

A Critical Engagement with Queer Studies in Indian Sociology

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Abstract: This research actively queers Indian Sociology. The queering viewpoint encompasses the thoughts of those who do not or do not want to conform to the heterosexual or hetero-gender idea. People who don't conform to a culture's gender and sexual standards suffer harsh consequences, such as violence, exclusion from social groups, and even marginalisation. Sexual minorities in India have been the target of discrimination, humiliation, and abuse, but campaigners have been fighting against these injustices since the early 1990s. The LGBTQI movement, which represents South Asia's sexual minorities, has brought to light many of the negative and even deadly tendencies that are inherently linked to the existence of these communities.

Keywords: LGBTQ, Erotic subjectivities, Sexually marginalised, Queer Sociology

Introduction

The sociological community in India and the rest of South Asia has not yet acknowledged the complex realities faced by sexual minorities. Indian sociologists' seeming indifference to the concerns of the sexually underprivileged has fueled rumours of underlying homophobia and heterosexism in the field. So I'll start this article with a phrase from C.W. Mill's *Sociological Imagination* that was stolen by Michael Burawoy (2006): "private troubles and public issues." Mills considers the ability to make one's own problems into social ones to be an example of sociological imagination (emphasis added). According to Burawoy, personal challenges are the experiences of an individual as a consequence of unemployment, illness, poverty, and other comparable issues. The dedication of sociologists to continuously embrace and accommodate the "unfamiliar" and "new" difficulties, and to forge alliances with dissident organisations involved in contesting a variety of power and domination, broadens the sociological vision (ibid.). In my opinion, the sexual and erotic elements of human existence are among the most private of the "private troubles" that are seldom addressed in sociological research on India and South Asia. Jeffery Weeks (1986) argues that sexual and personal life are strongly linked in power relations because they are socially ordered. He reiterates the idea that artificial constraints on the radical play of desire are to blame for the perpetuation of subordinate sexual categories and subjectivities. Therefore, it would be necessary to recognise that desire is socially controlled and governed by state authority in order to make the plight of various sexual subjectivities a public concern. *Studies in Sexuality and Society*

The study of "sexuality" as a distinct subfield within Western sociology did not begin until the 1960s. According to Ken Plummer (2012), the first 150 years of Sociology's existence saw very little significant attention dedicated to the study of human sexualities. Since the

1960s, a critical new discipline called "sociology of sexualities" has been developing (ibid). Feminism emerges as a major theoretical framework in Indian sociology by the late 1980s (Rege, 2003). While gender has become a prominent sub-field within Sociology, it would be a stretch to say that it has been completely mainstreamed. Since the 1980s (Chaudhuri, 2011), an enormous body of research and publications has accumulated in this field, and many universities and colleges now offer elective courses on the topic of "women and society." Feminist Sociology in India is mired in heterosexism since mainstream Sociology seldom treats "gender" as an issue of significance. The question of why feminist pedagogy still perpetuates the gender binary (of men and women) is relevant if feminist notions and theories provide a radical criticism of the gender binary. Feminist sociologists and their educational practises undermine traditional gender roles and the division of work along sexual lines, and they also interfere with the clear expression of sexuality, gender, and desire. Here, I pull from V. Geetha's widely read and discussed book *Gender* (2006). She comes dangerously near to a queer criticism of binary assumptions when she explains the notion of gender.

Sexuality and Sexual Stratification

High, low, natural, unnatural, pure, and polluted are all categories used to describe erotic desires and behaviours. The dominant moral interpretations of desire and sexuality involve marginalisation, stigmatisation, violence, and discrimination against those who do not comply to those norms. In order to understand sexuality, says Jeffery Weeks (1986), it's important to stop thinking of it as something that just happens. To be sexual is to be a subject of one's own sexual definition and to be sexually defined by others is to be a subject of one's own sexual definition (ibid). Our social environment influences our feelings, wants, and relationships in complex and varied ways. Human sexuality is enabled by the body's physiology and anatomy. However, it does not determine sexual behaviour (Rubin, 2011). It's important to emphasise that reproduction is not the only meaning of sexuality. Many today consider Freud's ideas on sexual instinct, drive, and libido to be potentially subversive since he did not think they were inherently directed towards procreative, genital heterosexuality but rather towards polymorphous pleasures (Jackson & Scott, 2010). In order to understand how sexual life is constituted, one must investigate the ways in which norms impose restriction and boundaries. Kinship and family systems, economic and social organisation, social regulation (including formal and informal methods of control), political interventions, and the emergence of "cultures of resistance" are five broad areas that Weeks (1986) identifies as particularly important in the social organisation of sexuality. Weeks also draws attention to secular methods of sexuality organising in fields including medical, education, psychology, social work, and welfare. There may be various unspoken norms, such as in sexual abuse terminology (see Cameron & Kulik, 2003). However, the history of sexuality is more complex than just a history of control; it is also a history of resistance to societal norms. I use Gayle Rubin's (2011) radical theory of sex to define sexual stratification because it is an effort to name and shame the prevailing theories of erotic injustice and sexual oppression.

The sexual pyramid notion that Rubin proposes in a Western setting may also be applicable to South Asian civilisations in a more general sense. Marital, reproductive, and heterosexual partnerships are at the top of the pyramid, followed by unmarried monogamous heterosexual couples and then most other heterosexuals. Those who engage in sex only with themselves are clearly at the top. homosexual males in committed relationships are on the cusp of respectability, while bar dykes and promiscuous homosexual men are just above the lower tiers of society. Transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers including prostitutes and porn models, and the lowest of the low are the most reviled sexual classes today. People whose actions rank highly on this scale are accorded institutional legitimacy, social and physical acceptance, institutional help, and pecuniary rewards. People who engage in more deviant sexual behaviour or professions are more likely to be stigmatised as mentally sick, socially and physically marginalised, institutionalised, and financially punished.

In Defense of the terms 'Queer' and 'Queering'

Reversing and destabilising heterosexuality as a norm is what queering is all about (Nayar, 2010). First, I'd want to defend the use of the word "queer" before I set out to "queer" Indian and South Asian sociologies by bringing the perspectives of sexually oppressed persons to the fore. The perception that a phrase is a "western import" might make it more convenient to ignore it in non-Western settings. Because there is no "pure" indigenous phrase for describing and capturing the helplessness and revolutionary potential of non-heterosexual erotic subjects in South Asian or non-western settings, I use the term "queer" to draw attention to this omission. The word "queer" serves as a catch-all for those who aren't interested in or able to pick a specific label for themselves, as well as those who don't mind sharing their non-heterosexual orientation with the world. Politically, the word "queer" stands in opposition to heteronormativity, all forms of stigma-based sexual assault, and the prejudice that follows. As defined by Yasha Nayar (2010), the queer community is "inclined to forge alliance with any counter-hegemonic project" and "includes activism and protest through art, literature, and academic criticism." To review, the word "queer" encompasses both the LGBTQ+ community and those who use indigenous names like "hijra," "kothi," and "panthis" to define themselves. The jogappa and jogtas of northern Karnataka and Maharashtra, as well as the shivshaktis and ganacharis of some regions of South India, are examples of regional identities of sexual nonconformity that are both actual and potential participants in "queer azadi" (Narain & Bhan, 2005; Pande, 2004; Menon, 2007). By utilising the terms "queer" and "queering," I want to call attention to the fact that "queer" loses its radical potentials as a political and emancipatory term when it takes a merely cultural turn and tends to disregard the ubiquitous effect of political economics. When I say "cultural turn," what I mean is queer protests that bypass the material circumstances of existence that ensnare subaltern sexual subjects like hijras and impoverished working class "lesbians" (Sharma, 2006) and instead focus on art, avant-garde experimentations, and identity politics. It is strongly associated with the neoliberal celebration of individual consumption and pleasure and is removed from wider

questions of political economy and from particular issues of class. Lifestyle performance of sexuality, in this sense, aims to generate a craving for liberty without really challenging the prevailing social and sexual order. In this light, the "success" of the gay political movement corresponds with the "celebration" of sexual diversity by the market, which offers a variety of queer-oriented goods and services, including but not limited to LGBT-oriented restaurants, bars, nightclubs, parties, and travel itineraries. The work of Rosemary Hennessy (2000), in which she examines how "cultural ideology" serves to shift, compress, and disguise the fundamental inequity of capitalism, appears especially relevant to this discussion. When interpreting and analysing culture is separated from the underlying principles of capitalism, sexuality emerges as an interesting area in cultural studies. According to Danae Clark (1991) in the Western environment, the increased commercialisation of lesbian imagery is more symptomatic of "capitalist appropriation of LGBT "styles" than of rising acceptance of homosexuality.

Social Movement, Sociology and Queer Movement

Here I make the case for why the LGBT movement ought to be included in the study of social movements in Indian Sociology. It's possible to classify it as one of the "new social movements," along with others that prioritise individuality, diversity, and liberation. According to Rajendra Singh (2001), NSMs are more often manifested in the socio-cultural than the socio-political spheres. Singh (ibid) discusses how current Indian culture juggles elements of both traditional and modern values. In the latter case, concerns about one's physical self, one's sexuality, one's health, and one's gender identity have taken centre stage. NSMs often operate on a multinational scale, with a globally oriented action field, strategy, and mobilisation. Although NSM performers come from various walks of life, the "new middle class" stereotype persists, especially when it comes to sexuality-based identity politics in India and elsewhere, who are not so privileged to participate in identity politics, need to be interrogated from the perspective of the sexuality movement if we are to have a critical Sociology and critical sexuality studies. Maya Sharma's (2006) working class "lesbians" are a fascinating case study, and many transmen whose experiences have not yet been absorbed into movements for sexual liberation. The difficulties of transgender people, women in prostitution, and those with marginalised sexual identities have all been addressed by the Indian queer movement. These mobilisations have often included the use of blackmail and violence against sexual minorities.

Conclusion

Finally, heterosexism is a type of power that has to be taken into account by Indian Sociology. It forces acquiescent "erotic subjectivities" to comply. Sociology not only addresses the "information deficit" (Mishra & Chandirmani, 2005) on the topic by including "multiple erotic subjectivities" into academic practises, but it also has real-world implications for people. While both dalit and feminist views have contributed much to Indian sociology,

none can adequately capture or express the pain experienced by a dalit subject whose erotic subjectivity does not adhere to the heterosexual binary. To wrap up, I'd like to respectfully suggest that any Indian sociologist who cares about "social suffering" and "marginalisation" read A. Revathi's *Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010), first written in Tamil and translated into English by V. Geetha. A person on the margins of society due to their class, sexuality, or gender has written their autobiography, raising important concerns for a field that seeks to untangle issues of dominance, oppression, and resistance. Also contributing to the mission of revolutionising epistemology and pedagogy in Sociology is Vidya, another dalit transsexual whose autobiography, *I am Vidya: A transsexual's Journey* (2014), provides deeper insights from her own life.

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