

Sexuality, Health and Hygiene in Colonial India (1860-1930)

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Abstract

The paper has focused upon understanding the politics of health during the British Raj in the light of venereal diseases. It is an attempt to analyze the role venereal diseases came to play in the regulation of sexuality of the Indian natives (particularly those that did not fall within the Victorian norms of respectability). The introduction of biomedicine in the colonies was an administrative necessity and a part of a larger project of cultural hegemony. The attempt has been to highlight hegemonic concern far beyond the concern of the public health of the ‘natives’; the relationship of knowledge, power and sexuality (as surveillance). The feminine body in particular came to be analyzed as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality. Review of literature suggests women’s sexuality, eugenics and racism were predominant themes in the discussions of both the colonialists and the nationalists. The women’s body in India during the colonial rule became the focus of debates. However, the issue of women’s health was never brought up. I will attempt to discuss the plight of native Indian women, particularly, the prostitutes whose sexuality first came to be controlled and then go on to looking at the challenges posed by alternate sexualities. The research involves an examination of GOI Home-Public files and Annual Lock Hospital Reports (North-Western Provinces and Oudh) along with an examination of the existing historical literature available on women’s health in colonial India from 1860 to 1930. There has been a deliberate omission and an invisibility of alternate sexualities in the archival sources (for it disturbed the image of colonial heterosexual masculinity). In the absence of official records, the attempt has been to look beyond archival sources; and use unofficial cultures of sexuality, i.e., the fictions of the British Raj as well as ‘footpath’ magazines (*Nar Naree*, *Hum Dono*). These themes were common in journals of sex-education as well as ‘advice’ and ‘discussion’ publications.

Keywords: Sexuality, Venereal Diseases, Politics of Health, Hygiene, Sanitation, Hysterization of women’s bodies, Medical surveillance.

Introduction

The paper is an attempt to examine the role of biomedical knowledge and practices in the perpetuation of colonial rule in India (in the context of venereal diseases). The attempt has been to highlight hegemonic concern far beyond the concern of the public health of the Indian ‘natives’; the relationship of knowledge, power and sexuality (as surveillance). Venereal diseases drew unusual attention. This was not so much because it was an epidemiological priority, but because it came under the scrutiny of Victorian morality. The feminine body in particular came to be analyzed as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality. Alternate sexualities came to be criminalized.

Health, morality and indigenous traditions came to influence the reconstruction of feminism, masculinities and sexualities in the colony. Public deliberations on sexuality came to have a direct linkage with the people, the society and the nation altogether. These themes were common in journals of sex- education as well as ‘advice’ and ‘discussion’ publications, the most widely circulated of which were *Nar-Naaree* and *Hum Dono*. An entire range of experts (doctors, psychiatrists, and teachers) turned their attention to the family and advised against the dangers of “bad” sexuality and ensuring its “good health”.

The rhetoric of body and sexuality became a contested site of discourse in colonial India. It was on this basis that the national and cultural identity also came to be constructed. The body became a tool of control and a site on which observations came to be inscribed. The body became a tool to restructure the boundary between the imperial and the national. Alternate sexual attitudes hence, came to challenge and subvert the homogenous and hegemonic hierarchy between the metropole and the colony.

Sexuality of native Indian women

In the following section, I will be analyzing the redefinition of gender (particularly in the context of native women) which in tandem with ideas of race, class and nationality became much more intense. Colonial power and race came to be understood through the lens of gender. These constructions seemed obvious, and came to be reinforced by the discourse on eugenics and racism. This often meant reduction of women to their biological nature. The native body came to be understood as one that was saturated with sexuality in general and sexuality became a metaphor for domination. Colonial ideological discourses came to project the native woman as one that was exotic and sexually accessible. However, it was also one that posed grave danger. The representation of the racial sexual ‘other’ was blown out of proportion during the colonial period. Difference of race hence, came to create a cultural divide between colonizers and colonized. The regime began to produce knowledge on race and alternate sexuality which included research on women’s bodies. Secondary literature highlights the unequal interaction between the West and the East. According to Nicholas Dirks, cultural domination was a way of showing one’s superiority over the natives and hence, the justification of colonization of the space of the ‘other’ (Dirks, 1996). The image of the native Indian woman became a representation of the unequal relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The native

woman was the classic symbol of the racial and sexual 'other'. The female body came to be represented as an infantile irrational being that had to be controlled and subjugated. What followed was the eroticized representation of the native woman by Western colonizers. Ann Laura Stoler wrote, 'sexual images illustrate the iconography of rule, not its pragmatics' (Stoler, 1990: 35).

The native Indian woman in general came to be represented as the sexualized and deviant 'Other'. Simultaneously, we see the construction of the eroticized, voyeuristic colonial male gaze. This came to symbolize power and domination. The impact of these cultural representations helps to understand the complex relationship between class, gender, sexuality, race and empire. The colonial regime had to highlight the difference between the ruler and the ruled, and hence, came to shape an image of itself that was in total contrast to that of the natives. This shaping of the 'Other' not only was a means to establish one's authority and domination but also projected the anxiety of the regime (Said, 1978). Said describes Orientalism as an 'exclusively male province' in which 'women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing' (Said, 1978: 207-208). The Orient then is not only penetrated, silenced, possessed (the metaphor of the colonial rape) but also static.

At the beginning of colonialism, sexual encounters between single white male colonizers and the local women were considered normal because there were few European women available in the colonies. The interbreeding of the two races in the course of time came to be discouraged for it was received that would have a negative impact on the purity of the white race (Stoler, 1990). However, in the initial years such unions were considered to have a stabilizing effect on the vigor and strength of the regime for it 'kept men in their barracks and bungalows, out of brothels and less inclined to perverse liaisons with one another' (Stoler, 1990: 51). It is only later that the problem of miscegenation became visible; for the intermixing of races contributed to a race that was not white enough. Where in the racial hierarchy should the mixed progeny be placed was the question that arose. The notion of racial purity came to be compromised as often it was difficult to distinguish the mixed progeny from the white. Concubinage came to be banned as a result in the nineteenth century (Stoler, 1990). The Company came to adopt a very strict

stance when it came to intermixing with the lesser race – punishments were laid down; however, the fascination with the ‘exotic’ sexually available native women continued.

The British government’s attempts to control prostitution were limited to providing safe pleasure to the soldiers, for, the *lal bazaars* symbolized filth, diseases and sexual laxity (Arondekar, 2009). The 1919 report by Shuttleworth warned the authorities of the filth and destitution as a major cause of disease in the colony. It came to generate a sense of fear amongst them. He described them as follows “festering hordes of prostitutes behind barred doors and windows...looking out like caged animals” (Home Department Files NAI, 1920).

The common prostitute stood as a figure of contagion, spreading disease through physical contact with clients and onto the ‘rest’ of the society. But conceived as a system, there was something more fundamentally threatening about prostitution, something less predictable and more difficult to obtain. Prostitution also constituted an invisible danger, one which moved between classes and conditions and which transgressed social boundaries even as they were established. In this way the prostitute was the link between slum and suburb, dirt and cleanliness, ignorance and civilization, profligacy and morality; the prostitute made it impossible to keep these categories apart (Need, 1988: 120-121).

Venereal diseases were to be checked by the Cantonment Magistrates by regulating the movement of the prostitutes and taking the responsibility of sanitation of their respective areas (Guha, 2001). Efforts at micro-sanitation, that is, the stress on maintaining individual hygiene boosted the efforts at macro-sanitation that was simultaneously on. Ewbank and Preston lay emphasis on maintaining personal health behavior (Ewbank & Preston, 1990).

The prostitute became a chief target of this sanitary drive. While as an individual she could spread diseases through contagion, as a part of a collective she was a potent source of pollution, contaminating the moral environment of the urban space (Guha, 2010). The Contagious Diseases Act was therefore a part of the larger surveillance mechanism adopted by the government to control disparate groups of urban poor. The Contagious Diseases Act targeted all women thought to be potentially harmful to the sanitary order of the state. Venereal diseases were typically thought to affect the poor unrespectable women only, because of their sexual promiscuous habits and hence, they became targets of urban sanitary politics.

According to Philippa Levine and Cynthia Enloe, the British army itself was structured around issues of sexuality (Enloe, 2000: 579-602). Though the Contagious Diseases Act came to be abolished in 1888, the brothel houses continued to exist. Between 1917 and 1939, investigations and commissions of enquiry came to be launched that were assigned with the task of doing an

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ethnographic study on the prostitutes in the sub-continent. For the first time, there was discussion in terms of rehabilitation of prostitutes. Earlier she had only been seen as a source of contagion (Chang, 2012). Debates on venereal diseases and regulation of prostitution had decreased by 1888 with the Contagious Diseases Act being revoked. However, during the prewar period prostitution reforms were at the forefront again. Gayatri Spivak points out that they must have been politically motivated. Reforming prostitution was justified with the idea of brown women requiring being saved by the white men, and hence, to justify British rule in India (Spivak, 1988). From being the ‘dangerous neighbor’ she came to be seen as a victim. Various organizations such as the Moral and Social Hygiene Association, the Salvation Army, the League of Mercy started asking for rehabilitation of prostitutes (Chang, 2012). Thus, justifying the idea of benevolent paternalist colonial rule. This focus however was short-lived as their attention would soon be diverted towards the rehabilitation of white prostitutes. The government had no real intention of bringing about social changes for prostitutes. As Charu Gupta points out, the politics of contagious diseases and lock hospitals in the colonial period came to be used to regulate, control and subjugate the body of the prostitute (Gupta, 2012:23).

The Nationalists too came to see her as the ‘Other’. She was the complete opposite of an ideal *bhadramahila*,¹ one who challenged the notion of family life. They were perceived as a threat to domesticity, as these women broke private/public distinctions (Gupta, 2012: 24). Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy also wanted rehabilitation of the prostitutes. The Women’s Indian Association and the National Council of Women in India took up prostitution reforms (Tambe, 2009: 104-107). Thus, prostitutes came to be seen as objects that needed to be rescued. In fact, women’s participation in the Nationalist Movement came to be dictated by their ‘respectability’. Tambe points out that Gandhi refused to meet prostitutes who had contributed to the Tilak Swaraj Fund (Tambe, 2009). In fact, the nineteenth century vernacular texts emphasize the association of sexual indulgence and promiscuity with venereal diseases. Manuals suggested the use of condoms and the need to resort to ‘high class’ prostitutes in order to prevent the contraction of disease. In fact many of these manuals state that since prostitutes were the main carriers of the disease, prostitution ought to be criminalized, and that men be encouraged to live

¹*Bhadramahila* is an upper caste woman in Bengal - chaste and pure, as opposite to the unchaste lower caste women and prostitutes.

with their wives (Chakravarty, 1924). The codification of commercial and criminal law for the entire nation came to be undertaken by the British regime. However, family law was not interfered with and was left in the hands of local communities. In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, Tanika Sarkar argued that this separation of domains served the purpose of empire well (Sarkar, 2001). It allowed the native males a sphere of rule, i.e., the household which translated into control over women's bodies. The household became the sphere of domination for the native male. Since the female body came to symbolize the nation, the possession of women became a potent weapon in consolidating power.

In the late nineteenth century, venereal diseases came to be linked with the discussion on nationalism and national health. Prostitution therefore, was seen as both a source of contagion as well as one that polluted the moral environment. Simultaneously, pleasure came to be delinked from marriage and came to be seen as a reproductive necessity. The only aim of marriage was the propagation of healthy progeny. Such public debates and discussions were informed by notions of race, sexuality and culture. Infection came to be associated with both physical and moral degeneration. Therefore, this entails the crisis of Indian masculinity. This sense of loss of power contributed to rethinking of conjugal practices. Therefore, it would not be incorrect to draw the link between venereal diseases, conjugality and national health. There was a need felt to revive the bodily health of the nation, and the most important area that required change was that of conjugality.

There is a need to explore the gender dimensions of the colonial space, for it had a bearing on women's health. Hence, the need to look into the sphere of women's health care, medicalization of child birth, the politics around reproductive health as well as the involvement of women in medicine. It is very evident that the involvement of the colonial state in the matter of health care for women remained only minimal which also gets reflected in the scanty studies that have been done on gender and medicine in colonial times. David Arnold opines 'in an essentially male-oriented/male-operated system of medicine, women appeared only as adjuncts and appendages to the health of native population' in the nineteenth century (Arnold, 1993: 254). The institutions such as the army, jails and military hospitals that came to adopt western medicine in the nineteenth century under the directives of the state were primarily male domains where women had an insignificant role to play. In spite of, the British government's limited involvement, there

were crucial developments which did come to affect the daily routine of women in significant ways. Gender operated in western medicine at the intersection of colonialism, caste, class, community and nation. Thus, there were broad changes in terms of growth of curative institutions and educational establishments, the evolution of public health administration, reform of midwifery, discourses on sexuality, marriage reforms, birth control, growth of nationalist politics, the emergence of women's associations. All of these, in varying degrees, were crucial in the politics of gender and medicine in the colonial period.

There was a hysterization of women's bodies. In order to pronounce a woman diseased, she had to be medically examined. Medical jurisprudence therefore, gained ascendancy. Thus, we see that women and healthcare in colonial times were largely linked to the socio-political context and hence, involved an array of issues that came to gain ascendancy in the course of colonial rule.

Alternate Sexualities

In the following section, my focus has been on alternate sexualities. It is clear that the regulation of sexuality in the colonies were driven by Victorian sexual restrictiveness. S. Bhaskaran addresses it as a 'purity campaign' (Bhaskaran, 2002:16). Any liaison that did not have a reproductive function was considered unnatural and a vice, to the extent that it was criminalized. In 1860, Britain saw the introduction of the Anti-Sodomy Law. The sentence of sodomy was less regressive as opposed to that in the colony. In fact, in Britain it came to be reduced from execution to imprisonment. In India Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was introduced which stated that whoever had voluntary intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term, which may extend to ten years, and shall be liable to fine. Penetration was sufficient to establish carnal intercourse as a punishable offence (Arondekar, 2009:76).

In the past, queer sexuality had never been criminalized. In fact, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Hinduism affirmed the dignity of queer individuals. Devdutt Pattanaik in his book *I Am Divine, So Are You* opines that all ancient texts recognize the male, the female and the third sex. Sukhdeep Singh started the Indian LGBTIQ magazine *GAYLAXY* (Pattanaik and Johnson, 2017). He explores the Sikh identity along with sexuality and points out Sikhism did not exhibit any signs of homophobia. *Janamsakhi* the biography of Guru Nanak shows him with a cross-dressed

Sufi Pir Sheikh Saraf. This goes on to show that there was no hatred for the third gender in Sikhism (Pattanaik and Johnson, 2017). Queer has very much been a part of the canons.

In contrast to this, the nineteenth century witnessed the creation of homosexual identities. Given the legal and socio-cultural prohibitions against homosexuality in the nineteenth century, overt primary sources are relatively scarce. Outside of the legal and medical sphere, homosexuality came to be ignored. Memoirs, diaries, autobiographies however, do offer more open accounts and representations. There are hidden, unconscious references within such texts. Though homosexual activities came to be punished rigorously, there is enough evidence to prove that homosexuality continued to thrive. Underground institutions provided space for this subculture to thrive. Anjali Arondekar highlights the ambivalent relationship of sexuality to the archives of the colonial period. She points out that sexuality was omitted in the colonial records. However, the silence of the archives makes it even more visible (Arondekar, 2009: 1-26).

Right until the nineteenth century eunuch slaves '*khwajasarais*'² were amongst the political elite of North India especially, in Awadh. Despite having the legal status of slaves, they came to occupy important political positions as courtiers, as military commanders, as household managers and hence, were powerful figures. However, with British imperial expansion in the mid nineteenth century they came to lose this position of significance. There were marked historical transformations in the socio-political status of the *khwajasarais*. Their position came to be entangled in the sexual politics of colonial expansion. The colonial state came to represent the eunuchs as politically corrupt officials and therefore, held them responsible for misgovernment in Awadh. Maladministration hence, came to be translated into gendered and sexual disorder (Hinchy, 2014). Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai opine that in the Mughal era same sex love, if not approved of, was never persecuted. No one had heard of execution on grounds of homosexuality (Vanita and Kidwai, 2008: 18). However, with Section 377 homosexuality came to be criminalized. Though queer engagements continued, the state came to hide such alternate realities for it challenged the masculine heterosexual colonial dominance. There is complete silence on queer identities. The archives do not mention such interactions at all. It is almost as if there was an eclipse in the documentation of male to male interaction in the colonial records. Kenneth Ballhatchet points out queer sexuality came to be represented as a vice of the Oriental

²Lord- superintendents of the imperial household

world (Ballhatchet, 1980). Hence, homosexuality came to be blamed on the Indian climate and its traditions.³ The question that now arose was – how to cure the vice of pederasty? There is evidence of sex-journals prescribing visits to prostitutes as cures. This explains the logic behind having *lal-bazaars* in cantonments. In fact, the vice came to draw lot of attention in the parliamentary debates as well. They came to discuss the chances of a homosexual relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. There was a need felt for sexual regulation. The prostitutes were a source of terror; however a sexual relationship between men in the army cantonments was even more threatening (Ballhatchet, 1980: 162). The provision of prostitutes was a complete contrast to the norms of Victorian respectability; however the fundamental concern was to maintain the colonial state's hyper masculinity.

Robert Aldrich in *Colonialism and Homosexuality* opines that it is important to highlight the invisibility of colonial homosexuality. In reality however, the colonies provided ample spaces for homoeroticism, homosociality and homosexuality (Aldrich, 2002: 3). Queer relationships could thrive in the colonies. Queer desire was quite predominant in the colonies. Thus, the possibility of having homosocial spaces was not uncommon. Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra' in *Chaklet* (published in 1927) hinted at schools, colleges, hostels, cinemas, theatres, social service organizations, parks, clubs, fairs and jails as predominantly male homosocial spaces (Gupta, 2012: 325). The text brought into public view emergent alternate sexualities. Kathryn Hansen's work has been on the Indian theatre, as a space that was homosocial and one that established a bond between the cross-dressed male performer and the male audience (Hansen, 1991).

Mrinalini Sinha points out that the colonial regime associated the non-intellectual martial class with degenerate hyper masculinity and the intellectual elite *bhadralok* with effeminacy. (Sinha, 1995: 19). The frequent references to the effeminate Bengalis helped strengthen the masculine portrayal of the British (Sinha, 1995: 5). The colonial regime also began to target ancient texts and contemporary journals that recognized the third gender; for these homoerotic texts had dirty content and required cleansing. Ballhatchet points out that *The Arabian Nights* and other Persian Arabic texts aroused a lot of concern as they were replete with homoerotic vulgarity (*Rupkatha Journal*). Educational and legal reforms were put in place to clear censored content from the texts. The imagery of homoeroticism and same-sex love in texts was not only prohibited but also

³Lord Curzon blamed it on early marriage.

criminalized. The laws were framed by Thomas Babington Macaulay. The ambiguity of queerness gets reflected in Macaulay's statement while passing the law "I believe that no country ever stood so much in need of a code of law as India and I believe also that there never was a country in which the want might be so easily supplied" (Bhaskaran, 2002: 18).

Despite legislations queer engagements continued secretly. However, the state came to hide such alternate realities for it challenged the notion of colonial masculine heterosexual dominance. There seems to have been complete silence on queer identities. There is no documentation of male to male interaction in the colonial archival records.

There was cultural censorship as well. Cultural readjustments and revisionism was conducted to purge the 'literature of most erotic themes especially of homoerotic themes' (Bhaskaran, 2002: 38). Hence, began the project of rewriting of texts. Despite criminalization, there is a large corpus of narratives around homosexuality available in the pre-colonial as well as colonial texts of India. For Norman Chevers, a renowned surgeon who advocated medical jurisprudence, the discussion on "unnatural" sexuality seemed to be paradoxical for despite the frequency of it in colonial India, there is sparse documentation of it. The unnatural offence, in particular, sodomy was considered to be a condition of the colonial subject. Unlike in Britain where sodomy was seen as a rarity, in British India it was understood to be quite common and yet it has been a subject that has been hardly acknowledged in the official archive (Arondekar, 2009:10). Chevers in his writings on "unnatural conduct" gives anecdotal references to sodomy. Hence, though not available in an official archival form, homosexuality remains obvious.

It cannot be doubted that such atrocities are frequent in the present day. A gentleman of the highest veracity assured me that a late Judge of Hooghly once mentioned to him that when about to sentence a native to imprisonment on proof of his having committed this crime in *corpore capellae*, he intimated his decision to the native jury, who hinted that, if so much severity was to be employed against so prevalent a crime, the prisons of Bengal would not be large enough to hold the culprits. Convictions for this crime are however rare; I only find one in the Records – of unnatural crime with a cow at Dinagepore (Police Report, L.P., 1845, p 23). Norman Chevers, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India*.

Chevers mentions the native informant/ the native sodomite *Hingun Khan* who is convicted of the crime on his own confession who points out that the practices are so common that they are scarcely regarded as criminal by the ignorant. The crime because of its high prevalence is held in light estimation by communities such as the Sheikhs (Arondekar, 2009: 11). Anjali Arondekar

attempts to understand this lack of documentation of alternate sexualities in the archives through a different lens. Sexuality then, through this approach, has never been a peripheral subject in the colonial archive. Its very invisibility, places it at the centre of the archives. She challenges the fact that the archive is the only source of information and hence, attempts to explore the silence of alternate sexualities in fiction (Arondekar, 2009). She stresses on the need to exorcise silent traditions and the need to uncover the homoerotic texts that came to be censored by the colonial regime in order to recover the lost narratives. In the fictional colonial records, homosexuality is both obvious and subtle (Arondekar, 2009: 14). E.M. Forster's character *Maurice* for instance, resides in a closed world of men where there is hardly any interaction with the women. Forster does not explicitly present Maurice as a homosexual. The references are subtle - 'I think I shall not marry' (Forster, 2005:19). Sexuality became a subject of taboo in the Victorian era. Homosexuality was forbidden. Sex was not to be discussed at all and the moral custodians developed repugnance for fornication, masturbation and sodomy. Any kind of sexual activity that was outside of marriage and not meant for reproduction came to be detested. Reproduction (sans pleasure) was the only purpose of intercourse.

In 1907 Forster becomes a private tutor to Syed Ross Masood, the dedicatee of his classic novel, *A Passage to India*, with whom he probably falls in love. The book was published in 1971 after the 1967 relaxation of laws on homosexual behaviour in England and Wales. Oscar Wilde's trial taught Forster to never come out publically as a homosexual. He acknowledged that the other Englishmen did not recognize the same sex emotional needs. In India, Forster visited Allahabad, where, according to Hindu legend, a third invisible river joins the confluence of the rivers Ganges and Jumna. The notion of the third river appealed to Forster, as P.N. Furbank describes in his biography; it suggested to him 'an allegory of human relationships' (Furbank, 1981: 245). Forster wrote *Maurice*, a novel about homosexual love that he immediately knew he could not publish.

It was in Alexandria that Forster first found sexual fulfillment, with a poor train conductor called Mohammed. In India, Forster led a secluded life in Dewas, where sexual comedy alternated with idleness and boredom. He attempted unsuccessfully to seduce his servant. The Maharajah, to whom he confessed his failure, was sympathetic. He advised Forster against masturbation and made arrangements by providing his palace barber to have an affair with. Forster soon realized

that Indians were far more accommodative of homosexuals. Unlike in Britain, the people here seemed to not be offended by homosexual relationships. He had always been intrigued by the androgynous figure of Lord *Krishna*.⁴

Aziz, a character in the novel, develops a friendship with Fielding, with the kind of erotic undertone Forster felt with his friend, Syed Ross Masood. Despite being a novel about homosexual love, it's only in the last horse ride together that Fielding and Aziz kiss. This was their first and last free intercourse. Despite being aware of the fact that they would part, they believed in each other (probably because they knew they were never going to be together).

Friends again, yet aware that they would meet no more, Aziz and Fielding went for their last ride in the Mau jungles. The friendliness of Aziz distracted him. This reconciliation was a success... ... Fielding hesitated. He was not quite happy about his marriage... ... 'and then', he concluded, half kissing him, 'you and I shall be friends'... 'Why can't we be friends now?' said the other, holding him affectionately. 'It's what I want. It's what you want'... ... But the horses didn't want it- they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single-file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the guest-house, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet,' and the sky said, 'No, not there' (Forster, 2005:306) .

In Forster's *Maurice* the adult protagonist introduces the young boy to an alternate world of homosexuality. He initiates the adolescent to this alternate masculine reality and teaches him all the secrets that he will need. Forster creates *Maurice* as an honest, affectionate and sensual adolescent that does not get repulsed by sexual desires but at the same time experiences them with countless restrictions. *Maurice* hence, is a text placed at the centre of the paradox and double standards of a society which produces homosexuality. Masculine courtship, in spite of, being an admitted practice, was not spoken of.

He had lied. He phrased it 'been fed upon lies', but lies are the natural food of boyhood, and he had eaten greedily. His first resolve was to be more careful in the future. He would live straight, not because it mattered to anyone now, but for the sake of the game. He would not deceive himself so much. He would not - and this was the test- pretend to care about women when the only sex that attracted him was his own. He loved men and always had loved them. He longed to embrace them and mingle his being with theirs. Now that the man who returned his love had been lost, he admitted this (Forster, 2005: 58-59).

⁴*Krishna* is a major deity in Hinduism. He is worshipped as the eighth avatar of God *Vishnu*. *Krishna* is the god of compassion, tenderness, love and is one of the most popular and widely revered among Indian divinities.

Unlike Forster who is conscious of his racial superiority, Ackerley does not seem to be in a position of superiority. For Ackerley, the relationship does not have to translate into colonial dominance. The one kiss in *Hindoo Holiday* is purely an amusing and charming act of little significance. However, it does offer a quick insight into the cultural difference.

“I want to love you very much,” he said. “You mean you do love me very much.” “I want to.” “Then why not?” “You will go to England and I shall be sorry. But you will not be sorry. I am only a boy and I shall be sorry.” When he got up to go, he asked me not to accompany him as usual to the fair-ground where he meets Sharma, but to let him go back alone this evening; then before I had time to reply, he suddenly laughed softly and drew me after him. And in the dark roadway, overshadowed by trees, he put up his face and kissed me on the cheek. I returned his kiss; but he at once drew back, crying out: “Not the mouth! You eat meat! You eat meat!” “Yes, and I will eat you in a minute,” I said, and kissed him on the lips again, and this time he did not draw away (Ackerley, 2000: 239).

Narayan says that he has no physical love for Sharma or for any man. This is wrong, he thinks. But he kisses him sometimes in praise, as he beats him in blame. When Sharma does a good act Narayan kisses his hand, and when he makes a good speech Narayan kisses his cheek; but publicly, never in private. “Not his mouth?” I asked. “He eats meat,” said Narayan. One night, he told me, when they were lying together on a *charpai*, Sharma whispered: “Narayan! Narayan! Kiss me.” Narayan pretended to be asleep. But Sharma knew he shammed, and touched him. Narayan would not respond to this either, so Sharma leant over him and kissed his hand. And in the morning Narayan said that he had dreamed that someone had kissed him on the hand. But Sharma would not believe in this “dream”; he said that Narayan had been awake all the time and knew it was he who had kissed him. Laughing, Narayan had denied this and asked why Sharma had kissed his hand; and Sharma had replied: “I got much love” (Ackerley, 2000: 267).

The interaction here is clearly not along the lines of imperialism. Forster, whom he knew from *A Passage to India*, arranged a position as secretary to the Maharajah of Chattarpur. J. R. Ackerley joined as the secretary of the Maharajah of Chattarpur in 1923 briefly. Ackerley spent about five months in India, which was still under British rule. Like himself, the Maharajah was homosexual. After which he got enrolled in Cambridge where he discovered an alternate homosexual world. The environment in Cambridge was as conservative as the British Raj. The Oscar Wilde trial and the laws around sodomy required cautiousness. These were bright men of well to do families that simultaneously enjoyed and suffered because of the highly stratified class society which dictated their friendships and sexual union. As detailed in Peter Parker’s witty biography of Ackerley, they talked endlessly to each other about their sex lives, but would select their actual partners from the working class. Unlike themselves their lovers were often heterosexual and sometimes married. Romance was brief and complicated to arrange. Ackerley’s play *The Prisoners of War* was replete with homoeroticism and hence, was being denied by

producers. He had already published poems by 1923. While he was in England, Ackerley wrote the *Hindoo Holiday* which was based on his travel diaries in India. It was published in 1932. The publisher was scared about the negative response to the book and suggested that sections on the Maharajah's sexual preferences be removed as well as the doubts regarding him being the father of his heirs. The Maharajah of Chattarpur was gay. Chattarpur was referred to as Chhokrapur (in a joking manner) “City of Boys” – it becomes especially funny when we get to know the sexual leanings of both the Maharajah and Ackerley. The Maharajah's pursuit of his boy actors is presented comically. Ackerley describes the beautiful boys in the same manner as he describes the wildlife and hence, presents it as a very natural way of life. Though in the position of a private secretary, Ackerley and the Maharajah discuss everything else other than state affairs – books, philosophy and most of their time is spent discussing which servant boy or male dancer they are attracted to “And you shall tell me which of the boys you like best” (Ackerley, 2000: 39). As Ackerley says of the Maharajah, “He wanted someone to love him”. (Ackerley, 2000: 39).

He had been so taken with this boy's appearance that he had wanted to buy him, and had asked how much he was... ..He would be dressed in yellow; but on the following evening I was to come again and see him dance naked and say exactly what I thought about him (Ackerley, 2000: 64, 142).

Homosexuality appeared to pose a threat to masculinity. The emotional happiness of two male young lovers seemed to be beyond the reasoning of those times. Freud's analysis of sex and homosexuality came to have a clear influence in the writing of *Maurice* by Forster which were contemporary works.⁵ One also needs to account the Oscar Wilde trial and the criminalization of homosexuality (Nandy, 1983). The purpose was to make an example and simultaneously valorize masculinity (Nandy, 1983).

Richard Burton's missing/lost report on male governmental brothels in Karachi becomes the evidence for the presence of homosexuality. The debate around the existence of the report itself sustains the idea of male brothels/*nautch* in Karachi. Burton wrote a secret government report on Karachi's “three lupanars or bordels, in which not women but boys and eunuchs, the former

⁵Freud's most important articles on homosexuality were written between 1905-1922 Three essays on the theory of sexuality wherein he propounded that all humans were bisexual. Homosexuality emerged from this original bisexual disposition.

demanding nearly a double price, lay for hire” (Arondekar, 2009: 27). The Karachi report therefore, exposes the most unspeakable of activities: male-male sex (English male-native male sex). Pederasty was therefore real. According to Philippa Levine, the constrained conditions of the Karachi military barracks left soldiers with little privacy and few forms of entertainment given the sheer physical intimacy of military barracks, the paucity of Englishwomen and regulation on native prostitution due to the fear of contagious diseases. In *The Arabian Nights* Burton recounts the punishment meted out to strangers entering the harems of Persian women – they are stripped and thrown to the mercy of harem’s grooms and negro-slaves (Arondekar, 2009: 41). On resisting penetration, a sharpened tent-peg is applied. Hence, pederasty turns into a space of humiliation. According to Burton, pederasty was a vice specific to Muslims (Afghani, Sindi, Kashmiri) – the Sotadic Zone (pederasty was understood as geographical and climatic, not racial). This attitude followed the dominant ideology of those times that used Muslim vice to contain Muslim threat. It was also noted that native men characterized for their bravery and prowess in martial arts (Afghans, Punjabis and Sikhs) had a predilection for sodomy. Rarely do we find a Bengali sodomite.

The complaint was that at the training battalion some Sikh and Punjabi VCOs had taken and used the younger Madrasis, some of whom had given false ages and were only fifteen or sixteen. The Northern Indians are far more often homosexual than the Southorners and our men feared the posting of senior Punjabis to this unit. It is a very odd fact in India that the tougher and more warlike the race, the more homosexuals are found among them, while the gentle girlish races are rarely homosexual (Atkins, 1986: 13).

Interestingly, anti-Colonialism and homophobia got interlinked (Arondekar, 2009). The notion of immorality around sexual excesses and ‘unnatural’ sex propounded by Puritans came to influence the discussions in national circles as well. In fact, the Indian national identity came to be developed along these lines. Nussbaum points out that the notion of virulent masculinities came to develop along with the nationalist mission. This notion was very much influenced by the West. The Muslims in the colonial discourse were classified as the “martial race” and therefore, came to be seen as the most virile males in the colony (Nussbaum, 2007). This also came to have an impact on the shaping of manliness amongst the Hindus. George Mosse in his book *Nationalism and Sexuality* writes - in both German and British nationalism, sexual morality and respectability were critical aspects (Mosse, 1985). It is this dynamics between respectability and nationalism that needs to be underlined while studying the history of sexuality. Ideal sexual

behavior dictated not only nationalism but also the norms in any bourgeois society. George Mosse brings to our notice how sexuality was recognized yet controlled. It also led to construction of an ideal male and an ideal female. Only if ideal sexual behavior be practiced and a virtuous respectable life led, that a nation could thrive. Anyone who seemed too “soft” or sensuous was branded as a “degenerate,” a label integral to the persecution of both Jews and homosexuals, who were believed to be subverters of the social fabric (Nussbaum, 2007: 196). Mosse observes that “inferior races” came to be associated with degeneracy (Mosse, 1985). The Hindu male and the soft Jew were natural objects of this critique. Both the Jews in Germany and the Hindus in India internalized this critique. They became determined to show their respectability. One way to do so was to adopt Puritanism and ignore the existence of the soft. This was a more passive means. There also existed a culture of aggressive masculinity that emulated British militarism (Nussbaum, 2007: 197). Hindu maleness was being mocked and considered incompatible with national unity and national success. The natural tendency was to scoff at the intellectual effeminate male who was not manly enough to command empires, and hence, the need to recreate themselves along European lines. There was a need felt to become the right sort of male – aggressive and nonsensuous. The need to create ‘postures’ of masculinity, which according to Rustom Bharucha, in the case of Vivekananda – was a performance on his part, something that he had to display to the world at large. According to Charu Gupta, in colonial India, the entire nation was preoccupied with manhood. The colonial regime too defended its right to dominance through the creation of such masculine images (the manly British versus the effeminate Hindu). Nationalism, as well, worked its own versions of it – national leaders from Vivekananda to Gandhi came to represent different forms of masculinity, from celibacy to warrior-like and so on. Any question of homosexuality, sodomy, male-male bonding came to be condemned by both the British and the Indian elites. Homophobia introduced through colonialism came to be internalized by the modern Indian as well (Vanita and Kidwai, 2008). However, in an attempt to check female sexuality (domestic spaces came to be jealously guarded); homosocial spaces such as the barracks and educational institutions emerged (Vanita and Kidwai, 2008). Opposite sex friendships came to be seen as western influences; friendships with the same gender were less scrutinized. ‘This space allowed homoerotically inclined individuals to develop ties of varying closeness with one another’ (Vanita and Kidwai, 2008:198). According to Nandy – Oscar Wilde, G.E. Moore, J.M. Keynes, Lytton Strachey,

Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster and W.H. Auden – all homosexuals, stood for the opposite of the conventional empire and the norms of Victorian morality which engulfed the colony too (Nandy, 1983: 42-43).

Conclusion

The anti-colonial movement led by the nationalists stands for the very same notions propagated by the colonizers. Concerns around sexuality, eugenics and racism were at the centre of the discourses of both colonialists and nationalists. The British as well as the Indian patriarchy felt the need for reproductive regulation. These resulted in public discussion in the newspapers as well as the journals. Sexual indulgence and promiscuity came to be associated with venereal diseases. Clearly, ideas of race, culture and nationalism came to influence these discussions. The discussions were not only on the disease - as aspects of sexuality and hygiene also came to be discussed. In nineteenth century England, sexual revolution and sexual epidemics became a symbol of waning culture. Images of sexual crisis came to be created. George Gissing wrote in the nineteenth century that it was a period of sexual anarchy - all the laws that governed sexual identity and behaviour seemed to be breaking down (Showalter, 1990: 3). Karl Miller in his work *Men became Women, Women became Men* points out that it is during the nineteenth century that the word 'homosexuality' first came into use and hence, redefined masculinity (Showalter, 1990: 3). The public became aware of discussions around sexuality. The state in turn came to organise campaigns around social purity, raise awareness regarding sexual morality, implement legalities and censorship. Family was to be idealized as opposed to sexual excesses. The purity of the family was to be the strength of the nation (Reverend Arthur, 1885: 3).

Resistance by the nationalists as well as empowering of the nation happens on the very same terms, which is, targeting of homosexuality. Homosexuality is seen as an unnatural vice of the nation of which the nation requires purging. There was a war going on in the public sphere wherein the ideal society shaped by the state and the actual society as it existed came to be in contradiction. The individual came to detest the state for forcing an ideal set of norms. Post-independence India continued to reform the Indian public in the very same image. Unfortunately,

the *bhadralok*⁶ of Independent India came to be influenced by the very same set of ideals. Alternate sexualities came to be marginalized. The multivalence of sexuality prevalent till colonialism came to be disciplined through social sanctions. Expressions of queer sexuality rather than being western concepts had always been common in ancient India. It was the colonial regime's anxieties around homoeroticism that led to it being sidelined and ultimately criminalized. Colonial anxiety towards homosexuality had an impact on the response of the Nationalists too. Rejection of homosexuality by the nationalist elites then seems to be interconnected with the anxieties of the British (Menon, 2007). The nationalist rhetoric of any modern nation needs to be understood through the lens of 'imagined communities' a term used by Benedict Anderson. This sense of 'imagined community' comes to be reflected in a way that is beyond and larger than an individual. The nation had to be imagined and created in a manner that commonalities could be identified. This common history/culture in turn would help integrate the nation. Very often it would translate into a common heteronormative body politic. Alternate sexuality tampered with this idea of commonality. This meant that all queer spaces had to be erased and made invisible in order to uphold the new narrative of heteronormativity which dominated all nationalist discourses. Certain sexualities came to be deemed "respectable" while others had to be discarded. Homosexuality to this day is depicted as a borrowing of the West (Vanita and Kidwai, 2008). However, expressions of queer sexuality historically preceded colonialism. What followed colonialism was the reconstruction of sexual identities; to facilitate the establishment of the colonial regime which later came to be replicated in the modernizing rhetoric of the nationalists as well. According to Menon 'the normalization of heterosexual identity is a part of the processes of colonial modernity' (Menon, 2007: 38). Homophobia hence is intrinsically linked to the question of the nation. The nation building process in turn requires the rejection of all cultures that are proof of homosexuality. According to Menon, it is the heterosexual patriarchal family that comes to represent the ideal family unit of the nation (Menon, 2007: 38-39). Mumby opines - gender plays out differently, temporally and spatially. It is continuously being redefined on the basis of social interaction and social interrogation. Hence, the reshaping of gender is a process that will continue to unfold with changing power relations. It

⁶*Bhadralok* is literally 'gentleman', 'well-mannered person' in Bengali for the new upper class of 'gentlefolk' who arose during British rule in India (approximately 1757 to 1947) in Bengal region in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent.

both defines and gets defined by the changing power relations (Mumby, 1998: 169). Till very recently, Macaulay's Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code loomed large.

To conclude, carefully constructed binaries of sex and race were both upheld and compromised during the years of the Raj. Despite what appeared to look like a rigid demarcation between the colonizers and the colonized, reality seemed to have been otherwise. A wide array of relationships existed between the two races which probably deliberately went unacknowledged.

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