

How did British colonialism influence the perception and representation of same-sex intimacies in Indian society?

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Introduction

In late 2018, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the criminalisation of same-sex relationships and intimacies under the colonial Section 377 was unconstitutional; bringing an end to a legal battle that spanned two decades. Amongst the celebrations were the expected criticisms, most notably to me that of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) spokesperson Arun Kumar who declared that, while it should not be illegal, it would never be accepted in Indian culture (Hindustan Times, 2018). The RSS is a Hindu group founded by the early Hindutva thinkers Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and Madhav Sadhashiv Golwalkar. Their ideology is centred on India, or Bharat, is a Hindu nation, and must belong in no diminished manner to the Hindus, something their website describes as a “global mission” and “for the welfare of entire mankind” (RSS Website, 2019). Under Golwalkar, the second *Sarsangchalak* (leader), race science from Europe, specifically Nazi Germany, was incorporated, and minorities under his vision would have to venerate the superior Hindu (and Aryan) race in a Hindu *Rashtra* (Hindu state), and could claim no civil rights or privileges (Guha, 2008: 35). According to their website, only men can join, and the physical prowess of the Hindu man is akin to the prowess of the nation and the faith.

The RSS is now a major influence in Indian politics. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has won two consecutive majorities in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian legislative system, and is essentially the political body of the RSS led by a *Swayamsevak* (‘volunteer’, Home Minister and BJP President Amit Shah) and a *Pracharak* (‘propagator’, Prime Minister Narendra Modi). The comments by Arun Kumar while rebuffed by the BJP, are likely well held in the two organisations, and were instrumental in the conceptualisation of this thesis. I realised that when homophobic discourse in the Indian political and social society occurs, the way it manifests is identical to Europe and Northern America. It centres around traditions, around the natural and the unnatural, the assumed approval and disapproval of the divine, and ultimately the idea that homosexuality and same-sex intimacies are something new and alien that should be kept at arm’s length at best. The fact that the law made unconstitutional by the Supreme Court was actually a law imposed on India by the British colonial regime led me to wonder if what was actually alien to India and to South Asia generally was not same-sex intimacies and homosexuality, but the condemnation thereof.

I seek to explore whether same-sex intimacies are imports from the “West” or whether they indeed have a long history in South Asian societies dating back to far before the British colonial period. I will explore whether perceptions and representations of same-sex relationships and expressions have changed and, if these changes have occurred, then why so? Is the shared discourse of homophobia between the Hindu Right in India and the Christian Right in Europe and North America evident of the impact of British policy and legislation on the way Indians perceived and represented expressions that had otherwise had a fairly normalised place in society and art?

The research question of this paper is “*How did British colonialism influence the perception and representation of same-sex intimacies in Indian society?*” I will address this in the areas of Hindu scripture, popular literature under the Mughals, the perception of those who engage in same-sex intimacies by the medical professional community in India and the representation of lesbians in Indian film and literature post-independence.

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In addressing these issues, I will perform a discourse analysis with a historiographical approach to the topic, looking at representations of same-sex intimacies in Indian religious and literary traditions before and following the British reign, and how momentous the British take over following the 1857 Rebellion was in regards to the imposition of British legislation on Indian society. For this, I will primarily look at the works of Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, who have provided an incredible foundation for this thesis in their collective works, which have coincidentally dominated the area of sexual history in South Asia, especially from a literary perspective. I hope to analyse the evolution of Britain's Section 377 in the Indian context, and explore how this law had a significant impact on Indian society in the context of the medical profession, and how sites of care became sites of violence for India's queer community, for which I have utilised a collection of essays and research edited by Arvind Narrain and Vinay Chandran. Following this, I address the unique development of female same-sex desires and lesbianism in India, in the Indian women's movement (reduced here to a monolithic group, though it was – and is – anything but) and through the cases of Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaf* and the film by Deepa Mehta it inspired half a century later, *Fire*. Throughout, I hope to intersperse this work by addressing the import of British, specifically English, concepts of masculinity, and how these imperial expressions of manhood can be seen in the modern day Hindutva movement and their rejection of same-sex relationships and intimacies as foreign. Regarding terminology, I will primarily use the terms same-sex intimacies and relationships. The European term homosexuality tends to refer to a more pathologised and (occasionally) identity-based concept in the tradition of Kertbeny, Ulrich and Foucault, while same-sex allows us to stray from the European sphere and away from the strictly binary notions of sexuality and sexual expressions that terms like homosexuality can imply. I will also use the collective term queer, in the same way that David Halperin applies it (Narrain, 2004: 144-145).

What this paper is *not* intending to do is argue for any monolithic Indian culture or history, nor do I hope to retroactively create a perception of an Indian history that was entirely inclusive of what we now know as queer people, or the LGBTQ community. To argue that there was never an oppression before the British would be counter-factual, and would be as dismissive of history as the Hindutva brigade's notion of a pure, immutable and masculine Indian cultural history founded upon Hinduism. I also do not intend to use history to justify the natural urges of human beings. History has been unkind to queer people, and the present is still unkind, to rely on history too heavily to justify the present is to rely on the records and writings of men (largely) who ignored the subaltern and marginalised perspective, and even those histories of 'heterosexual' men who occasionally engaged in sexual contact with members of the same sex. In a sense, this paper suffers from this centralised view of history. In the interest of space and the research available to me, I have opted to study the most noticeable instances in Indian history, which has resulted in a paper that largely follows North Indian literary tradition and political developments. South India, North West India and the sexual economies of subaltern India are notably absent, which I see as this paper's most significant drawback.

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Chapter One – How have homosexuality and same-sex desires developed throughout history, and how does this relate to the influence of the British in India?

The history of sexuality is something that requires a great deal of attention to various matters that come together to comprise the socio-cultural context of the era and locality in question. Matters of class, religion, societal prosperity, colonialism, power structures and language all come into play, and thus it is a field where something of a cultural relativist mindset is helpful. Consider that, in much of India and especially the southern states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, I observed men together in public holding hands and embracing one another from behind while waiting for a bus or conversing with a third party. Such behaviour would be considered the actions of two lovers in the UK, but in India, this is simply the behaviour of two male friends or relatives. This, perhaps basic, example is one that shows well the constructed nature of these notions, or at least how we judge such actions. Khaled El-Rouayheb, writing on homosexuality in the Arab and Islamic world, presents the difference in perception between contemporary western and Arab terminology to this effect. In Arabic, the term *ubnah* would refer to the man who passively receives anal sex, while in European contexts, sodomy referred to both agents, with a focus especially on the man who engages another (El-Rouayheb, 2005: 5). The similarity between the two terms however is that they refer to a single act, where our modern understanding of homosexuality refers to a wider identity, a person who desires to have relationships (emotional and physical) with someone of the same sex and gender. This, Foucault would argue, is evidence that such identities are social constructs and that sexuality is far more complex than mere labels or acts, and indeed that labelling to any degree of finality can actually have negative impacts (Foucault, 1998).

Retroactively applying modern day concepts when trying to understand changing perceptions in varying cultural contexts is dangerous ground, and because of this, I will be using the term *same-sex* to refer to what we may now call homosexual, and what in the past would have, in British and colonial law, been referred to as sodomy. This is also to avoid the universalisation of European and American concepts of sexuality and the retroactive application of modern impressions of sexuality to a time and a place where they do not apply. Homosexuality, of course, was not even a concept until 1869, when Austro-Hungarian writer Karl Maria Kertbeny coined the term in response to the criminalisation of sodomy in the Prussian Penal Code Paragraph 143. Kertbeny, along with the German Karl Heinrich Ulrich, was among the very first to centre the discourse of sexuality on notions of unchangeable and inherent qualities that constituted a person's identity. Same-sex relations were not simply depraved acts of wicked men, but the fulfilling of natural desires. However, he did not rely on this argument when trying to convince Prussian legislators to repeal Paragraph 143, instead he simply argued that sexuality was an inalienable right of man, one that occurred in the privacy of their homes and should not be infringed upon by the state (Takacs, 2004: 31). This was a turning point in European perceptions of same-sex relationships, and although neither Kertbeny nor Ulrich lived to see their work utilised in the mainstream today, both are remembered today by the modern LGBTQ movement as pioneers.

Perhaps most importantly what this shows is that while innate feelings of sexual and emotional desires for people of the same sex may be essential, the way these feelings manifest, and the response it receives from society, is far from so. In 100 years, Germany saw Kertbeny's first use of *homosexualität* in 1869 to the decriminalisation and abandonment of Paragraph 175 (the unified German Empire and

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Nazi Germany's extension of the Prussian Paragraph 143) in East and West Germany in 1968 and 1969 respectively. In his seminal *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Foucault states that the "sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault, 1978: 43).

Before the 18th and 19th centuries, the focus of any academic, religious or legal discourse on sexuality was aimed at the man and woman in the marital context. Restrictions such as motivations (procreation) and the permissibility of intercourse during fasts and religious events were common, Foucault argues that this changed (Foucault, 1998: 38) and suddenly the focus was turned to the peripherals - homosexuals, paedophiles, rapists, criminals and the insane. A combination of genuine study and condemnation occurred. The distinctions of natural and unnatural sex became clearer as scientists began to assert that certain acts were tied to a person's very being, or at least required a certain degree more autonomy than others. Foucault lists among these unnatural acts, to "marry a close relative or practice sodomy, to seduce a nun or engage in sadism, to deceive one's wife or violate cadavers", while adultery and rape received less attention and were condemned less and less (1998: 39). This new focus and the degree of dissection that these new personages were granted created, in turn, new identities. The peripheral deviants had, through study and condemnation, been constructed as individuals. This is not to be taken in a modern sense whereby realising that one's sexuality is largely inherent in their being means acceptance, rather it attracted scientific and medical examination and study.

Here Foucault lays out the argument that he would go into more detail on in a later chapter, where he disagrees with the commonly held assumption that the history of sexuality can be seen as a dichotomy of periods of repression and periods of liberalisation. Instead, Foucault believed that there was a period of confession, and a period of medicalisation, and this latter period (the 18th and 19th centuries) were not marked by a repression but by an explosion and a massive diversification of sexualities that were beforehand simply aberrations. The repression we equate with the Victorian period may have existed on a personal and a marital level, but in the scientific world, progress was made in leaps and bounds concerning the extent of human sexuality. This period coincides with the rapid colonisation of Africa and Asia by the European powers, which resulted in their new sciences and the legal models being imposed on cultures around the world. Societies where same-sex relationships and activities may have been tolerated or even celebrated were now under the rule of a legal system that had long criminalised sodomy as an act, and was now starting to medicalise homosexuality as a "hermaphroditism of the soul" (1998: 43).

Experiences in Colonial Africa

This science of sex and the medicalisation of bodies that performed their sexualities outside of what was deemed the natural order was, of course, applied to the colonies of the European powers, and has had lasting effects. I will explore briefly beyond India and Section 377 to Africa and specifically Uganda, who saw the Indian Penal Code imposed on them. I do this to show just how broadly this explosion of sexualities was exported around the world, and while not necessarily repressed, has certainly been oppressed. In Uganda, the infamous anti-homosexuality law was heavily framed on both sides of the argument as Uganda facing off against modern or western values, however such ideals have a root more in their adoption of British colonial laws rather than any long standing cultural aversion. However, President Yoweri Museveni said that their aim was "to demonstrate Uganda's independence in the

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face of Western pressure and provocation" (Museveni, BBC, 2014), even more so following the American and European sanctions that followed.

It is easy for Ugandans to proclaim that homosexuality is a western construct, and equally as easy for many western observers to conclude that this bill was a result of a backward African nation rejecting modernity, however, the history is far more complex. It is one that shows the deeply entrenched remnants of British colonialism in Africa, the very same that until September 2018 formed the basis of India's Section 377, which outlawed same-sex relations as an unnatural acts.

Indeed, during the imperial powers' *scramble for Africa*, Mwanga II, a king of Buganda (an area in what is now Uganda), executed multiple pages who had converted to Christianity. These executions did not take place necessarily because of the pages' new faith, but because they would not fulfil their sexual obligations to the courtly elites. Of course, there were deep political motivations for the execution of these pages, and the Bugandan resistance against British Christianity and imperialism, Islam from Zanzibar and the arrival of German forces in Tanzania resulted in the deaths of other Christian missionaries and dignitaries, however this remains a distinct example of European notions of gender roles and norms of sexuality being imposed on non-European cultures, and the outrage this caused. Mwanga II was so enraged by the refusal of the pages to perform their sexual obligations institutionalised in the kingdom that he had them executed (Hoad, 2007: 1), thus defending the Bugandan culture from European meddling, though the result was quite the opposite. The narrative is similar to that of 2014, except this time those engaging in same-sex relationships are now western and foreign and dangerous to Ugandan traditions. There is, of course, more to this story. Whether Mwanga II was gay, as many articles claim, is debatable, and the place of his sexuality to inform his decisions over that of the surrounding colonial and religious powers as well as his daily kingly duties is also debatable and one could argue is itself rooted in racist perceptions of black sexuality. However, in the British account his sexuality was regularly highlighted, with Catholic missionaries mentioning his "shameful passions" and British representatives claiming that he "disgusted even his negro people" who would have naturally worried over the disappearance of their people (2007: 4-5). Mwanga II earned the scorn of the colonialists because his perceived sexual aberrations were not only unnatural, but were condemning a nation that they deemed ready for Christianity.

This story is not new. It is shared across states from India to Somalia who share a common colonial history with a common colonial power, and many of these had unique indigenous understandings of homosexuality and same-sex relationships that were simply wiped away. Bisi Alimi, a Nigerian LGBTQ activist writing for the Guardian, highlights the peculiarity of the western import of Christianity being used to condemn something that existed historically in so many African cultures. Languages in Nigeria have their own terms for those who engage in same-sex relations, from the Yoruba term *adofuro*, which refers to those who engage in anal intercourse (Alimi, 2015), to the Hausa term '*yan daudu*, which refers to the effeminate men who are considered to be as wives to other men (Gaudio in O'Murray & Roscoe [ed], 1998: 121). Interestingly, there are even examples where the colonial context actually created instances whereby same-sex relationships became essential to those who were separated from members of the opposite sex. In Zimbabwean boomtowns, miners had what became known as "mine marriages" (Falk in O'Murray & Roscoe [ed], 1998: 197). This became so notorious that even today, the original mining town of Kimberly is referred to as *Sotoma* in Basotho tongue, which means Sodom (1998: 198). Alimi does not claim that this means African nations accepted or

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even tolerated same-sex intimacies, but it does present evidence that diverse expressions of sexuality existed in Africa before the arrival of Europeans.

In the 2014 film *God Loves Uganda* by American filmmaker Roger Ross Williams, we can see that this continues even today. The film shows that the homophobic crusade that the world witnessed in Uganda in 2014 was actually the result of a direct and concerted effort by US-based evangelical churches to export their hardline anti-gay, anti-abortion messages to African audiences via their TV channels and missionaries. In an interview, the filmmaker shows how one particular church known as the International House of Prayer (or IHOP, for which the International House of Pancakes sued them) led by American homophobe of the year winner Lou Engle had spearheaded this effort (Williams, 2016). This is clearly a neo-colonial program designed to destroy any semblance of same-sex relationships in African nations, especially where these churches are failing in their home territories. It is a continuation of former colonial practices, even down to calling Uganda the Pearl of Africa, a term used by Winston Churchill (2016), which presented Uganda as kingdom ripe for Christianity (Hoad, 2007: 5). Colonialism, be it historical or modern, remains a powerful force dictating the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the post-colonial world. Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta told Barack Obama that there were some things the US and Africa simply did not share; however, it looks as though they share more than he would imagine.

This paper is of course about India and specifically the history of same-sex relationships in India, but the African context is important too. With this, we can begin to unravel a much larger image of a strictly European understanding of the norms of gender and sexuality that was imposed so effectively on their colonial territories that they are today perceived by both the ordinary people and their leaders as their own cultures and traditions, and even how this continues today. Legislation has a powerful impact on the way a society collectively perceives and therefore represents something. Had Kertbeny and Ulrich not made efforts to bring homosexuality out of the criminal realm and into the social, Europe may not be as friendly to the LGBTQ community as it claims to be now, and had Britain and later the US-based evangelical groups not tried so hard to eradicate Buganda and Uganda's cultural expressions of sexuality, perhaps Uganda would not have made headlines in 2014 for pushing the death penalty on homosexuals.

In his study of the British Raj in Africa, Thomas Metcalf shows in detail how Thomas Macaulay set out to create a new penal code for India, with "uniformity where you can have it, diversity where you must have it, but in all cases certainty" (Metcalf, 2007: 18). This code, created for India, would later be exported throughout the Empire, first to the Straits colonial government in Singapore in 1870 (2007: 21) and to Uganda in 1897 (H.F. Morris, 1974: 13). There was opposition from both local educated elites who were concerned about the applicability of a code designed for India, and from the white settlers, who opposed the governing of white men with laws created for non-whites (1974: 13). India was a colony of the Empire apart from other colonies, it was *the* colony by which all others would be compared and ruled. When new lands were conquered, it was Sikh and Rajput troops who were sent in to police the new territory, while not only Indian civil servants were brought from India, but even the white civil servants were pulled from the Indian Administrative Services (Metcalf, 2007: 2), while challenges to the Empire, such as a mutiny by three Sudanese companies in 1897 would be crushed by troops requisitioned from the Raj (2007: 81-82). The British had already implemented Section 377 of the penal code in India by the time they subdued the Kingdom of Buganda and greater Uganda in the late 1800s, but the results remain visible in both nations today, especially the latter. The way in which

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perceptions and representations would be manufactured along the lines of the newly-implemented Indian Code would then be spread to any territory which sat beneath the Union Flag, whether it was the erasure of homoerotic poetry in Mughal India or the way sexuality existed as a fluid expression of power in Bugandan courts.

What I have shown in this chapter is that while we deem sexuality as inherent to a person's constituent whole, historically sexuality has been one of humanity's most fluid qualities, something legislation and colonial regimes have sought to control in effort to secure the universalisation of their cultures. Something else this chapter shows, on the periphery, is that the study of sexuality and the case studies that we have are gendered in their own respects. Once we step out of the realm of heteronormative studies of sexuality, we step into another restrictive paradigm – that of the male homosexual, or male-on-male same-sex intimacies. Female sexuality in general and lesbianism in particular has not received nearly the same level of attention academically, and of course the contemporary sources completely ignored women, at least beyond the now-cartoonish orientalist ideas of the exotic native women in harems. Any semblance of agency in such accounts is not just removed but was never included, or even considered. With this in mind, I will attempt to focus on this gap throughout this paper.

Perceptions concerning same-sex relationships and intimacies have been determined by so many interlocking and competing factors, from religion, ethnicity, social status, gender and even down to the micro familial and tribal ties that bind communities. India, as not only one of the world's ancient civilisations but also one of the most culturally diverse, is no stranger to this, and is certainly no stranger to the impacts of imperialism and colonialism. The recent decriminalisation of same-sex relations by the Supreme Court of India led to an outbreak of support alongside claims that these relations have no place in Indian culture. This paper will explore these two positions, and with this brief foray into Africa, I hope it shows to the reader that when it comes to sexuality, there no constants and no absolutes.

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Chapter Two - From Puranas to Ghazals: How have same-sex intimacies be represented in Indian history?

The colonial nature of India's history, and those of its partitioned neighbours, means that of course the focal point of sexuality is not limited by borders. What is true for India historically is largely true for Pakistan and for Bangladesh. Nepal, which shares a Hindu heritage with much of India, also shares this history. The reason I focus on India is due to the removal of same-sex relations from under the purview of Section 377, but also because the political arena in India since the 1980s has been conducive to a reshaping of Indian history in order to create the image of a homogenous, indigenous Hindu heritage (Uma Chakravarti in M.E. John & J. Nair [ed], 1998: 243-245). This further explains why I have chosen to focus on simply same-sex intimacies and relationships, rather than the broader stroke of queer identities in India. Martha Nussbaum argues that at the centre of this ideological shaping of history is a humiliated masculinity (Nussbaum, 2007: 361). In this narrative where proud Hindu men are subjugated by Muslims and Europeans, Nussbaum argues, the Hindu masculinity was humiliated, and now the true Indian masculinity must reassert itself. As a result, anything they consider foreign or emasculating must be removed. This means the Mughal history that forms one of India's richest and most powerful epochs is not considered by some to be a true representative of Indian history, and certainly same-sex relations between men or women are not.

This chapter will therefore attempt to display where it can a thread that runs continuously from before the Mughal rule of India to the arrival of the British, and that thread is not just the tolerated existence of same-sex intimacies and even that of same-sex love, but their active representation in society. If not necessarily evidenced through stories of day-to-day encounters between individuals, then through the representations of their gods and their passions through the written word. From the religious documents of the pre-Mughal eras to the Persian and Urdu ghazals that praise same-sex intimacies, I will show that gender norms and sexual expressions have been far more flexible than many today in the halls of power would care to admit.

Repressive or Liberating: Hinduism and Sexuality

In discussions around queer lives in India, a common perception in western imagining is that it is an oppressed set of identities that are policed and that lack an indigenous expression, be it through cultural traditions or as literal expression through the lack of a native terminology. This is why we see the use of European medical terminology such as homosexual and the more identity-focused use of gay, lesbian or queer amongst a litany of others. However, this is not necessarily the case. In the introduction to her influential anthology book *Queering India*, Ruth Vanita argues that there is evidence of native Indian terminology (Vanita, 2002). Vanita highlights the term *swayamvara sakhi*, a Sanskrit term that refers to the chosen female 'friend' of another female, coming from the words *swayamvara* which alludes to the ceremony whereby a woman chooses her groom from a selection of collected men, and *sakhi*, meaning a female friend (2002: 2). In the poem in which Vanita found this phrase, the Kathasaritsagara, an Asura's daughter named Somaprabha saw Kalingasena, the daughter of King Takshashila, and assumed the form of a human girl to please her. Somaprabha was overwhelmed by Kalingasena's beauty, and the two developed a strong relationship, the love of which was only denied once Kalingasena was married to Madanavega (Kumkum Roy in Vanita & Kidwai [ed], 2001: 86).

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In another story translated by Roy called the *Krittivasa Ramayana*, we see that two women are blessed by the Lord Shiva with the ability to have a child, after their husband King Dilipa had died without leaving an heir to the throne. The lineage would have to be rescued to allow for Vishnu's birth as Rama. Shiva granted these women the ability to pro-create, and they did. Though the child was born as a lump of flesh, he was blessed by the sage Ashtavakra whose powers were said to equal Vishnu's, and the boy became known as Bhagiratha, the sage who succeeded in bringing the River Ganga to earth from heaven (Roy in Vanita & Kidwai [ed], 2001: 100-103). Without the offspring of two women, the Saraswati may not be the only hidden river in Hindu mythology.

The *Krittivasa Ramayana* is still the most popular version of the Ramayana in West Bengal, in which Rama overthrows the evil rule of Ravana to rescue his wife Sita and usher in a utopian era of Hindu kingship. Rama is of course the most important god to the modern day Hindutva movement, whose cries of *Jai Shri Rama* echoed throughout the city of Ayodhya in December 1992 as Hindutva militants destroyed the Babri Masjid. They argue that Babur, Hindutva's primary villain, built the masjid atop a destroyed Hindu mandir that marked the birthplace of Rama himself. It is interesting then that in Bengali literature (which is the lifeblood of classical Indian literature, though less so today with the popularity of English language literature) Rama would not have been born without the conception of a child through same-sex intimacies. Shiva too plays a central role in this story, granting the power to the two queens to conceive together. He himself is present in many stories where same-sex intimacies take centre stage, such as the the Bhagvata Purana where he is attracted to Vishnu's female form Mohini (sometimes he is unaware that it is Vishnu, sometimes he is aware and asks Vishnu to take the form) (Vanita, 2001: 69). He also takes the form of a woman to engage in intimacies with Parvati in the woods, resulting in the entire forest and everything in it turning female as well (2000: 18).

Shiva is arguably the archetypal masculine form in modern Hindu sensibilities. Alongside Hanuman, whose aggression and loyalty to Rama is representative of their own, Shiva is that which all men should aspire to be. He is powerful, handsome, stoic and uninterested yet conscientious, and yet in these stories whether they are Sanskrit Puranas or regional retellings of Hindu epics, he is seen to be not just encouraging and enabling sexual intimacies between members of the same sex and gender, but engaging in it and transgressing what we would now hold as gender norms and what the Hindutva movement would consider to be emasculating in their narrative.

Therefore, the question is not necessarily whether there was any tradition for same-sex relationships, but rather it should be asking what happened to them. There was clearly a presence of same-sex relations in Vedic India, through its representation in religious literature to the existence of a clear terminology such as *swyamvara sakhī* which clearly denotes the practice of a female picking another female suitor.

Vanita argues that we can begin to understand this erasure by examining how the discourse around non-hetero-sexualities takes place. For example, the wording of Section 377, before September 2018, defined homosexual practices as *unnatural*. This word is not one that has really concerned Indian traditions prior to the arrival of the British. Indeed, a brief foray into an Indian cultural context will underscore several behaviours that indicate the presence of a supernatural. Modern India in the throes of liberalisation is still beholden to its traditions that are intertwined with that which is supernatural. The legal notion of natural is necessarily entwined with Judeo-Christian philosophy, and simply does not apply well to the Indian traditional context. Vanita expertly realises that such terminology is rooted

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in the Judeo-Christian homophobia of the Victorian era that ruled India and shaped its evolution for 200 years (Vanita, 2001: 2). This use of what is essentially foreign coding to regulate and police expressions of love and physical intimacy provides the basis of my overall argument in this thesis – that the British colonial regime is directly responsible for the way negative perceptions of same-sex relations and queer lives are expressed in modern day India and for the erasure of their historical representation. The language that is used to police the behaviour and lives of Indians who engage in same-sex relations shows a clear link between the imposition of legislation and the perception and representation of that which the legislation seeks to control.

Homoeroticism in the Indo-Muslim Literary Tradition

There is a similar literary presence of expressions of same-sex desire in the Indian Islamic tradition. Islam is commonly associated with a strict and dogmatic aversion to expressions of same-sex desires; however, it is rarely as simple as this in action. Indeed, where poets in Mughal India could not speak publicly of their sexual desires for women, they often spoke of young boys or beardless men through *Rekhta* poetry. Ralph Russell suggests that the segregation of society led naturally to this conclusion, and the powerful poetry it inspired suggests that emotion was as much involved as simple physical attraction (Russell, 2005: 295). Such men were written of perhaps as representations of a moral love, and the relationship between the mortal and the divine. Russel asserts that the beauty of love, be it the beauty of the natural universe, the beauty of a woman or the beauty of a boy, is the method through which god reveals themselves to the worshipper (2005: 305). Kidwai notes that, throughout Muslim medieval history, men who tended toward same-sex inclinations were continuously present, and existed peacefully (Kidwai in Vanita & Kidwai [ed], 2002: 108), having adopted the cosmopolitan outlooks of the Abbasid Caliphate from which the early Muslim rulers of North India sprang.

Mir (born Mir Muhammad Taqi 1722-1810), who wrote extensively on love, is one of the poets most regularly associated with the concept of *amrad parast* (boy lovers – although the term has often been reduced to age-based relations, its usage was more complex than early orientalists would give it credit) (2002: 108-120). Mir wrote about erotic encounters with boys and men across class, caste, religion and occupation, from Mughals to Hindus, Brahmans to flower sellers (2002: 108), and C.M. Naim argues that Mir himself was very open with his inclinations. Naim suggests that the culture of the day was focused, as it largely is in Islam, on the continuation of the Ummah. As long as Mir or any other man fulfilled his duties within the context of his *nikah*, consummated his marriage and sired children, then what he did elsewhere was of little concern (C.M. Naim, 1999: 201). This harkens to the claims of Foucault that it was the advent of capitalism and modernity that resulted in the stratification of sexuality, through the idea that Mir as a married man was able to enjoy his same-sex desires and express them publically as long as his duties as a husband and man were fulfilled. As psychotherapists began to analyse sexuality they inevitably categorised it. However, as we can see in the existence of the term *amrad parast*, such categories existed prior to this and it was something that was noticed and separated from the norm and only tolerated within the confines of societal expectations.

Importantly, amongst the literary tradition of *Rekhta*, there also exists *Rekhti*. This word refers to the feminine equivalent. These poems, primarily written by the major male poets of the time (but not entirely), focus on the lives, loves and passions of women. Although they took place in the home, they massively expanded the scope of a woman's affection to include people beyond her husband and children (Vanita, 2012: 9). Thus not only was a woman's experience expanded beyond the mundane,

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but the home was expanded into a much more dynamic and lively space with its own secrets. Many of these female desires were expressed in relation to other women. Indeed, the poet Begam (wife, or lady, of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah) wrote one poem where she describes the pain of a love triangle between three women. She writes:

*Hai manzūr bājī satānā tumhārā
Gilā kartī hai jo du-gāna tumhārā
Ghar sih-gāna ke du-gāna merī mehmān ga’i
Main’ yah angāron’ pe loṭī ki merī jān ga’i*

(Sister, I accept your harassment
It is your *du-gāna* who complains
My *du-gāna* went as a guest to the *sih-gāna*’s house
I rolled on burning coals, my life left me) (2012: 6)

This is noteworthy not only because it was written by a woman, but it shows a strong understanding of the style and vocabulary of *Rekhti* poetry on a par with that of the major male poets of the time, indicating far more than a passing or second-hand knowledge of styles and forms of poetry. The term *du-gāna* refers to an intimate companion, and *sih-gāna* refers to the intimate companion of someone’s *du-gāna*. The term *merī jān* literally means my life, but colloquially did and still does refer to one’s beloved. So here the poet writes that her intimate companion has left her for her companion, and that in doing so not only has her beloved left her, but her life too, consigning her to lie on hot coals.

Critics at the time, and in the conservative shift that followed in the centuries after the consolidation of British power, denounced the genre as licentious and scandalous. Either because it was representative of male voyeurism or because it intended to disgrace women who, though they may not read it, would inevitably encounter it in daily life, especially those in touch with the educated in cities such as Lucknow or Delhi. So expressions of same-sex desires were common amongst male poets, but the liberty was not extended as freely to women. Other poets even wrote their own poems to condemn this art form, and their peers who engaged in it (2012: 7). However, to reduce it to simply a male sport is to erase the role of women, such as Begam, and importantly the role played by courtesans. Courtesans were part of urban India’s intellectual elite. They were often bilingual if not multilingual, and engaged with noble men as equals, and it was common for men to form romantic relationships with these women outside of their official marriages (2012: 191). Furthermore, such criticisms became sport for the poets who utilised it to subvert the moral ideologues. The poet Insha’ wrote in one *Rekhti*:

I haven’t robbed anyone else’s garden
If my lap is full of flowers, what is it to you?
My style is like fields with new crops, Insha’,
If I’m green and brightly coloured, what is it to you? (2012: 11).

One older poet, Jur’at, wrote a poem titled *chaptīnāma*, which means the poem of female lovers. The term *chapaṭ-bāz* is used by Jur’at to refer to women who have sex with other women. In this poem, two women are discovered to have been having sexual relations by their husbands. Instead of ending their relationship, the lovers defy the social norms, declaring:

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Jab nāchne nikle to ghūn'ghaṭ kaisā
(When going out to dance why wear a veil) (2012: 11)

This poem explicitly refers to two women who love each other and act on that love, and plays off an older Hindu devotional poem about a woman, Mīrā, who defies society by not only dancing, but dancing with bells on her feet to make a show of the fact. It also shows again that the expression of same-sex love between women was not as free as that of men. I would argue that, in light of the argument made earlier that men were free to explore their desires once they had sired children, mothers were not granted this benefit due to the patriarchal notion that their duty to the children is ongoing and takes priority. A man earned this right by having children, but for women their domestic role never ended, she was either responsible for the children, or for her husband.

Not only is this genre important in its portrayal of women and their lives beyond their socially expected duties, it had a defiant and liberating aspect, resisting the dogmatic calls for moral purity. This poetry, whether by men or by women, attempted to bring women's intimacies to the same level of men's, who were largely free to discuss their romantic and sexual desires in poetry.

Vanita argues that one of the major deviations from *Rekhta* poetry is that there is no shielding the female desires behind the claim that the significant other in the poem is representative of the divine. Many poets of the day mystified their poetry behind such methods. After the sanitisation of *Rekhta* poetry that occurred throughout the late 19th and 20th century to fit with more conservative social norms following the British takeover of India, notions of same-sex intimacies were reduced to an expression of love for the divine. However, this is not possible with *Rekhti* poetry. God in the Islamic context and the literary context of the North Indian Islamicate was always referred to as male or without gender (2012: 11), so it is not possible to reduce the themes of *Rekhti* poetry to devotional love as many have attempted to do with male-male intimacies expressed by poets – it represents expressions of female same-sex desires.

In Vanita's earlier analysis of Urdu *Rekhti* poetry in 2002, she notes that a major cause for the erasure of not just *Rekhti* but also any ghazal that appeared to be effeminate was the British perception of Indo-Muslim culture (Vanita, 2002: 57). The significant position the British authorities held meant that their mere perception of a community as effeminate was enough to cause that community to police itself. The British brought with them not only their laws regarding same-sex relations between men but also their societal expectations for how men should act and be seen to be acting. In response, the embarrassed elites of the remnant Mughal Empire began to eradicate anything the British may deem effeminate, including ghazals that included homoerotic sentiments and, most effectively, *Rekhti* poetry.

British concepts of masculinity were thus central in the suppression of *Rekhta* and *Rekhti* poetry. In the era of New Imperialism, where the European states, the USA and Japan vied to conquer what was left of the Earth, masculinity in the British Empire was reimagined alongside notions of nobility (and thus class and education), bravery and the exploits of the daring colonial British man (Linsley, 2013: 2). The nature of colonialism requires an inequity of power between the coloniser and the colonised, and thus an inequity in masculinity. Macaulay, who would go on to oversee the creation of India's criminal code, wrote of Bengali men "the physical organization of the Bengali is feeble even to effeminacy... during the many ages he has been trampled on by men of bolder and more hardy breeds. Courage, independence, veracity, are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable" (Macaulay in Rosselli, 1980: 122). The opinion was a commonly held one of all Indians,

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though Bengali men were considered substantially more effete, with one historian asserting that they were “still of weaker frame” than other Indians (Rosselli, 1980: 123). This was an opinion that even Bengalis internalised, particularly those who received British education. They declared that they were the weakest men in India, overall entirely inferior to Englishmen. Even Swami Vivekananda, the great Hindu revivalist, decried his small frame as the “physique of a Bengali” (Rosselli, 1980: 123). Not only legislation therefore, but perceptions in the mind of the British were enough to implant an altered image of self in the colonised.

If Indian men were to challenge the British monopoly on masculinity, it was an internalised belief that they could not do so through physical prowess, even the Sikhs and the Rajputs who were considered the most masculine in India had been brought under the boot, and so they had only one other avenue – the role of the patriarchy. As Brett argues, the civilisation of a society was often judged by these gender roles. The way in which Japan was considered an honorary European power, and even the praise meted out to Japanese brothels in India, were evidence that masculinity could be achieved through the organisation of gender in society (Linsley, 2013: 5). To the Mughals, *Rekhta* could be re-imagined as an expression of love for the divine, but *Rekhti* would have to be erased if their masculinity was to be maintained. Women could not be publishing licentious literature from their homes if they were to be considered as proper as white European women or Japanese women. The image of Indo-Muslim masculinity in the eyes of the British was enough for them to re-construct their cultural expressions of same-sex desires.

In records kept of Delhi by the Persian Dargah Quli Khan, it seems fair to suggest that such expressions of same-sex attraction were almost mainstream, at least among men. Social and religious sites both were common spaces for men to gather, socialise and fraternise. In the markets adjacent to the Jama Masjid or at wrestling events on the banks of the Yamuna, aristocrats and commoners alike would linger, as “young good-looking men danced everywhere and created great excitement” (Kidwai in Vanita & Kidwai [ed], 2002: 176). While such expressions of sexuality were categorised as different, they were obviously tolerated and popular. This is an important example because it shows life in Delhi beyond the courtiers, the poets and the princes. We can use the writings of poets to show examples of expressions of queer love, but it does not necessarily apply to the common Indian of the time, nor does it suggest that the common Indian would be given the same freedom as the Muslim literary elite. However, Khan’s description of Delhi’s social scene shows men from all walks of life engaging in such expressions and doing so in spaces of traditional masculinity such as the wrestling events, and amongst spaces of traditional religious patriarchy and heterosexuality, such as the masjid. All of this provides a more comprehensive image of sexuality in India at the time beyond the elites and the courts. Interestingly, the English-language translation of Khan’s *Muraqqa’-e-Delhi* by Chandra Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy is completely devoid of these references, and Kidwai describes it as bowdlerized. Written in 1989 and thus coinciding with the reconstruction of India’s masculinity in the wake of national discord, it is likely that if they were not merely incompetent in their translations, then they were influenced by a desire to remove this history from India’s capital.

Sexuality in India did not go through the same discursive disentangling or explosion of diversity as it did in Foucault’s France. Instead it seems to be represented as calmly complex, regulated by expectations and duties but largely free of the same religious persecution that afflicted similar expressions in European contexts. This, however, would change with the gradual imposition of British power. Initially, the mere suspicion amongst the British that India’s masculinity was lacking was

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internalised, leading to a conservative overhaul of the cultural expressions of same-sex desires in Mughal India. The presence of same-sex desires and intimacies in Hindu religious literature was also largely erased as the British sought to uplift a Hindu text that could be applied in a positivist sense the same way the Shari'a was the Indian Muslims, which I will explore in the next chapter. Overall, this chapter shows that there was indeed a clear representation of same-sex desires and intimacies in popular Indian literature, and cosmopolitan Indian society at the time, in the case of Delhi at least, was open to flirtations and relations between men of all levels of society. While women expressed similar desires in their *Rekhti* poetry, they received more policing and criticism, and in the consolidation of a British expectation of feminine behaviour, their contributions to Indian literature suffered greatly. British legislation was not necessary to impact the free expression of same-sex intimacies in the fading Mughal Empire, their belief that Indians were effete were enough for such expressions to be quashed in effort to preserve their masculinity in the face of an overwhelming inequity of power. The colonisation of India by Britain was a challenge to Indian masculinity, and after the failed reassertion of that masculinity in 1857, Britain would consolidate its rule over India to completion, and British jurists would begin the process of reshaping India to their image.

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Chapter Three – How far can we say that the events following the 1857 Rebellion were pivotal in the perception of same-sex relationships and intimacies in India?

As I have displayed in the previous chapter, the notion that same-sex intimacies and the expression of queer identities is unheard of in Indian history or traditions is factually incorrect. The Urdu poetry of Mir and Insha' is praised throughout the Muslim world and beyond and is inherently connected to the Indian subcontinent, and even if the Hindu Right reject this history as the foreign history of invaders (which, of course, they do) then within their own religious tradition, sexuality is far more fluid than they would have you believe. The current position held by groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) where they do not wish to further criminalise homosexuality (in the modern parlance) but seek to socially marginalise and medicalise it as unnatural and counter-traditional are largely based on a foreign discourse imported by the Victorian Britons who dominated India for centuries and left India with the very legal system and discursive toolkit that has been to weaponised to criminalise everything out of the heterosexual norm. As such, this section of the paper will look at how the British achieved this following their consolidation of British India under the Crown in 1858 following the unsuccessful rebellion that engulfed India the year prior.

The 1857 Rebellion

It would not be possible for me to cover the 1857 Rebellion fairly in the space I have, and one's perception of the conflict depends very much on their position in Indian society, or outside of it. The British, eager to control the narrative, reduced it to a mere sepoy mutiny (a sepoy was an Indian infantryman), in order to soothe the anxieties of the colonial elite and the British at home. The mutiny, they asserted, was caused by the introduction of the new Enfield rifle, which required the bullets to be soaked in grease (made invariably from the fat of a cow or a pig, both problematic for Hindus and Muslims respectively) and then have the cap bitten before loading and firing. This, it was argued, was believed to be a British plot to make the Indians Christian by contaminating them in the eyes of their traditions. In his book *The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India: Exploring Transgressions, Contests and Diversities* (2010), Biswamoy Pati breaks the rebellion down from the British, nationalist and Marxist narratives that have ruled (and reduced) the discourse to include the important subaltern perspectives of the Indian tribal population, women (including the courtesan Azeezun) and the forgotten conflicts of South India, and the book is highly recommended.

Irrespective of how one perceives the events of the Rebellion, however, are the results. The following conflict, which cost up to 800,000 Indian lives, resulted in the formal end of the Mughal Empire, the end of the rule of the British East India Company and the official absorption of India into the British Empire. With this, most central to this thesis, was the huge task of restructuring the government of India from the various monarchic and feudal states into one that managed overall by a central government.

The Legal History of Anti-Sodomy Laws in the United Kingdom and India

Although British rule was not new in India (nor even were attempts to criminalise same-sex relations between men by the British), it was now a fact of law. No longer would the East India Company tread around the remnants of the Mughals and the princely states, it was firmly British territory. In regards

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to queer lives and the expressions of same-sex love, this meant the legislative rule of a nation that up until 1835 had executed men who had sex with men (Dryden, British Library website, 2018). Indeed, the history of homophobic discourse and criminalisation of same-sex intimacies in the British Isles is older than the United Kingdom itself. The UK, which was formed officially in 1707 following the Act of Union with Scotland, inherited the laws of the Kingdom of England, included among which was the Buggery Act of 1533, the first time that sodomy was wrestled from the ecclesiastical courts into the civil courts as King Henry VIII consolidated his power. Bret Boyce shows in an article how the perception of men having sex with men (interestingly, women having sex with women was never legislated on in British or English history) was so virulently negative that men it could not even be mentioned (Boyce, 2015: 14). He gives examples of Sir Edward Coke, who said that buggery was “*a detestable, and abominable sin, amongst Christians not to be named*” (2015: 14) and of William Blackstone, who said “*I will not act so disagreeable a part to my readers as well as to myself as to dwell any longer upon a subject the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature*” (2015: 15). This attitude can be seen on the British Library’s newspaper archives, where the print press would often go to great lengths to explain why a man was being executed, without ever saying what he actually did. Print capitalism was a source of anxiety in such respects, as the executions had to be covered, but to cover them in their entirety would be to acknowledge that men were having sex with men in the UK (Dryden, 2018).

The British legal tradition on same-sex relations between men was drafted for the British Raj by Thomas Babington Macaulay (a man with nothing but disdain for Indians, as shown by his comments on Bengali men), brought to India by British officials in 1861 and codified into Indian law by 1863. The wording of the law, which became known as Section 377, was this:

“377. Unnatural offences: *Whoever voluntarily has carnal 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 term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.*

Explanation: *Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offense described in this section.”* (Boyce, 2015: 16).

Although the Buggery Act was amended in 1861 to reduce the sentence from death to ten years imprisonment (hence the reduced punishment in the Indian context, too), British Parliament later passed in 1885 the Labouchere Amendment, which criminalised any form of sex between men, termed vaguely as “*any act of gross indecency*” such as touching or oral sex (Arvind Narrain in Kannabiran & Singh [ed], 2008: 56). This had a domino effect on legal traditions globally, with every state with considerable populations in the USA following not far behind. This also coincided with the growing understanding in the medical community and parts of continental Europe’s literary and political elite (such as Kertbeny and Ulrich in Germany) that men who have sex with men may not be acting on sudden primal urges, but acting on accordance with their nature, potentially as homosexual men. Thusly the law in the UK was extended to criminalise any sexual or even intimate act between two men, rather than being decriminalised entirely (which did not happen until 1967 in England & Wales).

Twenty years following the Labouchere Amendment, a court case in India massively expanded the scope of Section 377 in a similar manner. In the oft-cited *Khanu v Emperor* 1925, the courts heard the case of a man who had forced a minor to perform oral sex on him. Though in 1884 the courts had decided that sodomy, the object of Section 377, was dependent on the act of anal intercourse, this court argued that it was not the act itself that was criminalised necessarily, but its nature – or lack

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thereof. This court defined natural sex as any consensual intercourse that could possibly result in conception, and argued that any penetrative sex that could not possibly result in a child was criminal under Section 377 (2008: 57). This was further expanded in *Lohana Vasantlal Devchand vs State*, and *Brother John Anthony vs State*, which included any imitation of penetrative sex, and sex where the man envelops his penis between the thighs of another respectively (2008: 56). These cases all involved men forcing themselves upon children, yet the focus on *nature* meant that whether intentional or not, any attempt to criminalise the sexual assault of a child could and would be extended to consensual acts between adults. Even consensual anal intercourse between a husband and his wife which could obviously not result in conception could be tried under this interpretation of the law, and while these examples include the just conviction of child rapists, the resulting expansion of the law created a climate of fear for queer Indians and gave what many understood as a legal justification for the harassment of everyone from someone simply perceived to be gay to people who worked in the prevention of India's HIV epidemic. So, while Section 377 was never utilised against a heterosexual couple or a lesbian couple, and despite it rarely being brought against two men who have had sex with each other, the law allowed a culture of violence and oppression of queer Indians, and has led to instances of harassment, blackmail and even sexual abuse towards these individuals, who often feel no legal recourse is available to them (Narain, 2004: 151)

However, the British understood that the best way to present their ideals of a natural law was to show a common thread between civilisations that, at the time, were considered completely alien to each other, to show the Indian subject that the heart of their newly imposed penal code could be found in their own texts. For this, the perfect tool was the *Manusmriti*, the largely forgotten and irrelevant text resurrected by the British in their mammoth task of creating a civil legal tradition fit for their new realm from its own history. The British suddenly found themselves legislating for a group (Hindus) that compared to the Muslims and the Sikhs, apparently had no religious law to run their civil and criminal law. This text, which was never intended to be applied to a pluralist nation (the text was created with upper-caste Hindu's in mind, but the British applied it to everyone they deemed Hindu), was suddenly adapted to become a positivist legal document defying its actual origin. Patrick Olivelle notes that the one held up by the British as *the Manusmriti* was simply so because it was the first one to be found. This version however was not only inconsistent within itself (as many texts can be when making absolutist assertions, of course) but largely inconsistent with all others found (Olivelle, 2005).

This text refers to same-sex intimacies between men only in XI.175, where it deems the issue to be one that reduces one's purity. Men who engage in such acts must purify themselves by bathing in water in their clothing (translated by G. Buhler in 1886, accessed online 2018), and is mentioned alongside having sex in the back of an ox-driven cart or in water. The issue then is not moral, but concerns purity, specifically the purity of an upper-caste Hindu. The punishment too is not meant to condemn the actors but simply to re-purify – a far cry from the ten years' imprisonment prescribed in Section 377. The British officials in their hunt for a Hindu equivalent to the Islamic Shari'a that already had a strong tradition in the subcontinent took this code of conduct aimed at high-caste men and universalised it for all they deemed to be Hindu (which is, of course, an entirely different controversy). Today, this text remains as a foundational legal text in India and in Hinduism, further accentuating the role of colonialism in post-colonial Indian jurisprudence and in the attitudes towards same-sex relations.

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This section has covered how the British created the Indian Code, which would later become the basis for criminal codes throughout the British Empire, from India to Singapore to Uganda, and how they sourced a positivist legal text from Hindu religious traditions. However, it is not enough to simply examine the implications of British legal impositions. While this chapter also discusses how Indian jurists would expand on these laws through the precedent of the various cases they handled, it is important to show the ramifications of Section 377 in Indian society, and how legislation impacted perceptions and representations. In the previous chapter I discussed how British concepts of masculinity and the patriarchal order of society were internalised by the literary society of Northern India to impact the representations of same-sex intimacies. In this chapter I will show how the Indian Criminal Code created by Macaulay and the subsequent expansion of this Code in the Indian legal tradition has impacted the perceptions of Indians who engage in same-sex intimacies and relationships amongst the medical professional community, and how they are represented by these professionals who have largely internalised the homophobic discourse present in Section 377.

Perceptions of Same-Sex Intimacies in the Indian Medical Community

The impact of the expansion of Section 377 had on the social position of queer Indians was significant. In Arvind Narrain and Vinay Chandran's collection of essays, Dr. Bharath Reddy postulates that there are around 50 million sexually active gay men in India, and stresses that this does not include women who have sex with women, transgender people or *hijra* (Reddy in Narrain & Chandran [ed], 2016: 67). That's a population over twice that of all Sri Lankans who are engaging in what the Indian legal tradition would have defined as an unnatural lifestyle before decriminalisation last year, something that the RSS and many in the BJP would agree with still today. The medical health community should be a site of care for any individual, however for many queer Indians it is a site of violence. In an article by a second year medical student at the Madras Medical College in Chennai, they described how they encountered professors who made statements such as "*in Western countries, it [HIV/AIDS] primarily spreads among homosexuals. Of course, in our country, we don't have any homosexuals*" (Balaji Ravichandran, 2005: 57). The author organised a conference on the social stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS in India, during which a medical student stood up and proclaimed that these diseases were a punishment for their "*disgusting lifestyle*" and that no attempt at finding a cure should be made (2005: 57).

Narrain shows how Section 377 was used by police and courts in Uttar Pradesh to harass and intimidate NGOs and professionals who sought to educate about and mitigate the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in India. Following the sexual assault of a man in a park in Lucknow, police raided the area, frequented by Hijras and Kothis, and arrested ten, including an activist from Bharosa, an NGO that worked with men who had sex with men. Bharosa and the Naz Foundation, which championed the first major court fight against Section 377, both had their offices raided and materials related to HIV/AIDS and safe sex were confiscated, and the police sought to use Section 377 as well as various other sections relating to conspiracy and abetment against the NGOs (Narrain, 2004: 152-153). The result was a media outrage against "gay clubs" and "gay culture" which was, in the words of the judge presiding over the case, "polluting the entire society" (2004: 153). The Senior Superintendent of Lucknow's police force accused the two NGOs of "running gay clubs in contrast to Indian culture and ethics under the garb of educating the masses about AIDS and HIV" (2004: 153). News media framed this entire controversy around the acts of the alleged gay clubs, accusing them of providing boys to politicians and running call boy services. There was no coverage of the severity of India's HIV/AIDS epidemic which, while small for a middle-income country, runs currently at around 2.1 million people living with the conditions

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(AVERT, 2018). As we can see by the language used by both the judge and the police officer, we see a striking application of the notion that same-sex intimacies are alien to Indian culture, and had a polluting influence, mirroring the opinions of the lecturers and students recorded at the Madras Medical College.

Dr. Bharath Reddy conducted a study with third and fourth year medical students, interns and postgraduates concerning their knowledge of the healthcare needs of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) patients. The study, which included a series of questionnaires, found that while 69.56% of participants strongly agreed that lesbian and gay patients deserved the same level of quality care as heterosexual patients, the other answers did not support this. Only 43.47% agreed that they would be comfortable being known amongst colleagues as a doctor who cared for LGBT patients, while 29.34% and 28.26% believed that same-sex attraction and behaviour respectively are natural in human beings (Reddy, 2016: 73-74). That's over 70% of these medical students, many of which are likely medical professionals at the writing of this thesis, who at a fundamental level believe that same-sex desires and the action of those desires are unnatural. It is hard to believe that such respondents would provide a place of care for queer patients who come to them regarding their sexual health, or any matter indeed.

We also see, both in the form of the questions asked in the survey and the responses they attracted, a foreign discourse on sexuality. The homophobic tendencies of the participants remain framed in a discourse that is straight out of Victorian Britain. In India, negative perceptions of same-sex relations are still largely beholden to these very antiquated moral judgements of what is and what is not a 'normal' sexual lifestyle. A number of students surveyed quoted directly from both the Bible and Section 377, arguing that same-sex desires were unequivocally unnatural and anti-social, with the student mentioning the Bible also believing women were purely concocted for male pleasure (2016: 78). These students saw Section 377 and the punishment it delves out as just and fair. Others believed that sex education was needed to remove this "*black mark to the society*" (2016: 79). Alongside reliance on concepts of natural and unnatural, there is also present an element of attempted scientific reasoning and medicalisation. Students mentioned issues such as psychiatric issues and disturbances of the endocrine balance (2016: 84) as explanatory for what they see as a medical condition. The issue was pathologised, and while these students may believe they are showing compassion, they nevertheless hold explicitly homophobic views that can have incredibly dangerous implications by creating a site of violence for their queer patients, and in the form of the justification of dangerous conversion therapies. Such views have been recorded in another study conducted by Bina Fernandez, who interviewed 22 medical health professionals. Fernandez found at least four professionals who reduced same-sex desires as the result of dysfunctional relationships and sexual assault, and two others who, while claiming they believed these desires to be natural, paradoxically asserted that they led to "*problematic' behaviour*" (Fernandez in Narrain & Chandran [ed], 2016: 128).

As Arvind Narrain argues, when heterosexuality is upheld as the normative expression of sexuality in a society that is prone to shame and violence, the resulting violence and discrimination is to be expected (2004: 149). Corrective rape is prevalent, especially for women (Reuters, 2018) but also for men. Suicide rates are significant, as is self-harm generally. Narrain provides the story of a man, Hemant, who was told his sexuality was the result of schizophrenia, who attempted suicide by overdose after taking medication for 15 years, followed by two years of memory loss resulting from the electroconvulsive therapy that was administered, and the suicide notes of lesbian partners Geetalaxmi and

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Sumathi, who were overcome with grief at the realisation that people knew of their orientation (Narain, 2004: 146). Like the Bengali men who believed they were not masculine, many Indians have internalised the idea that they are the problem, and that they need help, or even death.

Overall, it is easy to see British colonialism as a turning point in the perception of people who hold these same-sex desires in society, and how much the discourse that has condemned them remains reliant on this Victorian perception of sexuality. While British concepts of masculinity began a process of internalisation and self-policing amongst Indians, British policy and the implementation of Section 377 following the failed Rebellion provided a legal and moral discourse against same-sex relationships. It is a marked contrast to the world one conjures from the works of the Mughal literary elite and the travelers who documented social life in Delhi, where people seemed to enjoy relative freedom beyond their expected familial duties. The ramifications of the import of Medieval England's particularly aggressive and oppressive homophobia can be seen in India's modern medical community, who still find the Victorian, Judeo-Christian discourse to be not only socially acceptable but medically applicable to their queer patients who have a right and a need to seek medical treatment and advice without judgement. This shows how legislation and the absolute power afforded to it in the unequal power relationship inherent in colonialism erased indigenous expressions of sexuality in favour of British expectations of masculinity and gender roles, thus erasing the previously accepted expressions of same-sex desires, and leading to their criminalisation and medicalisation, something that remains dangerously prevalent in the Indian medical community.

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Chapter Four – How are female same-sex desires expressed and opposed in 19th century India?

If the pejorative discourse around same-sex relations is inherently based in western notions of the natural and the unnatural, then the discourse within the queer community by those who many would consider lesbian has at times been the opposite. Through the women's movement of the 1980s and 1990s in India, there was strong debate around how appropriate a term like lesbian really was to the Indian context. As we have seen in the previous chapter regarding the medical community, there was and is a tendency to connect the HIV/AIDS epidemic to western promiscuity, and that promiscuity to the permissibility of homosexuality. In 1994, Vimla Farooqi of the National Federation of Indian Women, the women's wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) petitioned the Prime Minister to ban an upcoming conference in Mumbai devoted to the South Asian gay community. The issue, according to Farooqi, was that the conference would begin the import of western decadence and sexual permissiveness, eventually leading to cultural decay (Naisgari N. Dave, 2010: 599). The context to this was, of course, the liberalisation of India's economy from a closed economy to an open one, with heavy restructuring by the neo-liberal International Monetary Fund. Such processes were an existential threat to Indian communists and Nehruvian socialists, and the already marginalised queer community were unwitting victims of this, not unlike today when they again find themselves between Hindutva and Indian liberalism.

As a result of these charges, there were concerted efforts among the community to reject labels such as 'lesbian', alongside the intersectional inclusion of low class and low caste women who largely did not speak English (2010: 600). Interestingly, amongst the terms used to refer to women who have sex with women, such as *ekal aurat* (literally single woman, though this erased those women who were married), one group eager to avoid the western connotations of *lesbian* often utilised the phrase "*women who love women*", which was equally as inaccessible for those women who did not speak English (2010: 601). This internal discussion was not necessarily indicative of common Indian women however, whose consumption of mainstream media stories about lesbian women getting married, forming suicide pacts or living together under friendship pacts (often hyper-sensationalised) allowed a general admission of the term amongst its heightened accessibility. This discussion became in a way elitist in its own right, constantly renegotiating identities with the arguments coded in the terms of an educated elite while common women had little issue adopting the term.

Female same-sex desires in India

As I have shown in the second chapter, there has long existed in India a literary tradition to express feelings of sexual and romantic desire amongst those of the same sex, and this is inclusive of women. However, through the total dominance of Indian society by the British colonial machine, this tradition faced an uncertain future. The British obsession with the appearance of masculinity and the marginalisation of the feminine was the death knell for *Rekhti* poetry. Women were the vanguards of culture and nation, and their sexuality had to be guarded, lest that nation be dishonoured (any brief foray into wartime propaganda will demonstrate this). Britain represented by Queen Victoria and icons such as Boudicca, India represented invariably by *Bharat Mata* ('Mother India'). Those male poets who indulged in this art form were denounced by the British. One British resident rejected the poet Insha' as emasculated from his time spent with women, eunuchs and "*other parasites*" (Ruth Vanita, 2012: 18). This poetry suffered erasure in the internalisation of British masculinity in the years that followed,

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with that poetry including female subjects and especially those written by women being the those first to be forgotten.

One of the most famous examples of female same-sex desires displayed in India is the short story *Lihaaf* written by Ismat Chughtai just shy of Indian independence in 1942. In the story, a young girl is sent by her mother to stay with her adopted sister, Begum Jaan, the unsatisfied wife of an old but respectable Nawab. Begum Jaan is unsatisfied because her husband married her and then threw her aside, and it is suggested in the story that the Nawab's real interest lay in other men, specifically "young, fair and slender-waisted boys" (Chughtai, translated by M. Asaduddin, date not provided). In reaction to this, Begum Jaan undertakes an intimate relationship with a servant, Rabbu, whose only job is to massage the Begum. The young girl witnesses the intimacies of the two women occurring beneath a quilt (the titular *lihaaf*). After Rabbu's sudden departure, the child, eager to please the Begum whom she loves, offers innocently to massage her in Rabbu's place, which sets in motion a series of events which results in the Begum molesting the child, whose love of the Begum turns to fear, and who wants only for her mother to return.

The story caused uproar at the time. Its publication some hundred years following the gradual erasure of homoeroticism from Urdu literature provided anxiety for the North Indian community, specifically for Muslims, who no longer wanted to be associated with this kind of writing (Vanita, 2002: 134). However, the British colonial authorities most strongly condemned the work, charging Chughtai with obscenities in 1942 arguing that she had offended the sensibilities of the Muslim community (Carla Petievich in Vanita [ed], 2002: 58). Chughtai was acquitted of all charges, and refused to apologise, challenging the prosecution to find any obscene language or explicit description of an obscene act.

Chughtai's story is an important stage in the history of same-sex intimacies in general and lesbianism in particular in India, though for Chughtai herself this was a source of frustration. In later interviews, the author denounced lesbianism, going so far as to say that had she known what she was contributing to she would never had written it (2002: 58). While Chughtai may not have intended so, by saying this she showed just how normalised relations like this were. She wrote a story involving a man enamoured by boys, whose dissatisfied wife finds gratification in the touch of another woman, and then a female child, and she never once considered that she was writing of the life of a woman people today may call lesbian, or at least writing of the fluidity of sexuality. Even in the latest period of British colonial rule in India, such concepts were seemingly mundane enough that Chughtai could write about them without realising. It should be noted that due to the acknowledgment of a woman's sexual agency, many have outright ignored the blatant child abuse in the story, not just of the female child, but of the young male students the Nawab offers free accommodation to, likely in return for sexual favours.

This is not the last time *Lihaaf* caused controversy. In 1996, an Indian-Canadian filmmaker named Deepa Mehta directed *Fire*, loosely inspired by Chughtai's short story. In the film, the wives of two brothers form an intimate relationship around the mutual dissatisfaction stemming from their married lives – one because her husband is celibate and the other because her husband is having an affair with a woman he knew before marriage. The film, predictably, caused outrage, with the Hindu fundamentalist Shiv Sena violently attacking theatres that dared to show the film. At the heart of the vitriol was one primary theme – the corrupting influence of the West. Where it was once a foreign, western colonial government throwing the book at Chughtai for what was a portrayal of fairly indigenous sexuality (whether she approved or not), now it was the Hindu Right accusing foreign

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filmmakers of a corruption of their values. One of the major charges launched at the film was rooted in the director's Canadian nationality. Gayatri Gopinath highlights how the mainstream *Hindu* newspaper asserted that Mehta's film had "very weak links to the true Indian milieu" – the criticism was not merely from the Hindu right (Gopinath, 2006: 131). Feminist writer Madhu Kishwar also wrote that the film suggests that the director has no understanding of the emotional bonds and family construct in India (Kishwar, archived online, date not provided). It should be noted that feminist critique of this film is common. The film problematically trivialises lesbianism as simply that which occurs in the absence of male sexual-attention, though it is this has often been forgiven, with priority given to protesting the homophobic attacks it was victim to.

During one screening of the film, members of the *Mahila Aghadi Sena*, the Shiv Sena's women's wing, attacked a theatre in Mumbai, smashing glass and defacing posters. They were accompanied by a Shiv Sena Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) R. Mirlekar. Following the violent outburst, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra Murli Manohar Joshi supported the chaos, saying, "I congratulate them for what they have done. The film's theme is alien to our culture" (India Today, archived 2011). Bal Thackeray, the leader of the Shiv Sena, argued that the film was inherently foreign, and that it would cause lesbianism to spread like an epidemic (Shohini Ghosh, 1999: 144). Thackeray then offered to support the film if the protagonists' names were changed from Radha and Sita (the Indian censorship board had already changed Sita to Nita), two divine figures in Hinduism, to Shabana and Saira., Muslim names. The implication here being that lesbianism was as alien as Islam, and that it would be better suited as a film if it had no overt connection to his concept of India, that is, a Hindu *Rashtra*.

This film is an important example of same-sex desires and the evolving perception of them in India because it clearly shows how the discourse has been turned on its head. First was the disgust of the British colonial resident at the effeminate nature of the poet Insha'. Then the internalisation of British concepts of masculinity by the Muslim community so outraged by *Lihaaf*, where before they had largely tolerated *Rekhti* while criticising it, and the colonial authority's attempts at stifling it. Finally the modern Hindu right's assessment that homosexuality and lesbianism are western ploys threatening India's already-at-risk hetero-patriarchal marriage system (Bhaiya 2007: 205-206). The British specifically and the West more generally has lost its position as the archetypal masculine civilisation to an effete one, primarily due to its surrender to 'liberalism', against which *Hindutva* now stands alone, defending a pure, immutable Hindu ideal, "for the welfare of entire mankind" (RSS Website, 2019).

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Chapter Five – How has Hindutva influenced the perception and representation of same-sex intimacies in India?

The Hindutva movement in India has been defined largely in its opposition to anything that is not within its notion of pure and proper Hinduism. Famous examples of this include the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, the murder of the missionary Graham Staines and his two sons while they slept in their station wagon in Orrisa in 1999, and the Gujarat riots of 2002, often termed as the Gujarat genocide, which left nearly a thousand dead, and 125,000 displaced (Satyavatra, 2003: 197-199). Each of these instances share a major instigator – one of the *Sangh Parivar*, the groups who originated from and share an ideology with the RSS. The *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP), its youth wing the *Bajrang Dal*, the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the BJP. It was VHP and Bajrang Dal who led the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. It was Bajrang Dal members who burned the missionary and his sons in their car after accusations of coerced conversions, and it was VHP members who perished in the train fire at the Godhra station in Gujarat, which led to one of the most depraved outbreaks of communal violence in Indian history.

The state's absorption of Hindutva is not only manifest instances such as the 2002 Gujarat riots, but it occurs in all ranks of the state in various instances. As I displayed in the case of the judge and senior superintendent applying moral judgements of homosexuality in Lucknow, the Hindutva brigade's unceasing condemnation of same-sex intimacies is frighteningly common amongst the powerful state agencies. While I cannot speak to the individual motivations of the judge or the senior superintendent, their words echo those of the Shiv Sena responding to *Fire*, that Indian culture was under siege from some impure and dangerous foreign scourge. They represented an internalisation of the Hindutva mindset that itself reflects the internalisation of British concepts masculinity in the colonial era.

In response to the Naz Foundation's first attempt at reading down Section 377 (they did not seek to remove it out of the interests of certain rape and child abuse cases which relied on it) (Narain, 2004: 157), the government response was, "While the government cannot police morality, in a civil society criminal law has to express and reflect public morality and concerns about harm to the society at large" (2004: 157). This response was instrumental in consolidating the power of majoritarian ideologies inherent in the Hindutva movement, and completely abandoned the state's responsibility in guaranteeing the rights and safety of all Indians, regardless of how numerous they were in society. The response appears neutral, painfully so, but in fact Hindutva talking points were present in a way that did not relate to the Foundation's initial case. While the petition does not mention homosexuality or lesbianism (it focused on the harm done to HIV/AIDS workers trying to mitigate the epidemic), the affidavit mentions homosexuality and lesbianism explicitly, and argues that there is no tolerance for them in Indian society (2004: 158). In this response, the government of Delhi came down firmly on the side of intolerance, acknowledging that an intolerance existed, and that it was the duty of the criminal penal code to reflect that intolerance.

The nefarious spread of this Hindutva ideology generally can be seen in the televised serials which dominated Indian airwaves in the 1980s and 90s. India was engulfed in turmoil. 1984 saw the violent siege of the Harmandir Sahib, the holiest site in Sikhism and the focal point of the Khalistani separatist movement, and the reactive assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. The Khalistani movement brought similar regionalist movements in Northeast India to the forefront of the Indian

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consciousness (Chakravarti, 1998: 243). 1989 saw a surge of violence with the Kashmiri intifada, and the early 1990s seemed to lurch from controversy to controversy, with the upper-caste agitation against the implementation of the Mandal Commission, the demolition of the Babri Masjid and Hung Parliaments in 1991 and 1996. Meanwhile, a civil war raged in Sri Lanka and an insurgency grew in Nepal. Indians sought unity in a time of discord and found it from the televised versions of the *Ramayana* (1987), *Mahabharata* (1988) and *Chanakya* (1991), about the 4th century BCE political and economic theorist. While *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* worked to lay the foundation of Hinduism, *Chanakya* created the illusion of an Indian state that stretched back thousands of years, encompassing the stories and values told in these Hindu epics.

In *Chanakya*, India is a state that has always existed. Chanakya, the titular character, is not only the father and defender of Ma Bharat in this series, but the protector of Hindu masculinity. Against the opulent courts of the incumbent king who humiliate him and acquiesce to Greek dominance, Chanakya runs a *gurukul*, in which he teaches his *Brahmacharyas* how to become Hindu warriors. A key aspect here is their celibacy, which must be maintained by engaging in rigorous physical exercise and training, while the weak emasculates of the court hand the 'nation' over to foreigners (1998: 243-258). This is contrasted, however, with the celibacy of Buddhist monks, who have failed to apply their ideals to the collective good of the motherland, and are emasculated by selfish individualised goals rather than protecting their nation. Thus, there is a duty for Hindu men in this ideology to be physically strong, to have control over their sexuality in order to increase their focus and physical strength, and to use this to defend their nation, which as a woman, reflects the honour of their religion. In this construction of masculinity, any other expression of sexuality not only runs counter to the true expression of masculinity, but runs counter to the nation, and to the religion. A man having sex with another man is like the king in *Chanakya* who lies in a drunken stupor while Greeks pillage the *Ma Bhoomi*, he has betrayed not only his gender but the Hindu *Rashtra*.

Such cultural nation-building efforts relied on the construction of a historically continuous concept of Hindu masculinity that had been suppressed and embarrassed by acquiescence to foreign rule and the appeasement of minorities (such as the effete Buddhists of *Chanakya*), and that would now be rescued by the RSS and its *Sangh Parivar*. It should not be understated how popular these series were. The 1987 *Ramayana* series was televised in 55 nations, and was watched by 650 million people (Hindustan Times, 2018). Such numbers are staggering; it is nearly ten times the population of the United Kingdom. In his book on television and politics, Arvind Rajagopal (2001), the interviews show a general feeling of nostalgia for a time when Hindus had honour and strength, as portrayed by the series. Now, one respondent claims, no son would go into exile for his father – he would tell his father to go instead (Rajagopal, 2001: 138). BJP leader L.K. Advani capitalised on this newfound religious fervour and launched his Rath Yatra, a journey across India, agitating for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya while VHP members swarmed alongside the chariot. The Yatra caused violence wherever it went, leading to Advani's arrest in Bihar. However, it was a success. The media, largely upper-caste and incensed by the Mandal Commission's implementation by V.P. Singh, saw the Hindu consolidation as a positive, and the use of Ram and Hindu gods in political rallies became more popular. Mulayam Singh Yadav of the (somewhat socialist, but primarily Yadav-caste focused) Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh declared that he was more devoted to Ram than BJP's Advani or Shiv Sena's Bal Thackeray, while VHP ran a campaign accusing him of appeasement, calling him "Mullah Mulayam" (2001: 196). The BJP outperformed all expectations, becoming the second largest party in the Lok Sabha. Hindutva ideology had become the mainstream.

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The growth of the Hindutva ideology in mainstream Indian political society in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in the spread of their concepts of the ideal Hindu male, which necessarily creates the ideal Hindu female (in keeping with the Ramayana theme, the chaste and dutiful Sita fulfils this role). A man, especially a Hindu man, who engages in same-sex relations is not just going against his own nature, but he risks the unity and security of the entire nation. Appeasement of minority groups, such as the effete Buddhist monks in *Chanakya* would allow a group with no loyalty to the nation to flourish, as the Congress and Janata Dal governments had allowed to do with Muslims. The symbolic politics that flourished after the airing of these religious and nationalistic serials would become the dominant politics of the day. The heteronormative gender roles that came from this ideology would be reflected in the judge and the senior superintendent's moral judgement of the HIV/AIDS workers, in the Shiv Sena's response to *Fire* and the government affidavit replying to the Naz Foundation's petition to read down Section 377. The role of British imperialism in creating a perceived vacuum of masculinity in whatever collective Hindu identity there was, alongside the challenges to this Hindu majority nation from crises such as Sikh separatists (who often mocked the femininity of Hinduism, see Veena Das 1995: 118-136) cannot be ignored in the Hindu Right's reassertion of their place in Indian politics. Thus, we can see that the growth of Hindutva ideology in India has reflected the British imperial presence and has utilised British notions of masculinity and the discursive toolkit provided by Section 377 to express their opposition to same-sex relations.

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Conclusion

The impact of British colonialism and specifically the imposition of Section 377 and British notions of masculinity on the perceptions and representations of same-sex intimacies and on the freedom of queer Indians to live openly and safely has been significant and pernicious. As I have shown, there was present in both Hindu literature and Mughal poetry a representation of gender fluidity and sexual intimacy between members of the same sex, and was reflected in contemporary Delhi society. This literary tradition largely went unchallenged in the Mughal context until women began to publish, and even then it received only light public scrutiny – there was certainly nothing akin to the ten years' imprisonment imposed by Section 377. Even up to the publication of Chughtai's *Lihaaf*, such expressions of same-sex desire were so normal that Chughtai claims she did not even know that she was writing of something outside the norm. The Manusmriti too, which the British regime uplifted in an attempt to find a Hindu Shari'a, had no equivalent punishment beyond a bath in one's clothes – the issue was not moral, or natural, it was purity, and applied solely to twice-born Hindus.

The British imposed a worldview that was internalised by the oppressed colonised subjects, as identified in the way Bengali men expressed their effeminate as the most feminine of all Indians, even up to the point that world famous and respected men like Swami Vivekananda perceived himself in this way. Such flawed perceptions of self, based in race science that Britain would now like to forget it applied, can be seen in India's queer community which struggles with high suicide and drug abuse rates due to the fear of stigma in a society that can be unrelenting in its efforts to shame and bully queer people.

There are records within Hindu texts and Indo-Islamic literature of terms such as *swayamvara sakhi* and *amrad parast* that show an acknowledgment of diverse sexual expressions within Indian cultures historically. While Hindutva groups in the RSS and the Sangh Parivaar may indeed see same-sex relationships as antithetical to what is Indian (read: Hindu), they either wittingly or unwittingly utilise a British and Judeo-Christian belief system to express it. We find little in the way of an indigenous expression of what we would deem homophobic attitudes, but we find plenty of evidence of same-sex intimacies and we find these in the most accessible sections of the population. Sexual economies of subaltern India and expressions therein are likely even more diverse.

This is not to say that there was never an indigenous *opposition* to same-sex relations. In the *Krittisava Ramayana*, the two wives had to be granted leave by Shiva to procreate together, and the child was initially born without bones until a sage blessed him. Women were generally under more scrutiny, as we saw in the controversy around *Rekhti* poetry. However, this is generally understood to be a response to emasculation by British colonialism, and Hindutva groups are utilising the discursive toolkit provided by Section 377 and British concepts of masculinity to express their opposition. In light of the evidence presented, it seems that the influence of British colonialism on the perception and representation of same-sex intimacies in Indian society was significant.

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