



## RE-DE-MINI NARRATING THE LITERARY DIALOGUES ON LGBTs: ASPIRATIONS & POSSIBILITIES

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### ABSTRACT

Flabbergasted, perplexed, desperate and dejected would be the state of mind of LGBTs and gender right activists when they come across the code number 'nine' assigned to transgender and 'other' sexual minorities in the gender identity column of the 6th Economic Census forms. Many literary narrations have already mini narrated the survival and the needs of the LGBTs. More than enough documents, poems, fictions and dramas and other forms of genres have come up, but still the otherwise post-postmodernist 21<sup>st</sup> century is not ready to get rid of its patriarchal remnants. Are LGBTs not mini narrated enough or should the path of literary genres that could possibly make changes in the minds of people who are the carriers of meta-narrations be deconstructed and post-post structured? This paper strives to re-de-mini narrate the literary dialogues on sexual minorities with reference to Mahesh Dattani's 'Do the Needful' and Manju Kapur's 'A Married Woman'.

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The gender identity column in the Sixth Economic Census Forms (Tamil) has broken the hearts of LGBTs. Again the struggle had to be started from the scratch by the LGBT community, activists, and supporters of queer people. When the Delhi High Court repealed the Indian penal code 377 on July 2, 2009, supporters of LGBTs thought that India has entered into the democratic space where most of the countries were already in. Legal reforms are merely superficial and they hardly get to change the depths of conventionality that are embedded in people's minds. The true color of semi feudal India has come to the lime light proving the seemingly progressive society to be actually retrogressive. The achievement of queer community that was believed to be won by

their tireless struggle has been thwarted by a simple gender identity column where male has been identified with code 1, female with code 2, and transgender with code 9. This is not a simple juggle between numbers, but the contemptuous grin of the Indian male dominated society that has been using number 9 to tease the transgender for a very long time. Indian society and its semi feudal and semi colonial characters made it oscillate from one side to the other. Subsequently it becomes the crux of character of India. For example Shobaa De in her article titled "Gandhiji- A Gay Icon" proudly says:

"We have grown up! That is the best news ever! Today, homosexuality is no longer a taboo subject and is out there ...

along with other aspects of sex... Wokay, buddy. If you say so... Let us hope whatever it was that Gandhiji shared with Kallenbach did indeed bring a lot of joy and fulfillment to both their lives. Gandhiji as a Gay Icon? Why not? I think that's pretty cool!"

(shobaade.blogspot.com)

The above quoted bold words sharply contrast with her novel *Strange Obsession*, which is a scathing attack on LGBTs, especially lesbians. Mini narrations on this tabooed area of LGBTs were seen as the way to their freedom by many. The post 90s opened up space for queer writings. Literary dialogues that were with particular people addressing the particular community have been forcefully hijacked by grooming but well politicized writers. They dialogue on everything that was left out by their conventional and orthodox ancestors. The genres like dramas, novels, poems, queer film festivals, facebook pages, meetings and other forms of explorations on these issues faked quite convincingly that the society's outlook on this issue has remarkably changed. But the semi feudal mode of production that is prevailing in India has taken all back to the same rigid society where transgenders were mocked at during the days and sexually exploited at nights. When Stalin says about the national question, he says that when revolution sprouts out many unknown nations will come up. Similarly, when gender revolution sprouts out, many self-considered so called trivial gender issues would come to the forefront. Though if these so-called trivial gender issues are not addressed, they would at least be recognized. In gender revolution, literatures are the literary extension of superstructures. The sudden booming of LGBTs and the writings on them gave a sort of hope and understanding to all the activists concerned that mini narration of gender relations is in the process of eliminating the darkness that clouded them.

When one would step back and ponder the road that sexual minorities have trod over the ages in both society and literary works, he or she can find harsh realities tarnished and tuned to the ways of thinking of the pseudo-democratic moralistic crowd. The very word "homosexual" has

branched out of homophobia in the society, first coined in Germany as a medical-legal term. It has been projected as the 'Other' though it is very much within us, as it is beyond us-the Self. Thus homosexuals and other sexual minorities are constantly been alienated beginning from the ideas of Oriental licentiousness and Erotic East of the Western intellectuals including Foucault, to the present day Indian conventionalists' constant remark to homosexuality as a remnant of foreign invasions. Though Foucault had brought to light the facts that sexuality and gender have had their history, he has so evidently muddled up homosexuality in his writing, and the history he speaks of is a tainted one. He was clearly biased and had imagined the East to be totally erotic and acknowledged it for any streak of sexual abnormality. Michael J.Sweet writes,

"Such societies according to Foucault, possess an "ars erotica" of pragmatic sexual love for the connoisseur... it is clearly the model for his notion of the Eastern erotic treatise, distinguished from the rationalistic and controlling modern Western *Scientia Sexualis*. This awesome display of willful ignorance surely must have arisen from a desire to shock plodding academics" (79)

Literary works thus began by introducing sexual minorities as the 'Other'. Gradually, the West started portraying them in fiction and plays though homosexuality was considered illegal and condemned heavily even there for quite a long time. Mini-narrating sexual minorities by many writers who had taken as a cause to bring to limelight their problems and tribulation they undergo in their everyday lives have been there for quite a while. This mini-narration has done seemingly great things in the West, and the changes have been surprisingly good, if not the best. However, in India, repealing of the Indian Penal Code 377 might be the only positive result in the struggle for the rights and acceptance of sexual minorities. Sadly enough there are a very few writers who talk of gender and sexual rights of LGBTs in this country. The few writers who had brought up the issues of LGBTs include Mahesh Dattani, Kamala Das, Manju Kapur and Anita Nair amidst a few others. The works of Kamala Das and Ismat Chughtai have

been openly condemned as obscene for having unraveled the long-hidden homosexuality in Indian households, thus tarnishing the so-called sanctity of the Indian culture. Any amount of mini-narrating the sexually oppressed in literary works may not be enough as there is a constant and ever-omniscient heterosexuality and exaltation of masculine culture deeply embedded in the minds of individuals. Also, these mini-narrations have persistently and unwittingly portrayed the LGBTs as the other, trying to create a utopian world for them, thus again alienating them. Of course the existing binary constructs of the human mind should be broken and broadened to let in the third genders/ homosexuals and other sexual minorities, but this poses a definite problem of creating an ideal and alienated world for them, making this kind of mini-narration wanting and quite ineffective. These texts try to include them in the society driving the undercurrent that they are minorities, and that they face many challenges for following alternative sexuality. This seems to be the bare bone of all works that speak for and against the LGBTs throughout.

Leela Gandhi speaks of the utopian space that mini-narration of sexual minorities unwittingly creates thus making them far distant than they are from the human societies. She opines thus on Monique Wittig's *'The Straight Mind'* "By imagining homosexuality as a third position outside the binary of sex- indeed outside the social contract itself- Wittig secures a powerfully utopian provenance for the activity of homosexual identification" (88)

But such mini-narration of the LGBTs had been a dire necessary to bring them to the limelight, out of the accursed darkness. Once out, too much of attention on them seems to create an overt image which people mock at, and alienate as the 'other' as the bi-polar heterosexual mind find it difficult to embrace new genders and sexualities. This provides the minorities only two choices, either to live in the dark, or get exposed and thus alienated from the society.

Mahesh Dattani, greatly acclaimed for having brought out the plight of homosexuals in Indian theatre, has quite deliberately and skillfully exposed the needs and desires of a gay man caught in the entangled mess of hypocritical heterosexual

marriage, in his play *'Do the Needful'*. Boldly written, this play projects the hidden presence of homosexuality amidst common beings, in common surroundings, and how they are forced to live their lives in the dark, unable to proclaim their sexual orientation as they form the oppressed and greatly condemned minorities. In a strict orthodox conventional but hypocritical household setting which is quite common in India, Dattani has fused in the trauma of a homosexual by creating a gay protagonist, Alpesh who constantly hides and still tries to live by his sexual orientation. He is forced by his parents into marriage though his first marriage with a girl had ended in a divorce. He hints that his second marriage with Lata might also prove a failure, but meekly succumbs to his mother's views later on.

"Alpesh: Yes. All right. I give up. If you like her, I will marry her"

"Alpesh (*thought*): Trilok, you can't say I din't try." (125)

He is ashamed and scared to disclose his sexual identity to his parents who are typically conventional, and so is forced to lie and invent new reasons to stay out of a heterosexual marriage.

"Alpesh: I am happy being alone." (125)

Alpesh's love for Trilok is mentioned right from the beginning of the play, as he craves for physical union with him. This actually makes his homosexual identity quite transparent to the audience.

"Alpesh (*thought, over the drum*): Love me, Trilok! Yes! Kiss me. Oh! Oh! Oh! Ooooh!" (143)

Alpesh indulges in sexual intercourse with Mali, a helper in Lata's farm. When Lata finds them in the act, Mali begs for her pardon and pleads her to keep it a secret. This scene visibly shows the ignorant nature of Mali, a country dweller who is more inclined to the society's rigid heterosexual way of living than Alpesh. Mali considers the very act that he enjoyed a few moments back shameful. He also tries to make Lata understand her subservience to Alpesh by saying that she should remain with him though he is a gay.

"Mali: I will never do anything shameful again!" (154)

"Mali: Then you will stay? Your happiness is at his feet." (155)

Because of his parents' and society's expectations Alpesh marries Lata, and sadly ponders over his love for Trilok, caught firmly between the pseudo-democratic, pseudo-postmodern society and his 'abnormal' love for another man.

"Alpesh (*thought*): Trilok I don't know how much I am actually going to say to you. I assume you will not understand some of it. I am certainly not going to tell you about Mali. One more lie, I guess. I am used to it." (156)

Dattani portrays Alpesh as living a life of lies as he constantly tries and fails to adapt himself to the rigid ways, and later decides to fulfill his desires and live according to his sexual orientation. He succumbs like many other Indians to the hypocritical ways of life, as the society and his parents refuse to see him for what he is and instead looks at him for what he is supposed to be a dutiful husband. Alpesh's true identity is not exposed even at the end of the play for he would certainly not stand a chance of acceptance in the strictly conventional and highly hypocritical Indian setting.

Manju Kapur brilliantly pens the unseen agonies of a married woman and the blissful serenity that she gains from her lesbian relationship with another woman, in her novel '*A Married Woman*'. The protagonist Astha is seen evolving from a young romantic girl in her late teens through marriage, the difficulties of being an 'Indian' wife, to a mature woman in her early forties with her husband, two children and her aged in-laws to look after. The physical, emotional, mental and spiritual growth of Astha is vividly portrayed as she experiences the myriad mysteries and tastes that life offers her. Here, the tranquility that she gains through her lesbian affair is seen as a definite foil to her challenging heterosexual marriage.

The very idea of a lesbian relationship between teenage girls was unimaginable by Aijaz though Pipeelika tells him that her first love was a girl from her school, and dismisses it as a trivial misconception of adoration as love.

"Her name was Samira.'... 'You were in love with a woman?'" (129)

Astha discovers her love for Pipee quite amazing, and relishes every moment of it as it greatly

contrasts with her love for her husband. This gives her, her much needed space and a life of her own, comforting her in all her domestic endeavours. Moreover, she is made visibly conscious of her physical appearance and realizes her beauty only through the eyes of Pipee. She fantasizes their physical union too, engraving their love deeply in their bodies.

"She started to fantasise about touching her, imagined her hair between her fingers, her skin beneath her own, her hands on the back of her neck." (225)

Astha is torn between choosing her secure family life and her relationship with Pipee. Though this lesbian relationship alone offers them comfort in their equally tormented lives, Astha like any other conventional 'Indian' woman chooses her family and children to her own comfort and desire. She feels obliged to her family as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law and refuses to walk out of her marriage into Pipee's welcoming hands. Her guilt takes the better of her than her love for Pipee though it is her only solace.

"For a brief and guilty moment she wished she was like Pipee, alone and free, but she checked herself. A large part of her belonged to her children, that was how she lived her life." (231)

Pipeelika, heartbroken, tells Astha that she had not expected a woman to break her heart, and thought that things would be different with women. Later, she regrets for having had an affair with a married woman as Astha refuses to walk out of it.

"I had thought that with a woman it would be different-" (268)

In both the works taken for a reading, the very sexual orientation is hidden in the background, and the readers and audience are only given a glimpse of it as an alienated identity though both Dattani and Manju Kapur support the LGBTs. Though the literary narrations have started talking about LGBTs, they time and again fail as ineffective. Mere words and few wordy consolations cannot solve the problems of the sexually marginalized. The literary dialogues and other super structural changes that happened so far in the society have proved that they

are not sufficient. The socially, economically and psychologically driven deconstruction on mini narration of LGBTs is the need of the hour. The failed mini narrations should be deconstructed and again mini narrated. A sharp blow on the male dominated mode of production alone can give the freedom that LGBTs aspire.

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