

Tones and Shades of Queer Rainbow

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Pablo Neruda in his Nobel Prize speech said, “*There is no insurmountable solitude. All paths lead to the same goal: to convey to others what we are. And we must pass through solitude and difficulty, isolation and silence in order to reach forth to the enchanted place where we can dance our clumsy dance and sing our sorrowful song - but in this dance or in this song there are fulfilled the most ancient rites of our conscience in the awareness of being human and of believing in a common destiny.*”

Since time, immemorial homosexuality has been looked down upon with abhor and detest. Though there has been a gradual affirmative shift, the deeply embedded homophobic attitudes expose many gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) to exploitation and discrimination.

The LGBTQ Literature has remained neglected and uncelebrated in the mainstream readership due to objections and censorship. The experiences of the gay and lesbian writers were considered unnatural and as something that can be treated medically. Thus, their writings have remained in the dark sections of libraries and have faced criticism across the globe.

Literature is a reflection of human life and it unfurls the true colours of the masses. Queer voices have been strangled and

stifled. Many of those who dared to write did so in the enclosed encroachments of the four walls, even though the representation of gay, lesbian and transgender people can be traced down from Homer’s *Achilles* to the *hijras* in *Kama Sutra*. In between the covers of the books you’ll find traces of love and loss, desire and lust, rage and grief and also the personal sexual orientation of the writers and poets throughout the bounds of time.

Sappho, who gave name to female homosexuality *Sapphic and Lesbian* and brought the hushed topic to the world’s stage and paved the way for future writers. The exploration of the relationship between David and Jonathan in *The King James Version* of the Bible has remained a hot topic of debate. Some call the relationship “platonic” and others consider it to be a “romantic” affair.

“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

(SAMUEL 18:1-4)

Was Shakespeare Bisexual? A question that has made scholars tear their hair out. Sonnets addressed to the ‘*Fair Youth*’ - “*the master-mistress of my passion*” have explored the elements of homoeroticism that can’t be brushed under the carpet.

Walt Whitman's *Calamus* was labelled 'obscene' and 'scandalous' for its themes of homosexuality. Emily Dickenson and Susan Gilbert's exchange of "passionate love letters" will always bewilder the readers and fill their hearts with wonder.

*Her breast is fit for pearls,
But I was not a "Diver" -
Her brow is fit for thrones
But I have not a crest.
Her heart is fit for home- [rest crossed out]
I - a Sparrow - build there
Sweet of twigs and twine
My perennial nest.*

(Emily's letter to Gilbert)

In the pantheon of gay writers, one can never miss out the name of Oscar Wilde, who led a dual life. A happy devoted husband and father in public while a passionate lover of Alfred Douglas in private. Eventually, his love for Lord Alfred Douglas gave rise to the most passionate public love letter '*De Profundis*'.

"You came to me to learn the Pleasure of Life and the Pleasure of Art. Perhaps I am chosen to teach you something much more wonderful, the meaning of Sorrow and its beauty."
(De Profundis)

Even in Ancient Indian Text from *Ramayan* to *Mahabharata* the reference to homosexuals and transgenders can't be put behind the curtain. *Shrikandini* and *Bhrihanalla* in *Mahabharata* and the manifestation of *Ardhanareshavr* both symbolize the amalgamation of the two genders into one entity.

Devdutt Patnaik explored queerness in Indian Mythology and brings to the surface the queer unheard voices present in the Hindu

culture. Ismat Chughtai was behind bars for her incredible work '*Lihaaf*' which explores the themes of lesbianism and sexuality.

"I woke up at night and was scared. It was pitch dark and Begum Jaan's quilt was shaking vigorously, as though an elephant was struggling inside." (*Lihaaf*)

Kamala Das '*My Story*' gives an account of her encounter with lesbian acts and her own attraction towards the same gender. Vishwanath Tripathi's novel *Nangatalai Ka Gaon*, and R. Raja Rao's novel *The Boyfriend* talk about gay representation and carve out a social and political space within the dominant heterosexual paradigm.

Silencing of the queer voices through censorship has always remained the most dangerous weapon. The voices even before they could make it to the readers were crushed under the feet like cigarette butt ends. Throughout the soiled pages of history, such writers who dared to explore this subject have remained buried deep under, locked in the dungeons of darkness and anonymity.

LGBTQ works not only broaden the moral spectrum of society but also become an explicit window to the existential struggle of the people in this community with their gender and body. These writings break the shackles of the structural social hegemony. However, queer literature does not provide a '2-minute instant solution' instead becomes a free space for all to thrive and celebrate their identities.

"Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim, Accept no one's definition of your life; define yourself."

-Harvey Fierstein