

“Comprehending Queer: An Analysis of Gender Identities in Indian Literature”

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Abstract

Over the time, one has realised that the world is progressing in science, technology, intellect, and every realm possible. But what if one were to know that what is now called progressive is actually getting arisen from a novel regression? What if one encounters that the world was at the brim of utopia in the prehistoric age? What if the structure was not centred thousands of years back? These questions become harder to answer since it is impossible to time travel and understand a two thousand year old status quo- its culture, society, arts, and science. But literature of a particular era has always been reflective of its society. Therefore, the paper's concern is to evaluate the equality of gender(s) in pre-historic times. This will be done with regard to the Indian Literature; especially those of the transgenders complementing the race with other genders. The essay will focus on establishing the view that the marginalized gender(s) of today's time (women, transgender, and queer) shared a comparatively better position in the puranic times. Instead of marginalization these identities were recognized as 'natural' and as equals. To validate this argument, the paper has analysed Devdutt Pattanaik's book *Shikhandi* and taken support of other gender readings in India.

Key Words: Queer, transgender, prehistoric age, puranic times, homosexuality, Shikhandi, Devdutt Pattanaik

Introduction

Gender, class, and religious equality have been perpetual concerns over centuries. Humanity is struggling for its rights in a constrained conventional society. Where developed countries like USA are already on their way of achieving absolute equality, developing countries like India are recently stimulated by the hovering concern of egalitarianism. The world is in a constant battle to establish just and equal rights for women, LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual), minority and backward classes. Yet the victory is not achieved. In order to understand the status of equality in the present, we must be able to comprehend equality in the past. Was the world emancipated of these concerns in

the prehistoric age? Were our ancestors free of the burden of equality? Perhaps, yes. Perhaps, they had relished the established equality among every realm possible. The past in Indian Literature is widely glorified for being just. This dissertation will be an attempt to establish the essence of the 'lost' equality of the prehistoric times simultaneously putting it in contrast with the contemporary struggle to achieve the same. The article will focus on the concept of gender equality, especially transgender and queer theory, in India. When asked about global and social acknowledgement by a transgender at the Town hall event held in 2015 in Delhi, India, Obama answered, "This is the reason why art is a powerful tool in social change." In agreement with the statement

and believing that the form of art not only propels change but also reflects to a nation's contemporary status quo, the paper will take the support of Indian Literature, myths, recorded historical facts, and few instances of Greek Literature to vindicate the idea of transgender equality.

Hypothesis

The 'puranic' literature suggests that the society before the Anno Domini was more progressive than the society of the 21st century. If not utopian, the social status was at least egalitarian and free off today's pondering issue of equality. There seemed to have prevailed harmony amongst gender, classes, castes, and various religious groups. It can be interpreted that our society which appears to be progressive globally seems to have been arisen from a novel regression. However, the change is not sudden. It has followed gradually over centuries. If one were to structuralise this change it would form a 'U' shape figure- where from the culmination point of B.C. we fell down to the regression of mid-16th century, later headed toward the progression which is not yet absolutely achieved in the 21st century. When the article speaks of progression and regression it is mostly and majorly in terms of society, social responsibility, and gender roles. To contemplate this trajectory of 'regression' and 'progression' gender roles will be taken in consideration. The article's primary concern under gender equality will include the eminence of transgender and queer tales, grounding this idea with the help of Devdutt Pattanaik's *Shikhandi*. The article assumes that the gender identities held a liberal position in the prehistoric age compared to the modern

times, thus it will attempt at proving the same.

Argument and Debate

Pattanaik starts his tales by establishing a unique aspect about queer. He says:

"All things queer
are not sexual
All things sexual
are not reproductive
All things reproductive
are not romantic
All things romantic
are not queerless"¹

Pattanaik makes clear that the definition of queer is beyond our imagination but to understand it is within the ability of human mind. To have a discourse on the equality or the dominant prevalence of queer instances, one must understand the term 'queer', its origin, and its ability to remain undefined. Gender is often understood as a binary term, a term that bifurcate sexes into either two or more than two parts, dominantly being male and female. These definitions of gender are thought to be outdated as they are ignorant of the diversities and possibilities of sexualities. However, terms like 'transgender' and 'queer' encapsulates sexualities that are dynamic and undefined. These terms seem to be unfit in a social and cultural structure. According to Judith Butler, 'gender' is a term socially constructed whereas 'sex' is natural and not man-made. Butler says:

"... gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes,... gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. In this sense, gender is always a doing."²

Similarly, Stryker points out:

Transgender studies, as we understand it, is the academic field that claims as its purview transsexuality and cross-dressing, some aspects of intersexuality and homosexuality, cross-cultural and historical investigations of human gender diversity, myriad specific subcultural expressions of “gender atypicality,”... Most broadly conceived, the field of transgender studies is concerned with anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood.³

Moreover, Queer Theory interpolates more into transgender studies. The term ‘queer’, introduced in 20th century, seems to have developed from gay and lesbian studies. The terminology not only inhabits transgender attributes but is far more open ended and congruous. First, it minimizes gender discourse and includes diverse sexuality. Second, it does not only encapsulates homosexuality, but it is inclusive than gay and lesbian studies, analysing, discussing, and debating sexual topics that are considered queer- that is odd, peculiar, or abnormal. Third, it

compartmentalizes instability of identity and sexuality, and diverse identities that do not lie under social construct of conventionality. According to them nothing can be defined abnormal, lacking, complete, or incomplete.

Devdutt Pattanaik explains this queerness elaborately in *Shikhandi*:

“... I have a man’s body. I reject this body. I desire no one.

I have a woman’s body. I reject this body. I desire no one.

I have a man’s body. I dress like a woman. I desire men.

I have a woman’s body. I dress like a man. I desire women.

I don’t know if my body is a woman’s or a man’s. I feel I am a woman.

I don’t know if my body is a man’s or a woman’s. I feel I am a man.

I am neither male nor female.

I am both male and female...

To appreciate this fluidity of nature
And the shifting rigidities of culture
Is to appreciate queerness.”⁴

He talks of this queerness through

“... stories of men who become women, and women who become men, of men who create children without women, and women who create children without men, and of creatures who are neither this, nor that, but a little bit of both...”⁵

Thus, queerness is appreciating all that is undefined and remains undefined; that is unconventional and free from societal norms; that is within and outside the realms of cultural barriers; that is free and fluid. *Shikhandi*- a queer character, the name itself, serves the idea of queerness. She is

universally known as a product of the most initial sex change who turns into a man to kill Bhishma. She also stands as one of the most known examples of queer identity in Indian mythology. Wendy Doniger in *On Hinduism* writes, "...Shikhandin retained her female gender when she lost her female sexuality. Indeed, it is imperative for Bhishma that Shikhandin is in essence (in this case, in gender) a woman, despite her outer male form."⁶ Thus, Pattanaik's book *Shikhandi* comprises of the most mesmerising, appalling, idiosyncratic, and atypical stories of queerness that presents the world more harmonious for the individuals with vivid and varied sexualities.

Sexes in prehistoric India and contemporary India have always held on to very different positions from each other. On one hand patriarchy seems to prevail dominantly in 21st century, whereas on the other hand seemingly all sexes had an almost equal status in the puranic times. To understand the position of queer identity of those times, it becomes necessary to evaluate all and every sex of the prehistoric age. The focal concern of gender discrimination reflects back to the availability of education to all the genders equally. Tharu and K. Lalita say, position of women is "...a steady decline from this golden age to the shadowy valleys of the period before the Muslim invasions."⁷ Today, activists struggle with the right to educate all genders equally, whereas it seems that the past was not burdened with this botheration; they had established a

unique platform of education for all genders. Eighth century Sanskrit scholar Bhavabhuti wrote a play, '*Uttara-ramacharita – The later deeds of Rama*', or '*Rama's later history*'. The play posits the idea of liberation of women in the realm of education through a conversation between two characters Vasanti and Atreyi. Tharu and Lalita marks Mutthulaxshmi Reddi's idea, "(R)eserved seats for women should not be thought of as a favour... They were only a means by which the present inequalities under which the women struggled could be acknowledged."⁸ Thus it can be interpreted that reservations work hand in hand with inequalities. Women, Dalits, and minority classes have held reservations because they have been considered unequal. In contrast with today's world where reservations have aided the marginalised with equal opportunities in education and profession, stands Atreyi enjoying co-education in folkloric times. Atreyi is concerned about her studies as she is unable to learn from her former teacher due to his preoccupation with his ongoing novel. She travels to South to complete her education from a famous scholar, Agastya. It is interesting to know that Atreyi's former professor is Valmiki occupied in writing Ramayana. In fact, Atreyi is not the only student learning under Valmiki, but her fellow mates are Lava and Kusa. Thus, it can be comprehended that co-education was not a problematic concern in prehistoric age. Anant Sadashiv Altekar says:

"It would however seem that co-education in higher studies was not

unknown even in 8th century A.D., for Bhavabhuti in his play *Malatimadhav* represents Kamandaki as being educated along with Bhurivasu and Devrata.”⁹

For an 8th century writer to casually write about women’s co-education in higher studies, in not one but two of his plays, suggests toward the liberation in women’s education. Yoga Vasishtha, a sacred text by Valmiki, dated back to 700-1400 CE, tells a story of king Sikhidhvaja who was enlightened by his wife, Chudala. She was a woman well versed in the ancient occult, and a woman who could change her form according to her will. The king decides to leave the kingdom and become a hermit in order to control his desires over material possessions. Thinking of his wife as a woman and not enthusiastic to seek wisdom from her, he moves to a forest to become a sage. The wise wife thus follows him to the forest in the form of the sage Kumbhaka and enlightens the king with the power to be determined to be celibate. Kumbhaka then turns into Madanika, a beautiful woman, to test the king. Every day the king slept dispassionately with Madanika at night, and listened to Kumbhaka’s wisdom in morning. “Thus, the king was hermit by day, and hermit by night.” He overpowers is lust and desires irrespective of the place, “... enlightened he returns to his kingdom with his wife- who was both his teacher Kumbhaka, and his lover Madanika- and ruled the land with the wise Chaudala by his side.”¹⁰ The story talks about the wisdom coming from the end of a queer identity. However, the tale also puts forward the idea of patriarchy which is peculiarly disposed of by a queer person. Indeed, Pattanaik aptly comments:

“Queerness here is a tool used to demonstrate, and eventually overcome patriarchal bias.”

long with literature, the idea of educating women is also represented in history. Gargi Vachaknavi and Mayetri, the two brahmavadinis, were the contributors to the hymns of *Rigveda*. Gargi was a woman scholar and one of the nine gems at King Janak of Mithala’s court. Brihadaranayaka Upanishad accounts Gargi’s debate with Mayetri’s husband, Yajnavalkya. This portion of the Upanishad talks about Gargi’s innate intelligence and the abstrusity of her questions that Yajnavalkya denied to discuss publicly. After being persistently provoked by Gargi, Yajnavalkya says:

“Do not, O Gargi,” said he, “question too much, lest your head should fall off. You are questioning too much about a deity about whom we should not ask too much. Do not ask too much, O Gargi.”¹¹

Similarly, in the Upanishad’s fourth segment of the Brahmana (universe), in ‘the conversation of Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi concerning the pantheistic soul’ Maitreyi talks about the concept of soul (*atma*), and the understanding of the world.¹² Women were not mere students or intellectuals but they took the acquired knowledge one step ahead and became *gurus*. Women who were teachers by profession were called ‘Upadhyayas’. For Sanskritians to coin a vocabulary for female teachers must have required a decent amount of them to exist. Apart from teaching, women also took writing as their profession. They had the leisure of becoming poetesses and authors.

The earliest compilation of literature by women is *Therigatha* published in 6th century B.C., where ‘theri’ stands for nuns and ‘gatha’ stands for verses. It is an anthology of verses and hymns from several ‘theris’ like a prostitute who turned into a nun, a mother who lost her child, and also Buddha’s step mother. These nuns are Buddha’s contemporaries who rejoice Buddha’s teachings in their hymns. They talk about relieving themselves from the circle of life. Mettika, an old, weak, and poor woman, talks about her victory and liberty as she has gained “Buddha’s way” which is the path of salvation- a freedom from the circle of life, from death and rebirth. The long contemplated idea of oppression of class and gender is presented in this age old text. Mutta, one of the nuns, talks of her ‘glorious freedom’ in the hymn:

So free am I, so gloriously free
So free am I, so gloriously free
Free from three petty things-
From mortar, from pestle and from
my twisted lord,
Freed from rebirth and death I am,
And all that has held me down
Is hurled away.¹³

These lines give a brief view of the society. Mortar and pestle suggest towards the captivity of women in household work. And “my twisted lord” represents the domestic supremacy of her husband in his abusive nature. Certainly, the lines are suggestive of women’s objectification. But the writing about the same also hints towards the power and liberation of women to break through these domestic societal norms with the help of literature and speak about their grief through beautiful lyrics.

“The focus of each lyric in the *Therigathais* an epiphanic experience in which the painful constrictions of secular life fall away and the torment of feelings subsides as the peace and freedom of nirvana are attained. Nesting within and shaping the moment is an autobiographical fragment, for as the poets testify to the transformative power of Buddhism and exult in their new life, they contrast it to the painful worlds they leave behind.”¹⁴

The trajectory of women writers can also be located regionally and culturally. The Sangam poetry is a part of Tamil literature of around 100 BC that marks the existence of women writers. It is divided into two parts- *akam* (the inner or the romantic) and *puram* (the outer or the martial). Akam poems talk about the gentle, love, and the inner world whereas Puram poems are the accounts of the powerful, war, and the public life. Women writers have skilfully wrote akam poetries in anthology like *Kuruntokai* and puram poetries in anthologies like *Purananuru* and *Patirrupattu*.¹⁵ This is only an account of few writers from pre-historic times. Infact, there have been an ample number of women writers over centuries till today’s time those who have chosen literature as their profession. Some of these known writers are Mirabai, Chandrabati, Ramabai, Cornelia Sorabji, Mahadevi Varma, etc.

The women of ancient times were not only intelligent students or powerful writers, but they were also chivalrous in attitude and actions. There are many conventional tabooed notions in nations like India; rape and widowhood are few of them. Women who are raped or widowed are out casted

by the society in many cultures. However, dissimilar to the contemporary conventional notions, women like Alli and Kannagi of prehistoric times are the examples of the contrast. Kannagi is the female protagonist of the renowned Tamil epic *Silapathikaram* (100-300 AD). She is a powerful widow in the text. Instead of losing respect and identity after her husband's death, she gains empowerment. Holding the city of Madurai as a reason for her husband's wrongful assassination, she flings her breast and sets fire to the city. In the epic, she is deified after this act and till date worshipped in Tamil Nadu and Srilanka. Similarly, Alli from *Alliyarasanimalai* is a highly learned scholar. *Alliyarasanimalai*, a Tamil folk ballad, is "a radical and liberating construction of femininity," says Wieringa, Blackwood, and Bhaiya in *Women's Sexualities and Masculinities in a Globalizing Asia*. She possesses martial prowess and loves hunting. She resides in Allirajyam- literary meaning kingdom of all. Her palace is a palace of women where men are restrained to enter. In the story, Alli is captured and raped by Arjun. After being emancipated, she returns to her palace and gives birth to her child. Alli is warmly welcomed by her people and is never criticized or victimized as a rape victim. She stands with the same authority and valour and continues to rule her kingdom. She is not only a reverential rape survivor, but also a woman "who resist prevailing heterosexist norms"

"The expression *Allirajyam*, derived from the legendary heroine's name Alli, literary means the kingdom of Alli. The Tamil word *Allirajyam* communicates the idea of the Sanskrit *strirajyam* or the "lands of

women." It involves the concept of women establishing their own kingdoms where men are made redundant. Women do not require men even for sexual pleasure or progeny. Women characters in *Pennarachiyar* and *Alliyarasanimalai* have created a space for women where men are literally banned."¹⁶

Thereupon, from the tale of Alli, one can not only discern women's agency but can also sense their sexual independency. The idea of being homosexual was comfortably discussed as well as practiced in that era. On the other hand, the most recent legalisation of same sex marriage was first seen in 2003 in Massachusetts and completely in 2015 in United States,¹⁷ besides in India, Article 377 was in debate till August 2017. Thus, the empiricism of the liberated view of homosexuality during pre-historic times can be fathomed by looking at the vast millennium gap between the legalisations of today's age and of the ancient time.

Terms like 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' are contemporary vocabulary. During the historic times of Greece, terms like 'sodomite' and 'Sapphist' were used. Similarly, Indian literature inhabits terms in Prakrit, Sanskrit, and Tamil "like *kliba*, *napunsaka*, *mukhabhaga*, *sanda*, *panda*, *pandaka*, *pedi* that suggest a long familiarity with queer thought and behaviour."¹⁸ Sapphist comes from the Greek poet Sappho born in a Greek town, Lesbos.¹⁹ She was the first known homosexual woman from Greece during late 7th and early 6th century to produce a literature of her own. Perhaps her birth place becomes the etymology of the term

'lesbian'. Sappho, in her poem, "It's no use/ Mother dear" writes:

It's no use/Mother dear
It's no use
Mother dear, I
can't finish my
weaving
You may
blame Aphrodite
soft as she is
she has almost
killed me with
love for that boy.²⁰

Sappho's lyric poetry reveals her homoerotic love, and jealousy towards her lover for her adulterous nature. She is apologetic that she couldn't complete her weaving because she was caught up thinking of her love. The lines also hint toward the demarcation of women to domesticity. Not able to do justice to one's work because one is caught up in worldly ties is reminiscent of Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam*. Sappho is prolific in writing about her homosexuality. The phrase to define such explicitness must be 'an accepting society'. The idea is not to disregard the condemnation faced by such writers but to celebrate the embrace of the society. The Oracle of Delphi also seems proto-feminist in nature. It is a telling of cryptic oracles at Apollo's temple in Delphi. The guardians and the teller of oracles were women. It is "seen as a source of divine inspiration, particularly concerning the mysteries of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth."²¹ Over the time, under the patriarchal society, the voice of the oracle shifted from woman to man.

Many critics have decrypted the fragments of ancient homosexuality in India in their discourses. Ruth Vanita in her book *Same-*

Sex Love in India: A Literary History traces the historical idea of love between women, and love between men in Indian written traditions. She talks about homoeroticism in puranic times. "Texts like the *Kamasutracatalog* sexual interaction between men and between women in the same section, thus treating them as having much in common. In Puranic and *Katha* literature as well as in folk tales, stories about cross dressing and ensuing ambiguity regarding gender and attraction, often play simultaneously with the idea of male-male attraction and female-female attraction."²² Their book mentions a recent English translation of *Krittivasa Ramayana* describing the love of two widow women of King Dilipa who beget a son Bhagiratha. Kidwai and Vanita say, "...the translator renders this as 'living together behaving like husband and wife.'" The son is named Bhagiratha as he is born out of two vulvas (bhaga). Similarly, Ganesha, one of the deities from Indian epics, is called Vinayaka as he is "born without (*vina*) a man (*nayaka*)".²³ The women and Goddesses in Indian myths seem capable of producing an offspring without a man, just like the protagonist of *Alliyarasanmalai's* Alli. Moreover, the men were equally capable of having a child without the women; Mandhata stands as an example of this. Mandhata is the son of King Yuvanashva from Mahabharata, who drank the magic water pregnancy, went through labour pains, and finally bore a son; thus, he was a King who was a mother of a son. All the three births- Bhagiratha (who is born out of two vulvas), Vinayaka (who is born without a man), and Mandhata (who is '*a-yoni-ja*', the one not born out of a womb) are unique examples of queer births. Besides homosexuality, Indian epics also mark the

presence of transgender fighters. Shikhandi, a character in Hindu mythological epic, Mahabharata, is a case of sex change. Amba was born a daughter to the king of Kashi; being vengeful to Bhishma she took rebirth as Shikhandi daughter to King Draupad. She was granted sex change as a penance to Lord Shiva. She stands as a one of the former examples of a cross-dresser, transgender, and sex change woman. Almost a 1700 year old text was splendidly progressive in science, intellect, and cultural constructs compared to the present era. Apart from the above there are a lot of other deities and mythological characters who subvert the contemporary notion of homosexuality and transsexuality. The ancient Indian Worldview has given a space to every possible and imaginary entity. An age old Indian temple of Khajurao has sculpted images of eroticism between women, and displaying of genitals among men. Devdutt Pattanaik says, "These images cannot be simply dismissed as perverted fantasies of an artist or his patron considering the profound ritual importance given to these shrines." Vatsyayana's text *Kama sutra* is an ancient Sanskrit Literature- it's a *sutra* literally meaning 'text' describing the works of *kama* meaning 'desires'. The text shows several instances of erotic relationships between same-sex. Several stories in Hindu epics talk about socially accepted queer identity and homosexuality. Hindu mythology talks about a deity, *Hara-Hari*, immersed out of a union of two Gods- Shiva and Vishnu who created a child named, *Hara-Harisuta*. Narad, another character from Hindu mythology, immerses himself in a pond and comes out as a woman. *Ardhanarishvarastotram* is a *stotra* (verse) on Lord Shiva's avatar of Ardhanari where

the God is half man half woman. There is also a transgender form of Krishna named Mohini who married Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, and also mourned for his death. Thus, there exist an innumerable recognised transgender stories in Hindu epics that challenge the notions of conventionality, the idea of noble society, and the most important- the idea of freedom to be. Devdutt Pattanaik in his article '*Did Homosexuality exist in ancient India?*' writes:

"Hijras are organized communities comprising of males who express themselves socially as women. They are a mix of transsexuals (men who believe themselves to be women), transvestites (men who dress in women's clothes), homosexual (men who are sexually and romantically attracted to men), hermaphrodites (men whose genitals are poorly defined due to genetic defect or hormonal imbalance) and eunuchs (castrated men)."²⁴

The concept of Hijra (transgender) in India is socially outcasted today. The community is, as Pattanaik puts:

"... perhaps the most vocal manifestation of queerness in India, refuses to stay invisible. Ignored by the mainstream, often rejected by her own family, reduced to a joke in popular entertainment, she claps in the crowded streets demanding to be seen. The hijras challenge not just the boundaries of gender, but also the boundaries of religion, for it is uncommon to find a hijra with a Muslim name, using Farsi words, worshipping a Sufi *pir*, alongside a Hindu goddess."²⁵

In ancient India this community was not only welcomed but also worshipped and sought blessings from. A temple in Ahmedabad (city in Gujarat) is dedicated to goddess Bahuchari (patron goddess of Hijras). It is believed that there was pond here which turned women into men. People who seek boy child still visit this temple and take blessings from Hijras. Though, the community has now been reduced to parodic sexual judgments, but it still upholds the freedom from all cultural, religious, and social conventions. One can perceive that the ancient India blurred the division among genders and sexualities. Indian metaphysics gave space to man, woman, man with feminine aura, and woman with conventional masculinity.

The Hindu holy text, The Bhagavat-Gita marks an episode of enlightenment between Krishna and Arjuna. In this discourse, Krishna tells Arjuna that there is much more to this Universe than the human mind can fathom, although the human mind creates boundaries, reality is diverse and can contain everything. Indian epics teach us that there is nothing unnatural in nature. And that every way of being is a manifestation of the divine. This is what Kabir tries to tell centuries later in his *dohas* that the soul, representation of the divine is caught within the body that is the representation of the material.

Is ghatantar bag bagice

Within this earthen vessel are
bowers and groves, and within it
is the Creator:

Within this vessel are the seven
oceans and the unnumbered stars.

The touchstone and the jewel-
appraiser re within;

And within this vessel the Eternal
soundeth, and the spring wells

up.

Kabir says: "Listen to me my
Friend! My beloved Lord is
within."²⁶

The dichotomies of divine and material, soul and body, natural and unnatural get dissolved in texts like *Therigatha*, in *dohas* of Kabir, and in epics like *Mahabharata*. Ancient Indian Literature focuses on the purer form of Humanity that is the soul. It leaves the material (the body) behind. Thus, this view of Indian literature has blurred the dichotomies of gender. Indian Worldview extricates boundaries imposed on women, men, and transgender. It also democratizes its discernment in the discourse of class, castes and religion. The supremacies of castes get dissolved in concepts like *ashtavivah*. In *Manusmriti*, *Ashtavivah* is a concept of marriage that classifies the pious ceremony in eight categories.²⁷ It encapsulates concepts like love marriage (*Ghandharvvivah* which is manifested in Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam* between Dushanta and Sakuntala), and marriage by abduction when the bride is willing to marry but bride's parents are against the alliance (*Rakshasavivah*). Concepts which are considered inferior in many countries like India were welcomed thousands of years back in function. Furthermore, Jaina philosophy does away with caste system in their literature. It does not talk about caste as *Varna* system does, rather it believes humans have only one division that is *manusyajati*.²⁸

Conclusion

Pattanaik concludes"

"In Hinduism, the world is not
distinct from God. The world is God.

God contains everything. The queer is not excluded.”

Perceiving the ‘*puranic*’ Indian Literature, and a few instances of Greek Literature, it seems fathomable to call the ancient time more harmonized with gender biases. The age old history, it’s art, and it’s recorded factual ancient tales legitimises proto-egalitarianism. It seems almost impossible to locate the beginning of the decline of such a golden era. Perhaps colonization, or maybe ages before that, by and by India down the line of national culture, literature, mythology, and society saw its corruption through the dogma of patriarchal imparity. The notion of equality seemed to have lost its essence along the way, and the humanity in its thought and performance seemed to have regressed from this equality. However, we have managed to realise the unjustness of gender, religion and caste; and we have started taking steps towards regaining an egalitarian society. Several organizations have established in India which are working in favour of gender equality. Activists have started acting and people have started raising their voice. We have accelerated towards achieving a society which will equally treat all of us, which will consider humans as a subdivision of nature, and sexual choices of humans as

natural. Judith Butler’s discourse in *Gender Trouble*, about defining sex and gender as being a natural and a constructed phenomenon respectively fits perfectly with the on-going debate of accepting homosexuals, asexual, transgender, and queer identity socially. Indian worldview accepted sexuality as natural, gender, class and caste as also natural. It embraced every form of being as it was. Albeit, presently being overshadowed with the unjust stance of humanity, it can still achieve the same perception that was lost centuries back. Lamenting the past is not what the world seeks; we have progressed towards change and will regain the ‘lost paradise.’ Certainly, the past can help us weave a better future as art has the absolute power the cause change. Thus, the paper can be concluded in Pattanaik words”

“Queer people, an umbrella term for gays, lesbians, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed people, cross dressers, hijras etc., who did not fit into the rigid definitions of male and female, came out in parades refusing to conform and stay invisible for the benefit of others. The world changed forever. This is the world we now live in.”²⁹

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