

Foregrounding Queer Spaces in Contemporary Indian English Fiction for Young Adults

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Abstract

The dimension of Indian young adult literature is far away from the mainstream literature. Nevertheless, there have been few known contributions of writers of post Raj like R. K. Narayan, Ruskin Bond and Mulk Raj Anand but it is not certain that their target readers are exclusively meant for adolescent readership. In fact, their readership is not directed by anybody in the Indian scenario. Since last decades there have been a tremendous change in the arena of young adult literature and that is the depiction of queer characters in the Indian English fiction. Here the word 'queer' has been used as an umbrella term for the LGBT community. Two novels "Slightly Burnt"(2014) by Payal Dhar and "Talking of Muskaan" (2014) by Himanjali Sankar have been selected for analysing queer spaces as exemplary of contemporary young adult Indian English fiction. Extending through the methodology of queer theory this article interrogates the narrative voices that claim heterogeneity as normal against homosexuality. Moreover, an attempt has been made to study and bring out the element of ambivalence delineated in the authorial voice, queer representations and the adolescent perspective.

Keywords: Queer, heteronormativity, adolescent, narrativity, ambivalence.

Introduction

Queer is used by some-but not all- LGBT people as an identity category including sexualities and gender identities that are beyond heterosexual and binary gender categories. Queer theory refers not to identity per se but to a body of theories that "critically analyzes the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 620). As Pinar (1998) noted, queer theory migrated from language and literary studies to education, "a highly conservative and often reactionary field" (p. 2). In education as in literary criticism, "queer theorists seek to disrupt normalizing discourses" (Tierney & C Dilley, 1998, p. 61), such as those that have been used historically to police teachers, students, and administrators at all levels of education (see Blount, 2005; Dilley, 2002b; Quinn & Meiners, 2009). Devdutt Pattanaik explicates in his *Shikhandi* (2014):

The celebration of queer ideas in Hindu stories, symbols and rituals is in stark contrast to the ignorance and rigidity that we see in Indian society. Some blame the British for making Indians defensive about being so 'feminine' and for criminalising, amongst many others, queer communities like the hijras and everyone else who indulges in 'sodomy' (a biblical word for sexual deviation that was practised in the ancient city of Sodom). Others blame Muslims for it, especially those particular traditions that frown upon all forms of sensual arts. Still others blame the Buddhist *vihara* and the Hindu matha traditions, which favoured yoga (restraint) over bhoga (indulgence). (Pattanaik 27-28)

As per political conventions in India a historic decision of the Delhi High Court decriminalized homosexuality and thus overturned the colonial law that had defined same-sex relationships and activity as an unnatural offence. In this decision, an aspect of the infamous Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code instituted by the British in 1860 was nullified on the grounds that the criminalization of consensual sexual acts in private infringed the fundamental rights guaranteed to the individual under the Constitution of India. Consensus is key in this judgment: non-consensual non-vaginal sexual acts continue to be considered a criminal offence. The decision is an outcome of a legal initiative taken by the Naz Foundation, a non-governmental organization, in the interest of the public. In her discussion of queer self-definition in India, Ruth Vanita comments on the efficacy of these 'empowering' terms, both in the context of queer activism and queer self-definition. Even with the decriminalization of homosexuality, what remains to be changed is the cultural perception of the queer subject as deviant, marginal, pathological or even demonic. The marginalism implicit in the colonial legal and cultural discourse continues in the present-day mainstream culture of the postcolonial locus. The cultural perception complicates the idea of coming out for the queer subject in India, who wants to reclaim his/her rights but is ambivalent about the idea of queer visibility. The closet, understandably, is a variable cultural construct: what forces decide where in the landscape of a locus a closet should be, and why?

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that space and spatial practices are social productions. Social (in Lefebvre's Marxist analysis, largely economic) practices are reproduced in spatial practices: "(Social) space is a (social) product...the space thus produced also acts as a tool of thought and action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (Lefebvre 26). According to Lefebvre, the hierarchy implicit in social relations influences spatial configuration and spatial practices. Space cannot be reified as an independent, neutral dimension preceding social relations, but is rather a product and a replication of them. He argues that "(social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder" (Lefebvre 73). Based on this argument, it seems reasonable to assume that the domination of the hegemonic ideology of heteronormativity is likely to affect the ordering of space. The spatial metaphor of a heterosexual 'center' with the non-normative sexualities situated in the 'periphery' could be understood in actual geographical terms. In a given locus, the spaces of 'power' and 'domination' are occupied by subjects who align themselves with the mainstream narrative of normative heterosexuality, and lend special significance to the metaphorical marginality of the queer subject. The spatial deployment of constructed environment emphasizes this deviation, with the production of gay 'ghettos' disassociated from the spaces of power and domination.

Analysis

Queer young adult fiction is an upcoming genre of young adult literature. The target age group in young adult literature ranges between ages 12 to 19. One of the approaches to define young adult literature is to consider what teens choose to read as opposed to what they are required to read and interestingly, that is decided by the experienced adults. Most teens choose books that publishing companies market as young adult literature, as well as books that are marketed for the adult readers. They select books with teen protagonists and seldom choose to read the traditional or the mainstream canon. While this approach, to define the genre, seems somewhat problematic, young adult literature is therefore, what they select to read, as sometimes they are forced to read books traditionally labelled 'young adult'. The world of young adults is more of a journey from fantasy to reality. During this process they pass through certain levels of experiences which are mostly associated with identity crisis, accepting the changes of adolescence, stretched family relationships, friendships and peer pressure, pains and pleasures of growing up, turmoils of school life, social matters related to gender and class discriminations subjected to identity fluidity as recurrent themes. They seek answers for the many disturbing occurrences like emotional and physical pandemonium, and personal and social traumas. Sometimes they do not even realise and recognise the root-cause of their anxieties.

Drawing on the work of Luce Irigaray and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Braidotti argues that the body is to be understood as "neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the material social conditions" (44). The body can be seen as "an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces. This notion of body as "threshold" is especially useful when describing the adolescent body on the threshold of adulthood. She names this the "nomadic" self, "a subjectivity 'beyond gender' in the sense of being dispersed, not binary; multiple, not dualistic; interconnected, not dialectical; and in a constant flux, not fixed" (50). It is clear from the understanding of Butler and Braidotti about the fluidity of gender pertaining to identity flux. Therefore, heteronormativity cannot be labelled as 'normal'. And this finds expression in novels like Payal Dhar's *Slightly Burnt* and Himanjali Sankar's *Talking of Muskaan*. Moreover, an emerging trend is always in the process of changing and state of flux. In the Indian context such works of fiction break the fixed doctrines of heteronormativity.

Children's and YA literature in India, as a distinct branch has been gradually spreading its wings in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Historically, India has been acknowledged as the fountainhead of ancient oral narratives like the *Panchatantra* and *Katha Sarit Sagara* which have been adapted into the children's literature for ages. Though there is a surge in the publication of children's books, it is a fact of concern that there is a dearth of academic research in the field of children's literature in India compared to the Western countries.

Getting into the realm of LGBTQ themed novels in Indian YA literature is even a rare phenomenon but not unnoticed. According to Jagose, queer notions are not the blending together of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, although it does pay particular attention to sexual and gender identities such as these (Jagose, 1996). Pinar says, rather, it is the suspension of these classifications (Pinar, 1998). As far as queer theorists are considered Britzman says that they recognize sexual and gender identities as social, multiple, variable,

shifting, and fluid; and while they allow for movement among such identity categories they advocate for movement outside of these categories as well (Britzman, 1997). By rejecting categories of identity, queer theorists interrogate and disrupt notions of normal, with particular respect to sexuality and gender (Tierney & Dilley, 1998), but not limited to these identities. It is these two key ideas—that is, understanding sexual and gender identities in complicated ways and valuing disruptions of norms—which is to be discussed on the grounds of the two contemporary Indian English queer young adult novels, Payal Dhar's novel, *Slightly Burnt* (2014) and Himanjali Sankar's *Talking of Muskaan* (2014). Foundational to understanding sexual and gender identities in complicated ways is the belief that these identities are not essential or even developmental but instead are poststructural. Essentialism “ascribes a fundamental nature or a biological determinism to humans” (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996, p. 336). Still, this view is, according to Sears (1998), the “most common view of sexuality . . . [that is] sexuality as a universal human trait” (p. 83). From an essentialist perspective, identity is understood in singular and stable terms and as essential to one's being. It may take some time for one to recognize and claim it, but an individual's identity is there all along, and it will continue to be there throughout one's life. A developmental perspective is not really a break from an essentialist one as much as it is a complication of it. In both essential and developmental approaches, it is understood that one develops one's identity over time in a mostly linear fashion toward a definite identity considered as true. What distinguishes the essentialist model from the developmental model is emphasis. When one embraces an essentialist notion of identity, one emphasizes the true, core, inherent identity and glosses over the process of getting into it. When one embraces a developmental model of identity, the reverse is true; that is, one focuses on the processes of coming to an identity, which is assumed but not discussed as fixed. The ‘straight’ world of the mainstream represents not only those who considered non-heterosexual attractions to be deviant and perverse, but also those who considered sexual identity to be consistent across an individual's life. Jenkins' and Michael Cart's landmark 2006 study of LGBTQ literature, *The Heart Has Its Reasons*, reports that LGBTQ young adult literature “has begun to move-as have many of the individual titles that comprise it-towards assimilation, moving, that is, from being an isolated or ‘ghettoized’ subgenre to becoming a more integrated part of the total body of young adult literature” (128). They also note that the treatment of LGBTQ young people “has become more expansive and, as a result, readers now get to observe the increasing opportunities for assimilation that occur after the dramatic moment of coming out” (165). This is key to the fact that LGBTQ young adult protagonists and secondary characters can now have a life beyond coming out.

Evolving from its original position of opposition to mainstream YA fiction, the body of YA literature with gay/lesbian content has developed its own conventions based on a new set of perceived truths about identity. The queer culture itself is a latest trend in popular culture. Precisely, young adult literature is far away from the mainstream literature and more so when it comes to queer adolescent literature. Therefore the teenage period is considered to be within the gamut of children literature. Now coming to readership there has been limited scope for novels exclusively for teenagers. Nevertheless, there have been a spectrum of fiction for teens in the last decade. To be precise writers like Payal Dhar and Himanjali Sankar have attempted with a novice way of story-telling to the adolescents about queerness.

Considering the authorial voices and the queer representations in both the novels the commonality lies in the way how the notion of heteronormativity is crushed to another dimension. Muskaan is observed closely by her friends whereas Sahil and Vikram are not even identified till the half of the novel by the homodiegetic narrator. Muskaan is shown more of a victim and victimised character whereas Sahil and Vikram in *Slightly Burnt* are not portrayed as victims. Moreover, the authorial voice is blurred with the adolescent perspective which is depicted in the state of incredulity that makes the narrator, Komal run to a counsellor, who helps her recognise that the distinction between what is normal and abnormal is a myth and that it is solely relational to circumstances and one's way of mindfulness. The question here is if in queer spaces there is gender discriminations in the portrayal of male and female gays. Nevertheless, the plots and writers of both the novels are different. What comes under interrogation is the depiction of the queer characters in young adult Indian fiction. Their treatment as the other is obvious in both the works. But none of their voices get enough space to express their true self. Precisely, the queer voice is missing in both contexts. In fact, the readers are unable to perceive the workings in the mind of the queer characters. Another question arises at this juncture is regarding the adolescent perspective of looking at such a diversity. Nevertheless, commonality in both lies in portraying the pictures as real rather than something related to the fantasy world. It has been found that the notion of ‘being queer’ has been introduced to the young adult group by those narrative voices who consider themselves as normal adolescents pertaining to societal norms. At this juncture, not much of a space is provided to the parents of the queer characters in both the two novels. Furthermore, the inner voice of neither Muskaan nor Sahil, Vikram could be heard and perceived because the authorial voice projects elsewhere. In fact, the

episode in which the criminalizing of homosexuality comes on television Komal's aunt and her father's reaction reflected the common Indian mass who still stays in the colonial set-up of mind. It is a known fact that the homophobic legacy of the British Empire dates back 157 years to a dark part of imperial history. In a system dictated by Victorian Christian morality, any form of intimacy that was not geared towards having and raising children was unacceptable. Homosexual desire was the worst of these offences. With such a rigid vision in mind, the empire implemented Section 377 in the Raj. The law made it a criminal offence to engage in any form of 'unacceptable carnal desire'. Perpetrators could be jailed, given a heavy fine, or both. The law was further exported to Australia, South-East Asia and African British colonial outposts as well. Now the point is the current scenario in Indian context which is breaking the norms subsequently that is prevalent in the contemporary novels chosen.

Getting into Dhar's *Slightly Burnt*, the novel is in first person narrative, in the voice of a 17 years old, straight girl named Komal and her perception of life and acceptance towards her best friend, Sahil, when she discovers him with her own brother, Vikram, intertwined in a homosexual relationship. Despite the fact, it is not clear that Vikram and Sahil share a pure, true and complete queer relationship. For her it was a shock and surprise she thought that she knew both of them very well since childhood. Her mistaken perception has taken a separate route because things were not as the way she thought it to be. Dhar makes Komal visit the "senior school counsellor" Usha McDowell often who helps her understand the changes she is going through and how to deal with it. In this matter, there is less role played by both of Komal's and Sahil's parents. For instance, Komal's father insists her brother, Vikram, to play cricket to which he disagrees. Similarly, the character of Neeli Maasi, their distant aunt, is a portrayal of such category of Indian mass which considers the queer community as social evils. Therefore, she commented, "These people...chhee" to express her disgust for them, (p. 122). On a similar note, Komal's father commented, "Don't worry about it...It isn't for people like us" (p. 122). This incident happened when the TV news flashed on the Supreme Court recriminalizing homosexuality, the 377 verdict. Here, it is required to be understood that Komal's voice is not of a queer adolescent but of an Indian adolescent girl who initially fails to perceive the nature of fluid dynamics. The character of Komal also represents a class of teenagers who undergo various changes in juxtaposing accepted and rejected laws. Bringing upon Pramod K. Nayar's opinion on queer culture, he says,

Changing family norms, notions of childhood and the role of parents construct the individual homosexual in particular ways. The emphasis on reproductive sex, the insistence on marriage and the laws against sodomy also influence and socially construct the gay (188).

This can be clearly justified from Komal's curiosity in the novel:

But it's not just movies and Mills & Boons, is it? It's all around us, hammering into our heads – sometimes directly, sometimes not – that boys like girls and girls like boys and that's the way the world goes round. Telling you what you should like rather than helping you figure out what you do like (Dhar 166).

Moreover, in the novel, it is the straight narrator who is shocked to find her friend and brother together at the terrace. It is Komal who is curious and visits a counsellor and neither Sahil nor Vikram visit any therapist unlike her. Sahil is curious only when Vikram sends him anonymous letters. It is not clear whether Sahil already knows about Vikram's letters and pretends before Komal or in actuality he is unaware of the latter's feelings. The development of feelings between Sahil and Vikram is shown to be very natural because their families are closely connected. Rather it is the way of looking of the society, which also includes Komal, her Daddy and people like Neeli Maasi, which is initially unacceptable by the narrator. This reflects when she retrospects after discovering Sahil as gay:

How could it have happened? Sahil had always been such a normal boy. He wasn't girly or anything, it's not like he used to play with dolls or wanted to wear dresses. I know that much. He's good at sports too. He lives in a normal home and all. So, yeah, back to my question – how could something like this happen? (63)

This reveals the inner consciousness of Komal who thinks that a boy who is like or behaves like a girl is a gay. This is what is commonly perceived by the so-called Indian society and the indoctrinations of what is normal and what is not. Looking back to Indian mythology, Devdutt Pattanaik argues:

When the queer is pointed out in Hindu stories, symbols and rituals ('Why does Krishna braid his hair as a woman's plait and wear a nose ring like a woman? Why does the Goddess take on the masculine role of a warrior, with a female companion by her side, as she rides into battle on a lion? Why is Shiva

half a woman but Shakti not half man?’), they are often explained away in metaphysical terms. No attempt is made to enquire, interrogate and widen vision. Thus is queerness rendered invisible. (Pattnaik 31)

Prior to the argument above Pattnaik also states:

The celebration of queer ideas in Hindu stories, symbols and rituals is in stark contrast to the ignorance and rigidity that we see in Indian society. (Pattnaik 27)

Deciphering from Pattnaik’s arguments Hindu mythology is in conflict with the modern Indian society. The mythological figures, characters and deities who are worshipped are not questioned in the name of values and customs by the common Indian society. Interrogations would demean and disrespect the Indian value system so Shiv-Shakti is worshipped but a transgender is ostracized. This is, perhaps, the irony that Devdutt Pattnaik is pointing out. Nevertheless, coming back to the novel *Usha*, the counsellor, clears up Komal’s mind saying:

‘There is nothing abnormal about him... Nothing to fix, nothing to cure. It’s as normal- or abnormal- as being straight... The only thing that’s changed is how you look at him, nothing else. And that’s just in your head.’ (78)

From the above it is more of Dhar being the counsellor answering and explicating things to the curious adolescent mind who falls into the spectrum of being straight. But the voices of the gay characters are not expressed as explicitly as the narrator who considers heteronormativity to homosexuality. It is just what Komal observes and sees in them like being vigilant on their activities after she discovers Sahil and Vikram’s terrace incident. Therefore, a queer voice does not find expression here because this scope and space is subjected to a straight narrator’s observation. Either she can criminalize them influenced from the society or she can decriminalize them influenced by the queer community. It is her perspective that Dhar attempts to percolate by bringing in the character of a counsellor.

Another instance that Dhar makes is an indirect reference through Komal’s justification on the typical Indian orthodox mentality is B. F. Skinner’s famous experiment on operant conditioning:

Remember that scientist guy who rang a bell before feeding his dog? After a while, every time he rang the bell, the dog would start drooling, anticipating food. Or something like that. That’s what we are like – stupid dogs who are trained to think in a certain way (Dhar 166).

Moreover, there is a difference between Komal talking to her readers on one hand and voicing the other on another track. In fact the role of parents towards this narrative is quite limited as evident from the novel. Sahil’s father is dead already and mother’s character is just like a little more than a passing reference by Komal. In that matter, Vikram and Komal’s parents share more space in the novel than rest parents just because she is a homodiegetic narrator. Her involvement with her parents is more than the others. At another instance Komal asking Sahil for his future marriage plans. To this his reply is:

‘Are two guys allowed to get married anyway?’

‘Not in this country.’ (Dhar 100)

Considering queer young adult fiction in an Indian context Devika Rangachari explains in her article, “YAL in India – Gender as an Issue” (2014) that “traditional and cultural constraints have made the development of a modern young adult literature difficult in India; hence, the very applicability of the term is 162 debatable in the Indian context” (Muse India). She further explains that as a consequence, gender as an issue in books for children in English in India was not considered particularly significant until very recently. However, she expresses hope that there are certain notable works that strongly foreground girls, portray them in non-stereotypical terms or raise pertinent gender issue. The socio-cultural situations and traditions too determine the nature of YAL since currently their circumstances vary in different countries. Considering another novel, Himanjali Sankar’s *Talking of Muskaan* is one such effort contributed towards young adult fiction in the Indian context in which the protagonist is a queer character as observed and judged by the typical Indian society at an urban setting. It is a work of fiction, written in English, for Young Adult (YA) Indian readers. This could be described as a poignant coming of age story, or a poignant coming of age homosexual story or simply as the story of 15-year-old Muskaan who comes out to her closest friends at school only to face a wall of senseless opposition, cruel bullying and deep, dark ignorance. No matter this novel has been termed as an Indian queer young adult fiction the loaded theme is treated such that any teenager with a disparate thought

process would encounter, such as, heartbreak and prejudice, are ambidextrously woven into the everyday fabric of urban English-speaking young India.

The narrative is structured into three different voices reflecting three different perspectives and insights that opionate the way how Muskaan can be looked at rather than she voicing for herself. The story goes five months back as narrated by three of her classmates: Aaliya, her best friend since childhood; Prateek, the poor-little-rich-boy 'antagonist' and Subhojoy, Muskaan's newest friend. The entire narrative is more of *what she is* than *who she is* because her version of the incidents are told by her friends than she telling about them. Right from the inception "*Muskaan hadn't come to school*" (Sankar 1) till the end it is prominently a *talking-about-Muskaan* as intended by the author. Due to this fact, the voice of the talked about protagonist is silenced as perceived by the readers. Nevertheless, it is learnt mostly from her actions that Muskaan's inner voice is understood. For instance, in the waxing incident she preferred to remain natural and hairy unlike her friends who think it to be quite an obvious and normal matter to any teenage girl to wax her legs, hands and underarms, besides wooing an opposite sex.

From a hindsight the three narrators give an impression of their social set-up too. For instance, their respective families like Aaliya's socialite-and-cultured parent, Prateek's rich-but-conservative parents including his Tauji and Subho's hand-to-mouth and simply led parents. Yet, in contrast, Muskaan reflects more daring and coming out personality that is lacked by all of them. No matter how much she is bullied but her behavioural patterns do not change despite her circumstances.

Muskaan attempting suicide is a consequence of the conflict between her inner self and external self which gives rise to an identity split. During this state of mind a teenage youth and especially if that's a queer girl, she suffers from identity confusion leading further towards identity crisis. At that point of time the familial support holds a significant value, just as Aaliya and Subho supported Muskaan, being her close friends, though the former disconnects with her in the middle of the story.

The narrative ends in such a way that if both the selves inside out are at a balance they can complement each other which helps the adolescent youth to come out with confidence and pride. But the question is whether the social system like family and friends support and accept such differences or not. It is quite controversial for a nation like India where homosexuality was criminalized earlier during the colonial era and de-criminalized currently. Prateek's family is a lucid example of the class of people who does not accept such dynamics and look at them as a threat to the society and culture. Gradually, the trend is changing and that is contemplated by the characters of Muskaan's family, Aaliya and Subho including Prateek whose perception begins to change later. The latter is a popular, spoilt and rich teenager who is very influenced by his conservative family and is unaccepting of differences. Extreme pampering and reinforcement of a view that he is always right makes him unwilling to accept Muskaan's way of being. Her struggle with getting an identity for herself makes her seem outright rude but as her narration about Muskaan progresses she seems to have a better understanding of Muskaan and what she might be going through. But again, that is entirely her voice, her mind speaking not Muskaan. Subhojoy is also an outsider to society and understands Muskaan better than anyone. Subhojoy is not from an affluent family and believes in hard work. He is good at studies and mostly keeps to himself. He becomes friends with Muskaan quite unexpectedly. Subhojoy accepts who she is unquestionably. He is also willing to stand up for her when she was at the verge of breaking down. Subhojoy has been portrayed as an ideal friend who also becomes one of the major reasons indirectly for her consequences. Despite multiple narrators, Muskaan's inner voice cannot be clearly depicted. Rather, it is talking about more of Muskaan's situation and not the way she feels or goes through. Nevertheless, both social and psychological factors are responsible for Muskaan's condition.

Muskaan is a heretic character who refuses to be like the other girls. Dressing up, waxing, hairdos, they are just not her interests. Everyone thinks she is weird and most of her classmates try to bully her into being like everyone else. Here her role is prominent more as a victim targeted by the society who considers being queer as a misfit. Her gang of friends, Rashika, Srinjini, Divya and Aaliya who were really close to her at one point of time, start bullying her too. Muskaan is unable to understand others' treatment towards her. In this novel, the social conditions and treatments are emphasized than the workings of her mind and how she grows out of it.

Young women like the protagonist in this fiction, struggling to find a place in their world, fight social prejudice against homosexuality, and equally against women asserting their right to be individuals. Early in the narrative it is witnessed Muskaan being browbeaten into joining a communal waxing session with her

friends. She eventually walks out of the gathering refusing to allow herself to be depilated, “It's almost like a cult thingy [to wax oneself]. Like one has to do this to belong, whether one wants to or not” (Sankar 17).

Well-educated, otherwise independent-minded heterosexual women in India conform and subject themselves to all sorts of patriarchal rules. They raise their daughters within the same limited confines. Teenagers like Muskaan's friends, Rashika, who later becomes ‘school hottie’ Prateek's girlfriend, and Aaliya who shares a conflicted kiss with Muskaan early on in the novel are raised to believe in conformity and inhabit a circumscribed woman's space. Sankar creates conflict at first and then assertiveness in both these women characters. Just as Rashika liberates herself of Prateek and his self-centered relationship Aaliya who visits Muskaan at the hospital after the attempted suicide, freely and without shame responds her sedated friend ‘right on her lips’. Therefore, towards the end of the novel Sankar attempts to throw back a vision of an accepting society which hints at the dismantling of heteronormativity.

Conclusion

Indian society is an assimilation of cultures in pluralities. As far as coming out from a closet is concerned various aspects may be considered like young adult readership, author intention, publishing and publicity of such fictional works, author's interpretation and understanding of the young adult readers. The authorial or narrative voice may be such that adolescents of any gender and sexuality can relate with (the characters) and not lead towards misguidance or cause aggression. Reality may be presented and re-interpreted as a rebirth of a new literature. Just like after every destruction there is a renewal process evolving, similarly, drawing upon the Hegelian dialectics, this genre of literature is a product of an emergent culture which would not be left unchallenged but will be at a continuous state of flux. Therefore, terms like ‘normal’, ‘standard’ and ‘absolute’ hold no fixed meanings and queer trend in young adult literature is not only a path-breaking attempt in Indian set-up but is open to be contested by yet another emergent culture. In ancient Vedic scriptures and Puranas the tales of deities are glorified. For instance a devotee of Lord Krishna will not interrogate why the deity is adorned like a woman. In fact the cult of Shiva-Shakti signifying both male and female in unified form will have different perspective of interpretation from a transgender community. Such gender fluidities have been already depicted in Hindu scriptures of having many changed avatars among gods and goddesses. Therefore, neither queer spaces nor heteronormativity can be claimed to be normal and of standard. The plurality of voices can be justified from expression of their own voice rather than the representation of the self by the other.

This can be concluded considering the position of the upcoming genre in Indian context quoting from Devdutt Pattnaik's “Shikhandi” :

All things queer are not sexual

All things sexual are not reproductive

All things reproductive are not romantic

All things romantic are not queerless (Pattnaik 36)

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