme was never marginalized from the public realm. Rather, they were widely discussed and displayed. Perceiving the delicacy of the theme, lawgivers were multiple times vigilant in drawing regulations for the same. They never forgot to categorize natural and 'unnatural' and to forbid the latter. Well, what information does Kamasutra provide about homosexuality? The urban nature of the text itself qualifies it to discuss the diversity of refined sexual techniques. The original text is said to be constituted of hundred thousand chapters, and then it was distilled down to a thousand chapters, then a hundred and finally reached its present form of what it proclaims to be "thirty-six chapters, in sixty-four sections in seven books, consisting of 1250 pages."³⁴

³⁰ Mallanaga Vatsyayana, *Kamasutra*. Eng tr. by Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar, New York, 2002, p.xi

³¹ *ibid.*, p.xii

³² Mallanaga Vatsyayana, *Kamasutra*, Eng tr. by Alain Danielou, *The Complete Kamasutra*, Vermont, 1994, p.11

³³ Wendy, *op.cit.*, pp xix-xx

³⁴ Wendy, *op.cit.*, p. xvii

The terminologies which were used to indicate the 'unnaturality' are Tiritiya Prakriti means third nature, Napunsaka used by Yashodara; medieval commentator of Kamasutra for neuter or impotent, Janakhapana, Narayitam for homosexuality, Adhorata Maithuna, Purushopasripta etc., for sodomy. Alain Danielou in his translation uses the term 'Svairini' for lesbian, where he himself comments on its inappropriateness.

The Book two 'Sex' consists of ten chapters dealing with wide range of matters, like sexual typologies, ways of embracing, procedures of kissing, types of scratching with nails, ways of biting, the start and finish of sex, lover's quarrels etc..Chapter nine is significant for us, as it handles exclusively the topic of 'Oral sex' or 'Auparistaka'. Vatsyayana gives a vivid description on this with unwavering brilliancy of dealing such topic. The first portion of the chapter explains the practice of oral sex in between men and one with Tiritiya prakriti, that is third nature. The explanation on this gives two kinds of persons of the third nature, one in the form of a woman who imitates the attire and charming mannerisms of female and the another in the form of man. "The exact meaning of the designation 'third nature', however has drawn a variety of interpretations, and has been rendered variously as 'eunuch', 'hermaphrodite', 'transvestic' and 'homosexual'. It is often connected to the phenomenon of hijras in India today."³⁵ "The third nature was also associated with genitally deformed, impotent or sterile denoted by the terms such as kliba, pandaka and pota"³⁶

What is Auparistaka? Vatsyayana says "The act that should be done in the sexual organ is done in her mouth, and they call that 'oral sex (3)."³⁷ "The word in Sanskrit for this act is Auparistaka, meaning literally 'sex in the upper part'- a term which, as locative marker, implied that sex was performed in the loins."³⁸

The genital oral positions were described in detail through the eight acts, as the casual/nominal congress, biting the sides, the outer tongs/pressing outside, the inner tongs, kissing, polishing, sucking a mango, and swallowing.³⁹ Immodest women, courtesans, loose women, servant girls and masseuse were another category other than third nature who engage in oral sex. Men are cautioned to not engage in this act with their wives(darmapatni), because Vatsyayan says, it will lead to pollution of mouth. Oral sex therefore is considered as unrefined(asabhyatva). Yashodara explains that the dharmashastra says that 'one should not ejaculate in the mouth' (na mukhe meheta). Yashodhara also gives explanation on why this should be avoided and cites Vasishtadharmanasutra and says 'a man who copulates in the mouth of his wife causes his ancestors to starve for fifteen years'. The idea that oral sex was a permissible practice only in relations with women other than one's wife is a durable idea that finds expressions in later nibandhana texts.⁴⁰ Oral sex has been practiced among the men as well, Vatsyayana in the same chapter says,

"Even Young men, servants

Who wear polished ear rings?

Indulge in oral sex

Only with certain men (35)

And in the same way, certain men-about town

who care for one's another welfare

and have established trust

do this service for one another (36)"⁴¹

Before entering into all these verses, he takes into account the social order and says in the verse 34 itself

"Since learned men disagree and there are discrepancies in what the religious texts says, one should act according to the custom of the region and one's own disposition and confidence. (34)"⁴²

He further stresses,

"But a wise brahmin, or a minister of state or a

³⁵ Daud Ali, 'Censured Sexual acts and early medieval society in India', In Raquel A G Reyes and William G Clarence Smith ed. *Sexual Diversity in Asia, 600-1950*, London and New York, 2012, p.57

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.58

³⁷ Wendy, *op.cit.*, p.65

³⁸ Daud, *op.cit.*, p.52

³⁹ Wendy, *op.cit.*, p.66

⁴⁰ Daud, *op.cit.*, p. 52

⁴¹ Wendy, *op.cit.*, p.68

⁴² *ibid.*, p.68

Man on whom the king depends

Or any man in whom people confide should not indulge in oral sex. (40)"⁴³

Alain in his explanations says, such prohibition on men of letters and the officials are not absolute. In the case of famous people, this practice is not a ritual sin, rather lack of decorum.⁴⁴

"According to the medical treatise, wine increases virile power, as does dog meat. Although this is a well-known fact, what circumspect man would eat it (42)."⁴⁵ Therefore, these practices were given as per the choice of individuals. These practices are not without their uses.

"Therefore, when a man has considered
the region, and the time, and the technique,
and the textbook teachings, and himself
he may-or may not- make use of these practices. (44)

But because this matter is secret,
and because the mind and heart fickle,
Who could know what should do what,
And when and how? (45)"⁴⁶

Vatsyayana is well aware of the regional varieties in adopting and applying the sexual techniques and commented people of Surasena do everything facilely. As we always see, he is considerate about the spatiality and the circumstances along with the interest and needs. In general, people of south have a low degree of reputation awarded by Vatsyayana. While discussing the unusual sexual acts, he specially mentions people from south indulge in it. For example, In the Book two, chapter six titled 'On copulation (sambhoga kriya) and special tastes(vichitrarata), methods of penetration (sanveshana vidhi)', verse 49 describes sodomy or adhorata as inferior way of copulating and is mentioned as particular practice of southerners.⁴⁷

Daud Ali in discussing the 'Censured Sexual Acts and Society in India' quotes some interesting informations from the indications by Zwilling and Sweet about the monastic circle in relation to third nature. He says that, those who belong to third nature were debarred from ordination in early Jainism. There are also Jain accounts in which young people derided Jain monks for being Napumsakas. Buddhist monastic orders were also vigilant towards these directions. The prohibition of third nature was not only the action they took, but as a caution against the homosexuality, prescriptions were coded in conducting oneself. For example, early Buddhist monastic rules "prohibits monks from using massage instruments and soap and applicators while bathing, including bathing with other monks who might perform such functions manually."⁴⁸ Through the Indian Buddhist texts, Leonard Zwilling gives a diagnostic account on the terminology and the prescriptions on their monastic laws and the metaphysics to minimize homosexual instances. As mentioned in detail by Zwilling, Pandaka⁴⁹ is the term employed for the homosexuals and got abundant mention in the earlier Buddhistic traditional texts. He gives account of five types of pandakas, as marked in the Sanskrit-Tibetan Lexicon, the Mahavyutpatti. Also, an accordant list has been found in works like Samantapasadika of Buddhaghosa, Abhidharmasamuccaya of Asanga and Yasomitra's commentary to the Abhidharmakosa.

Fellatio is viewed as male homosexual act, and what Shastri in his commentary says is, "Vatsyayana discusses even this only because his totalizing project forces him to do so:

It is clear that this act (fellatio) is extremely base and that this is not a new but an old and wicked deed in our tradition, since Dharmashatras condemn it. One might ask if this act is so reprehensible, then why does it find a supporter in Vatsyayana? A treatise (shastra) is a reference book. Fellatio is a sexual act; it is related to sexual desire and has a

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.69

⁴⁴ Alain, *op.cit.*, p.193

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.194

⁴⁶ Wendy, *op.cit.*, p.69

⁴⁷ Alain, *op.cit.*, p. 165

⁴⁸ Daud, *op.cit.*, p. 59

⁴⁹ See p.204 for the categorizations. Leonard Zwilling, 'Homosexuality as seen In Indian Buddhist texts', in Jose Ignacio Cabezon ed. "*Buddhism, sexuality, and Gender*", State University of New York Press, Albany, 1992.

tradition. How, then, can a treatise ignore it? Giving primacy to human inclinations and local customs, Vatsyayana says that a shastra has no meaning for the dissolute, nor does acting against the shastra bring sin to the wicked. Fellatio is an act which is proper if permitted by local custom or if it suits a person's particular taste."⁵⁰ Despite the normative texts, Vatsyayana never ignored these acts, because he puts all these in the canvas of regional preferences.

In the book two, chapter two- 'Embraces' (Alingana), Alain, quoting Bhikshu Padmashri, gives explanation on the stimulation of great nerves and its effects during copulation. Bhikshu talks about six great nerves called sari, asati, subhaga, durbhaga, putri, and duhitrini, which are situated in the vagina and aggravate strong desire. He says "by stimulating putri, a woman stays young. With duhitrini she bears sons, while with putri, daughters, if both centers are activated at the same time, the child will be homosexual"⁵¹

In the book two, chapter six, 'unnatural sexual acts' Vatsyayana gives a description about 'sex in cluster'.

"With two women who are fond of one another, it is 'sex in cluster'. (42)

Done with many women, it is 'sex with a herd of cows'. (43)"⁵²

As the explanation Wendy Doniger gives this description "This is the sex with two women who trust one another and one man. On one bed, the man can make love simultaneously with a pair of women. For all the while he is quenching the passion of one woman by moving inside her, he awakens the passion of the other woman at the very same time by kissing her and so forth. And then he slakes the passion of that woman and re-awakens the passion of the one whose passion he has just extinguished."⁵³ And moreover, there are possibilities of exciting the participants of the sex amongst one another.

Chapter eight from the same book (book two) deals with 'Virile Behavior in women' (purushayita), describes the hyperactive role of women who behaves like a man. Female performs every 'unusual behavior' virally to seduce the partner and lead him to the process of intercourse. In that chapter verse 11 reads:

"She behaves in the same manner with a girl. After winning the girl's trust and overcoming her modesty, she scratches and caresses the inside of her thighs, having unknotted the folds of the garment that passes between the legs"⁵⁴

The further verses give details about the act. A woman who is sexually autonomous and acting as she wishes is called svairini and "she makes love with her own kind...once she has won the girl's trust, the svairini practices the acts mentioned above pitilessly, ill-treating the girl's pubis"⁵⁵

There are ten forms of virile copulation (purushopasriptani) described in detail. They are, normal copulation (Upasriptaka), churning (manthana), the rod (hula), the devastator (avamardhana), the cruel, the thunderbolt (nirghata), the wild boar's thrust (varahaghata), the bird's amusement (chatakavilasa), the box (samputa).⁵⁶

In the Book two, chapter ten titled 'The start and finish of sex' comes the section 21 which deals with 'Different kinds of sex', verse 26 reads,

"Unfettered sex takes place between two people who trust each another, since each does whatever others like."⁵⁷

These verses are testimony to the fact that how much Vatsyayana gave thrust to the element of trust.

In book three, chapter two, 'How to relax the girl' (kanya visrambhana), the mention of homosexuality comes in a different way, "According to Babhravyas, if, during the first three nights, the girl sees the boy lying like a corpse without talking to her, she may imagine that he is homosexual, belong to the third nature."⁵⁸

In the same book three, chapter three-the ways of obtaining the girl (Bala upakrama) describes different types of marriages and states "if he is thought to be impotent or homosexual (janakhapana), it is not deemed desirable to give him a girl of good and virtuous family."⁵⁹

⁵⁰ Wendy, *op.cit.*, p. xxxiv

⁵¹ Alain, *op.cit.*, p. 118

⁵² Wendy, *op.cit.*, p.55

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 55

⁵⁴ Alain, *op.cit.*, p.171

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.171

⁵⁶ see, *ibid.*, pp.174-176

⁵⁷ Wendy, *op.cit.*, p.72

⁵⁸ Alain, *op.cit.*, p.230

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.240

Medieval commentator Yashodara has elaborated on homosexual acts among both men as well as women. He adds and elaborates certain kinds of acts. For example, the insertion of the lesbian intercourse in between queens namely 'Chapati'. The act is described as the rubbing of women's vulvas together.⁶⁰ Wendy comments on this missing part as, "Perhaps, 'chapati' intercourse had not yet appeared at Vatsyayana's time; otherwise, it could not have remained hidden from his penetrating gaze."⁶¹ It implies that this technique would have developed later. It also conveys that the idea of homosexuality was not dormant but expressed and evolved in course of times, enriching it with more experimentation of techniques for more efficacy of the partners. Further elucidation on these comes from the side of Vatsyayana in the book five titled 'Other men's wives', chapter six, 'The Life of the Women of the Harem'. It describes vividly how the women in harem, were not satisfied because they were entitled to enjoy one man, that is one husband, shared by many women in common. Since they were not satisfied, they shared pleasure to each other with following techniques:

"They dress up a foster-sister or girlfriend or servant girl like man and believe their desire with dildos or with bulbs, roots, or fruits that have that form (2)

They lie on statues of men that have distinct sexual characteristics (3)

Kings too, if they are sympathetic to their women even when their passion does not stir, make use of dildos until they achieve their goal, so that in one night they can even go to many women...(4)"⁶²

"With the very same technique said to relieve their desire in things in pother than the vagina, in creatures other than human species, in statues of women, and by simple masturbation (5)"⁶³

In the same chapter, verse 28 reads:

"The women of the harem, knowing
one another's purposes and sharing a single purpose,
may make the rest of women, too,
defect to their side.

Therefore, by getting them to corrupt one another
And to remain resolute in accomplishing their single purpose,
he immediately becomes safe from being betrayed
and enjoys the fruits that he desires."⁶⁴

This is not exclusively a lesbian relationship. This shoots to the bisexual ways of satisfying their sexual needs in the closed quarters of harem. It also hints at the awareness of the male about the relationship and his indirect approval of the same.

In the book seven titled 'Erotica Esoterica', chapter one 'Making Luck in Love', when Vatsyayana talks of courtesan's daughter who reaches on 'the ripeness of her youth', and loses her virginity engaging in sex comes this verse,

"But if the daughter has already lost her virginity with a girlfriend or a servant girl, and if she thoroughly understands the Kamasutra and is well grounded in the techniques that can be done with practice, and she is secure in her age and in her ability to make her own luck in love, then the courtesans de luxe let her go (20)."⁶⁵ Thus, the act was never presented in this context as a condemnable secret, but a cultivable skill.

Kamasutra is not only a complete guide to the sexual techniques and positions of intercourse. But it is also a rich source which throws light to other dimensions as well. The set-up of this text is urban and deals mostly about city-dwellers or nagarakas. About the homosexuality as well, it gives vivid explanation. Everywhere, homosexuality is mentioned as forbidden act, whereas Vatsyayana gives a liberal space of exercising one's discretion in opting to it, or not.

⁶⁰ Yashodhara while talking of homosexual marriage points, partners find satisfaction through this method/process (perversion)

⁶¹ Wendy, *op.cit.*, p. xxxv

⁶² Vatsyayana cites these as oriental practices

⁶³ Wendy, *op.cit.*, pp 125-126

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.128

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 162

In the book *five-other men's wives* (paradarika), the first chapter- Behaviour of woman and man, verse 44 says, "Moral objections do not resist the mounting of passion."⁶⁶ Alain gives explanation that in the peak of passion "moral objections, her husband's love, the fact of expecting a baby, of having passed the age, because she is in mourning, religious convictions, and all those barriers connected with Aryan ethics are broken down by the growing passion..."⁶⁷ It is very true in this context as well. Vatsyayana is very well careful in portraying moral and pleasure variants of sexuality in a same canvas, which he does brilliantly.

4. PURANAS AND ASSOCIATED LITERATURES

Early Indian texts, in one way, are not approaching 'sex' as a private affair. The dissolution of those who engage in sex with the spiritual realm gives it a different color. The spiritual explanation is, that the union of body, apart from the pleasure part, also immerses in the process of spiritual union. Therefore, the whole phenomenon has been elucidated through the Jeevatma-Paramatma concept. This is the character of Indian explanation flavoring sex as 'sacred'. The Indian conception of sex is rooted on the spiritual explanation. Men are encouraged to engage in sex for objectifying their pursuit of knowledge as well as for progeny; the most accepted engagement by society. At the end of Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad (6.4.10-11) there is a series of six rites, all of which directs sexual intercourse and procreation.⁶⁸

Through the analysis of normative texts, we looked into the societal response to the sexual manifestation which was/is pointed as unnatural is very much apparent. The same query on the portrayal of homosexuality needs to be put through other genres of Early Indian literature- the Puranas, Itihasa, Myths. The important among the eighteen major puranas, is Bhagavata Purana, which is said to be composed probably around 10th CE, somewhere in the southern India, calculably in Tamil region. The bhakti portrayed in the purana is parallel to the intense emotional fabric followed by the south Indian devotional poet saints Alvars. The purana consists of 18,000 stanzas divided into 12 books.⁶⁹ The proliferation of vernacular version of this purana voluminously shows its widespread popularity.

In the Tṛitiya Skanda of the Bhagavatapurana comes chapter twenty which deals with the 'various creations of Brahma'. It starts with Saunaka, Suta, Vidura, Maitreya speaking. Then comes the verse twenty-three: "God Brahma created sexually over-passionate Asuras from the lower part of his body. Out of lust, they approached him for copulation" (23)⁷⁰

The verses following show Brahma's helplessness and seeking help from Hari.

verse number twenty-six reads:

"Pahimam paramathmamsthe prekshenanasrijam prajah
tah imah yabhitum papah upakramanti mam" (26)⁷¹

The translation is "Oh supreme soul, protect me. It is at your command that I created (these) beings. Oh Lord, these wicked beings fall upon me to satiate their lust"⁷² (26)

Understanding Brahma's plight, Hari advised him to shed the body. The Sridhara, the oldest commentator on the Bhagavata Purana, in his commentary 'Bhavartha-dipika' explains that, all such citations to abandon the body implies the meaning of eschewing the particular state of mind. Therefore, the meaning is to give up the mind contaminated with lust. Hearing the command, Brahma abandoned it. Later verses explain that, the abandoned body of Brahma became 'evening' (dusk)-personified as a woman, with prime markers of beauty- lotus like feet with anklets, lustful eyes, beautiful loins, big high breast etc. The Asuras got infatuated towards this evening-woman form and finally accepted her.⁷³ The chapter continues to other creations of Brahma and ends by the fifty third verse.

⁶⁶ Alain. *op.cit.*, p 317

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p 317

⁶⁸ Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India, Priests, Kings and Women in the Early Upanishads*, New York, 2007, pp 138-139

⁶⁹ See, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Bhagavata-purana>

⁷⁰ *The Bhagavata Purana, Part I*, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, Delhi, 1950, p. 332 <https://archive.org/details/BhagavataPuranaMotilalEnglish>

⁷¹ M.R Narasimhan, editor. *Srimad Bhagavatam (Tṛitiya Skandam)-Anvayakrama-Paribhasha sahitam*. Mal. Translated by C.J Narayanan Embrandiri, Melarkode, p. 271

⁷² *op.cit.*, P. 334

⁷³ evening time appeared as a woman to asuras. And also, generally evening time is when sexual impulses are arousing.

Well, what we can trace exactly from this? Since the puranas and similar literal genres always inculcate divine characters, thus it changes the way of interpretation into another ideological prism. But from the very general level, the verses are explicitly showing that the asuras who were created from the pelvic area of Brahma, who are excessively lustful, approached Brahma for copulation. This may not be so appropriate to take as an erotic explanation of sexuality in between partners of same sex. But the acknowledgement; whether it is approval or disapproval, negative or positive, is indicative of such acts discussed even at the level of creation.

In the purports of Bhagavatam and translations, these verses have undergone vivid discussion with the apprehension of homosexual reference hidden in that. Danavir Goswami in elucidating these verses (especially verse 26) states that, the verse is indicative of the demonic character(sinfu demons) "Demonic behavior is most assuredly condemned in the Shrimad Bhagavatam and other Vedic literature exemplified by the hordes of demons killed by the Lord himself." ⁷⁴

The moral thesis he postulates is "The story does not describe mutually consensual homosexuality, since Brahma fled the lusty demons." ⁷⁵ Not only that, he gives the spiritual reasoning for the same incident and says "The story doesn't give any rule, injunction, or prohibition regarding homosexuality. Indeed, the very word homosexuality does not appear in the Bhagavatam...Since we do not find specific, explicit unambiguous set of rules for dealing with homosexuality, we must engage in spiritual reasoning about it" ⁷⁶ and the final thrust he gives before engaging in detailed explanations with other verses from Bhagavatam is, "In attempting to eliminate a scriptural prohibition, the moral thesis employs absurd literalism to support its claim that neither the Gita nor the Bhagavatam gives a single explicit reference to mutually consensual homosexuality." ⁷⁷

The whole elaboration he draws is from the canvas of the morals above mentioned as consensual homosexuality and the religious preferences of sexualities (procreative sex). According to Srila Prabhupada, the exponent of 'Hare Krishna movement', the homosexual appetite within men is resultant of the acute lust towards women 'atilolupan stri-lampata'. ⁷⁸ And one more thing we can get from this is: from the whole Bhagavatam we are not getting the inference that demons are homosexuals. Rather the close of the story gives the implication of their bisexuality. That is, when they approached the woman and accepted her.

The next best example for the instance of co-existence of two women we can trace is from the story of Bhagiratha, who was born out of two mothers. In the essay 'Born out of two Mothers, The Hero Bhagiratha, Female-Female Love and Miraculous Birth in Hindu Texts' Ruth Vanitha gives extensive analysis of this story which also appears in puranas. Bhagiratha is known for his physical strength and hard-effort, resulted in the idiomatic expression of 'Bhagiratha prayathna' means the solid effort. He is very much known as one who brought Ganga from heaven down to earth.

The story of Bhagiratha's birth to two women occurs by the fourteenth CE onwards especially in the Bengali manuscripts of Padma Purana and various versions of Krittivasa Ramayana. The story line as occurs in Padma purana is:

"King Dilipa's two widows grow worried after he dies childless. They visit the family priest Vasishtha in his hermitage and request him to help them continue the family line. Vasishtha, who is immersed in meditation, assures them that a son will be born to them. He then performs the putreshti sacrifice, which, as its name indicates, is aimed at obtaining a son (Putra), and prepares a food called charu (literally sweet and pleasant). Giving this food to the queens, he tells them that one of them should eat it and the other should have sexual intercourse with her, with the bhava of mam 'purushabhavena maithunaya'." ⁷⁹

Krittivasa Ramayana gives the story structure as the widow wives engages in love play (keli karitey) with the blessings and promise of Shiva that they will have a son. The child was born boneless. Therefore, out of grief the mothers decide to throw him in river Sarayu, but Vasistha advised them to leave the child in roadside. The child was later transformed into normal form by sage Ashtavakra who had did the naming ceremony as well. The idea of two females producing a child developed from the ancient medical text of Sushruta Samhita, which describes the contribution of male and female partners towards the evolving life form on procreation. It notes, father contributes the bones and mother contributes the flesh and blood. A child born out of copulation between two women will be boneless lump of flesh; which

⁷⁴ Danavir Goswami, 'Moral Thesis Unravelling', *Hare Krishna Cultural Journal*, 2005.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Ruth Vanitha, 'Born to Two Mothers, The Hero Bhagiratha. Female-Female Love And Miraculous Birth in Hindu texts.', *Manushi*, vol. 146, p.24

medical science states as monstrous. But the Bengali narratives celebrate it as miraculous birth. Since, he was born out of two vulvas (bhaga) thus named bhagiratha.⁸⁰

Bhagiratha's birth is definitely not in true orders of nature as like many. Puranic-mythological instance like the birth of Karthikeya, birth of Ganesha etc. are testimonies. The interesting fact related to this 'un-natural' births has been given as, "when male reproduce miraculously in the Hindu texts, a woman or at least an apparent woman is always involved as the inspirer of desire who causes the ejaculation-the sages see the beautiful women and ejaculate; Shiva sees Vishnu in the form of Mohini and ejaculates to produce Harihara...But when a goddess produces autonomously she can do so without the involvement of a male, like Parvathi producing Ganesh from her body rubbings or Devi or Sita cloning Maitrikas from herself."⁸¹ This instance is also indicative towards the conjugality of co-wives, which are possibly rooted in erotic feelings as well. As Ruth Vanitha says, there is all probability in nurturing strong attraction or emotions for each other as some literal evidence also points.

Another major instance of unnatural or miraculous birth which can be traced is from the celebrated episodes from Mahabharata, the narration about the birth of Mandatha out of king Yuvanaswa and about Shikandi. The first story appears in the Vana parva of Mahabharata and the latter in Karna Parva.

It is in the section CXXVI-continuation of Tirtha Yathra parva, the narration appears about the origin of Mandatha. As answer for Yudhishtira's query about Mandatha's birth and story behind his name, Lomasa explains it. Mandatha is born out of king Yuvanaswa who belongs to Ikshvaku race. His birth is narrated as a result of an accidental incident. Yuvanaswa; who is characterized as a saintly king who is constant resident of forest, doesn't have a son. One time, he was on fast, and feeling quite thirst and hunger he entered into Sage Brighu's hermitage where some religious ceremonies were being conducted with the objective of a son's birth to Sage Saudyumni. At that place, there was a large jar filled with water which was consecrated with recitals of sacred hymns and endued with virtues of those who consumes will bear a son. Yuvanaswa, out of heavy thirst, drank it, and came to know that he will conceive. Brighu says, "a son would be born to thee of exceeding strength and valour, and strengthened by austerities...By drinking this water, O King thou hast done what was not at all right. But it impossible now for us to turn back the accident which hath happened"⁸²

After one hundred years "a son, shining as the sun pierced the left side of the king endowed with a mighty soul, and came forth."⁸³ When Indra visited the child, the deities asked him what is to be sucked by this child and Indra introduced his own forefinger to child's mouth and said 'he will suck me' Thus came the name Mandatha literally meaning 'me he shall suck'.

Mandatha had been highly valorised and given good character role in the epic. Unlike child born out of two women -boneless lump-was not the condition of Mandatha. Rather, he was attributed with the 'shining as sun'. The king out of which he was born didn't think of him throwing away, rather the whole surrounding was celebrating. This is a parallel disposition of child born out of women and child born out of man/men. But it is a fact that, Bhagiratha as a character got wide popularity. This instance is also an instance of male producing child without the presence of a female. But yes, the liquid he drank was prepared for procreational purpose (for sage Saudyamni's wife to conceive). "Mandatha is 'a-yoni-ja', born out of no womb. This makes him special. He bypasses the passage of death and re-birth."⁸⁴ This is a special privilege of Mandatha and many such characters because the ethical moral code never gave approval for 'a-yoni' contact.

Story line of Shikandi is so huge, which covers an important episode of Mahabharata. The word Shikandi means 'one who has tufted hair like a peacock'. It sometimes refers to peacock specifically its crest.⁸⁵ Story of Shikandi appears in Karna parva and has been retold many times and the characterization has fluctuated into many forms. Shikhandini is a female character born to king of Drupada, and became Shikandi, a female to male transexual character. Devadutt Pattanaik says, "The re-tellers tend to portray him/her either as Eunuch (castrated male), a male-to female transexual (a man who rejects his male biology), a male-to female transgender (a man who wears women's clothes as he feels like a

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 25, Here explanation comes as- he is born not of the vulva alone but of two vulvas- bhage bhage janam hetu Bhagirath nam.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, pp.30-31

⁸² *The Mahabharatha of Krishna-Dwaipayana vyasa*, Trans. Pratap Chandra Roy, Vol III, Calcutta, p. 272

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 273

⁸⁴ Devdutt Pattanaik, *Shikhandi and other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You*. Delhi, 2014.p.107

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.47

woman), an intersexed hermaphrodite, or simply a man who was a woman in his past life. It reveals a patriarchal bias even in the queer space.”⁸⁶

Shikandi plays a significant role in Mahabharata because, his/her entry marks the turning point of the war. Shikandi is considered as the re-birth of Amba who was furious towards Bhishma; the grandsire. She actually took re-birth with the grace of Shiva, to slay Bhishma.⁸⁷ Shikandini was brought up by training in war skills and even married. When Krishna says, Bhishma will only down his bows in front of a woman and it is not right to take woman to battle field which is not permitted by codes of war. Draupada answers, “Bhishma will see him as a woman. But will contest his view, for now he is a man with a wife no longer doubts his masculinity.”⁸⁸ The story also includes episodes like Shikandini’s wife discovers her to be a woman in the wedding night and later gender changes etc.

Another story appearing in Skanda Purana narrates about two female friends who were so close that they were not willing to get separated. They were Ratnavali; daughter of Anarta and Brahmini; daughter of king’s priest. The story thread finally brought both of them to leave the home and resort to forest and perform penance. Shiva appeared before them and blessed both. And the place where they got blessing became a holy spot known as ‘Shudri- Brahmini tirtha’. This is one good example for ‘sakhi’ or girlfriend being intimately bonded with each other. Devdutt Pattnaik says “A queer person may see a fond between the two women of the story.”⁸⁹ It can also be a possibility of having erotic connection between two which makes them unbearable about separation.

Bhagavata purana, which is a locus of many morals and devotional instructions, is giving us the conclusion that, excessiveness of lust which comes out should be abandoned for the goodness of one. But, the fact as per the verses that Asuaras approached Brahma is an instance of homoeroticism, despite its spiritual explanation. Then, the story of Bhagiratha is not a normal instance, but because of the divine interventions and the speciality of sacred narratives it got justified from the orders of ethical codes.

The later instances like Mandata’s birth, story of Shikandi, birth of Kartikeya out of Shiva are absolute examples of gender fluidity which existed in the literal realm. These stories were re-told through various puranas and are popular among the mass. The space given by the literature for the erotic and these ‘un naturalities’ are worth appreciating through which we can trace the societal attitude. Because, literature (like puranas) have always contained fingerprint of wider societal aspects. The social approach was almost embracing all their favourite characters, despite their ‘un naturalities’ These are one among the ambivalent approach society exhibits.

5. CONCLUSION

Human desires of different nature and form have always existed in the society. Society has always tried to control them through regulations, social institution and religious interventions. No society has ever given full freedom or liberty to express or conduct as per one’s choice. The control also has been selective and relative depending on one’s background or the association to which one belongs. Norms, regulations, institutions, ritual or traditions are determined accordingly and control is exercised correspondingly. Homosexuality, is one such expression of desire which has found its existence in the societies of the past as well as of the present. The repeal of section 377 by the Supreme Court of India in 2018 has once again raised the question of freedom of expression and desire. The paper has tried to go into the ancient past and tried to see the existence of the ‘practice’ and the societal response to it. We have tried to understand it through reading of different texts and analyze the ‘desire’ ‘freedom’ and ‘control’ accordingly. In this study of conceptualizing the naturality in ‘unnatural’ human desire through the analysis of ancient Indian homosexuality, We have undergone through the textual analysis and noted its interpretations. The western conceptualization on this theme particularly has already been done by eminent scholars like Michel Foucault. The classic Greco-Roman social set-up and then contemporary Indian counterparts are different. We can trace the practices like homosexuality which is not exactly sanctioned in the social behavior. But from the proscriptions found from the normative texts, erotic love found from puranic-mythological accounts, it is difficult to counterpose with the ‘reality’. As always, whatever recorded is insufficient to analyze the whole array of population. The sexual mores of the lower stratum largely remain undiscoverable.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.46

⁸⁷ See, *Mahabharata* retold by C. Rajagopalachari, Ed., Mazo Jay, International Gita Society, section 4, ‘Amba and Bhishma’

⁸⁸ Devdutt, *op.cit.*, p. 45

⁸⁹ Devdutt, *op.cit.*, p.78

The sastra genre in Sanskrit usually understood to be prescriptive or normative in its intension, and by nature legal or quasi-legal. The understanding of legal tradition of early India is basically through the then articulated sastra texts. It is not roughly the compilation of rules and punishments. It tries to be coherent in character by embracing almost all socio-economic-political and religious dimensions. Moreover, the complexion of these sastras is more in the form of 'advices' rather than 'absolute rule'.

The literary texts of early India give fine accounts about different situations relating to courtship and private worlds of heroes, gods, goddesses, and contemporary figures in capacious narration. Erotic love was a favored leitmotif in Kavyas. In the whole array of literal corpus, we can see the entanglement of diversity sometime frictioning or discording with the ethical dispositions of Sastric texts.

Normative texts we looked through are Manava Dharmashastra, Yajñavalkyasmṛiti, and Arthashastra. The law givers were keen in keeping the social order as they desired and designed. The upper caste people, in order to sustain their privileges and status in the then sociological frame work, formulated complex ritual packages which ultimately endured their suzerainty unquestioned for a longtime. Therefore, as Daud Ali points, "With respect to matters of sex, they are more concerned with setting out punishments and penances for sexual crimes that violated the social boundaries of upper-caste privilege or the stability of the patriarchal household."⁹⁰ The most serious sexual offences and the accompanying punishments are assorted for the sexual relations involving women of the upper caste and men of lower castes. Coming to the un-natural or censored sexual acts, Daud Ali again gives clarity stating "it would seem that for the authors of Dharma shastra, the force of collective ideological investment lay not so much with the act of sex itself, but with the varna and kin status of one's partner."⁹¹ Everything quoted as 'unnatural', was for the convenience of those who quoted, codified the social order. Since, for everything they are giving spiritual explanation, their authority remained unquestioned. In moralizing the behavioral pattern of an individual, lawgivers continued the trend of guarding the social equilibrium through the 'dharmic' flavor.

The analysis of Manusmṛiti, Yajñavalkyasmṛiti and Arthashastra, gives us the indication of homosexuality through its proscriptive approach towards the same. Manu's categorization of the chapters into justice system and sins and penances where prescriptions for female offenders and male were given, is a clear indication of the patriarchal lens that prevailed. Yajñavalkya's silence to male-to-male sexual act is also an unanswered question. The diffusion of Indo-Greek thoughts during that time must have made an impact in the societal look-outs. Arthashastra's approach unlike other texts, seems lighter. The title of the Book on which Arthashastra refers to these offenses are significant for us. It is 'Removal of Thorns' or 'Kantakasodhana'. These 'un-natural' activities are considered as thorns or kantaka which were to be removed. Then comes the sutra text, the Kamasutra, definitely they are different genre of literature. During the time of sastras which is approving only procreative sex, arrived the Kamasutra which juxtaposes the sacred sex and sex for pleasure. In the first reading it gives an impression of, it neither approves or disapproves the so called 'unnatural' acts. But as we already mentioned the 'urbane and cosmopolitan' character allows it to inculcate the diverse aspects in a refined way. Vatsyayana; giving primacy to the moral codes and standard social customs; parallelly talks about the personal choices considering the tastes and preferences of an individual. Here, we can see the liquification of 'un-naturality' by adding pleasure, personal preference and trust. We can't see the intensity of un-naturality even though many references from the text comes under the title of unusual sexual act. More precisely, he is giving importance to satisfaction unlike seeing its moral face. The emblematic example is the 'women in harem' engaging in mutual sex with the acknowledgement of their man. Only requirement is, they should consider each other and should engage in the act only if they established trust in between each other. This component is visible from the verses of Chapter XI dealing with Auparistaka.

In the Book two, titled 'Sex' chapter one named 'Sexual Typology According to Size, Endurance, and Temperament', gives vivid details regarding the intensity of sensual pleasures and energy levels of men and women while copulating, types of love etc. From this section we get some interesting information related to the technicalities of love making in between two women in association with ejaculation. This explanation comes as an elucidation to the verse 18 from this section

⁹⁰Daud Ali, 'Censured Sexual acts and early medieval society in India', In Raquel A G Reyes and William G Clarence Smith ed. *Sexual Diversity in Asia, 600-1950*, Routledge, London and New York, 2012, p. 50

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 51

"The followers of Babhravya say: 'A young woman reaches a climax continually, from the very beginning of lovemaking; a man by contrast, only at the end. This is even more clearly evident. For surely no embryo would be conceived if she did not achieve a climax'. (18)"⁹²

From the question of climax, comes conception or fertilization. The ejaculation is the foremost want for this process which accompanies with satisfaction. The ancient medical treatises give the idea of child birth by sexual intercourse between two women. Wendy and Sudhir elaborate this discussion by quoting Sushruta the author of Sushruta Samhita.

"When a woman and a woman
make love together,
and she emit semen into one another
a child is born without bones.

For blood is formed out of the basic liquid of the body and becomes, under certain circumstances, menstrual blood, while semen is formed out of the marrow of the bones."⁹³

This basic explanation seems not to be a fact, but a general inference for the copulation and conception and the partners' contributions to new life form. The sexual relationship between two women, resulting the ejaculation, can consequently end in the conception and the resultant life form will be a lump of muscle. Because the donor of the bones is generally ascribed to the male partner in procreation. Well, these descriptions neither approves nor disapproves the act of homosexuality. But we can trace their acknowledgements and comments on the same. This context is more worthy in the case of birth of mythical character Bhagiratha, out of two mothers. The puranic-mythological instances are great evidences of vast space given by early Indian literature for diversities. Celebration of Bhagiratha in Indian milieu clearly states the accommodation of so called un-naturality in sacred narratives. In the mythologies: since they are primely related to Gods, in most of the cases divine interventions justify the act. The spiritual explanations accompany with these instances shows the divide between divine space and human space. The control in the human world had more to do with spatial and time constraints and the labelling and compartmentalization was a result of those compulsions.

There are good examples for the prevalence and celebration of queer culture in Medieval India as well. In the Mughal India, as per Fatwa I Alamgiri, homosexual intercourse was punishable which includes, "fifty lashes for a slave, hundred for a free infidel, or death by stoning for a Muslim."⁹⁴ The longing of the union with the supreme soul crossing the boundaries of gender and body in Sufi-Bhakti traditions indicates another dimension of conception of body in the spiritual realm where society remained unresponsive. In colonial times, where the British instrumented law for the societal control, witnessed the imposition of sin upon the homosexuality. Indian Penal code 377 criminalises 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature'. This was redrawn in 2018 by Indian Supreme court by invalidating the part of section 377 of Indian penal code, hence decriminalising homosexuality in India.⁹⁵

The continuing queer tradition of India is not exactly from the modern era, it is from the ancient time itself. But the approaches towards it, particularly to homosexuality is very different in different time periods. In discussing 'puritanism in modern India' in his Kamasutra edition Alain Danielou states "The blossoming of sexuality and all its variants has never formerly persecuted in India."⁹⁶ The accounts of persecutions in the form of social experience of homosexuals are absent in the Indian scenario. Daud Ali says, "The sociological placement of the Tiritiya prakriti may be in somewhat ill-defined 'service world', world that existed at the fringes and interstices of courtly and urban life."⁹⁷

The visual archives provided by the early Indian tradition through erotic sculptures and temples, are also testimony to the sound evidence for the then society and the themes it endured. Erotic temple walls containing homosexual acts are significant. Because all these arrived and got acceptance amid, the prevailing ethical disposition of censoring all these matters as un-natural. Apart from the emblematic Khajuraho temple at Madhya Pradesh, there are localised temples which exhibit erotic sculptures. For example, Raja Rani temple in Bhubaneswar, Orissa which is embellished with the

⁹² *ibid.*, pp 32-33

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 33

⁹⁴ Haroon Khalid, From Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain to Amir Khusro, Same-sex references abound in Islamic poetry, *Scroll.in*, June 2016. Also see, Neil B E Bailler., *A Digest of Moohummudan Law*, 1875, pp.1-3

⁹⁵ Samanwaya Rautray, 'Section 377: SC Rewrites History, Homosexual Behaviour No Longer A Crime.' *The Economic Times*, 2018, Sep 06.

⁹⁶ Mallanaga Vatsyayana., Kamasutra, Eng trans., Alain Danielou, *The Complete Kamasutra*, Parkstreet, Vermont, 1994, p.10

⁹⁷ Daud Ali, 'Censured Sexual acts and early medieval society in India', In Raquel A G Reyes and William G Clarence Smith ed. *Sexual Diversity in Asia, 600-1950*, London and New York, 2012, p. 55

erotic scenes including homosexuality. In correspondence with the social- economic and political scenario prevailed in the Indian realm, society underwent through its own stresses and relaxations in opening its door liberally to inculcate everything without tagging 'natural' and 'unnatural.' History which makes man wise is also a practicing discipline, marking the future society based on the understanding of the past. Indian societies of the past as read through texts, give us a glimpse of human behaviour, feeling and their associations. The idea of control and power generated through control of choices and desire is very much visible. Now, the choice is with us, what kind of 'wisdom' we want to take from the past.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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