



OXFORD INDIA STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

SEXUALITY STUDIES



edited by
Sanjay Srivastava

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OXFORD INDIA STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

SERIES EDITOR
SUJATA PATEL

OXFORD INDIA STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY is a new series of interdisciplinary compilations on issues and problems shaping our lives in twenty-first century India. The Series appears at an opportune time, when the boundaries of social science disciplines are being re-defined, and theories and perspectives are being critically interrogated. Using the frameworks developed by social science interdisciplinarity, this Series captures, assesses, and situates social trends in contemporary India. It affirms the necessity of analysing issues and themes that have a direct bearing on our daily lives, and in doing so, brings fresh perspectives into play, integrating knowledge from a variety of un-explored sources in conventional social science practice in India. The Series aims to introduce to a wider audience the central importance of interdisciplinarity in contemporary social sciences. It presents novel themes of investigation and builds a fresh approach towards the longstanding debates on methodologies and methods. With its emphasis on the debates on and about 'society' rather than 'social sciences', this Series should find an audience not only among the students and scholars of conventional social sciences, but also among the students, researchers, and practitioners of fields such as law, media, environment, medicine, policy studies, and business studies.

Sujata Patel is Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad.

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Abbreviations

ADR	Alternate Dispute Resolution
AT	Akshardham Temple
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BLT	Bacon, Lettuce, and Tomato
CDS	Centre for Development Studies
CPI (M)	Communist Part of India (Marxist)
DCGI	Drug Controller General of India
DTAB	Drug Technical Advisory Board
FIR	First Information Report
FTM	Female to Male
GLBT	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender
GoI	Government of India
HDR	Human Development Report
<i>IJS</i>	<i>International Journal of Sexology</i>
IPC	Indian Penal Code
ISKON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness
ITPA	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act
JACK	Joint Action Council of Kannur
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
MNC	Multinational Company
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
MTF	Male to Female
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

RWA	Residents Welfare Association
SCOTUS	Supreme Court of the United States
SITA	Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act
SLP	Special Leave Petition
SRK	Shahrukh Khan
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
SWAM	Social Welfare Association for Men
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
TVPA	Trafficking Victims' Protection Act
UN	United Nations
VAM	Vidhava Agathy Munnetam
WRAP	Women, Risk and AIDS Project
WSF	World Social Forum

Contents

List of Figures vii

Acknowledgements ix

List of Abbreviations xi

Introduction 1

Sanjay Srivastava

1. Scripting Pleasures and Perversions: Writings of Sexologists in the Twentieth Century 24

Sanjam Ahluwalia

2. Wanton Women and Cheap Prints: Farces, Other Genres, and the Reading Publics in Colonial Calcutta 46

Hardik Brata Biswa

3. Beyond Equivalence: Body and Language in Family Courts 73

Srimati Basu

4. Bodies Gone Awry: The Abjection of Sexuality in Development Discourse in Contemporary Kerala 94

J. Devika

5. Queer Formations in (Hindu) Nationalism 121

Paola Bacchetta

6.	Decriminalization as Deregulation? Logics of Sodomy Law and the State	141
	<i>Jyoti Puri</i>	
7.	True Sex and the Law: Prostitution, Sodomy, and the Politics of Sexual Minoritization in India	161
	<i>Svati P. Shah</i>	
8.	The Object of Attention: Same-sex Sexualities in Small Town India and the Contemporary Sexual Subject	184
	<i>Paul Boyce</i>	
9.	Queering Subjectivities: On the Praxis of Outing Gender, Race, Caste, and Class in Ethnographic Fieldwork	205
	<i>Diepiriye Kuku</i>	
10.	Street, Footpath, Gated Community: On the Cultures of Indian Pornography	228
	<i>Sanjay Srivastava</i>	
11.	Love Attacks: Romance and Media Voyeurism in the Public Domain	255
	<i>Christiane Brosius</i>	
12.	But I Can't Carry a Condom! Young Women, Risk, and Sexuality in the Time of Globalization	287
	<i>Shilpa Phadke</i>	
	<i>Index</i>	307
	<i>About the Editor and Contributors</i>	317

Figures

10.1	Seductive Women	230
10.2	Ashok Clinic, Chandni Chowk, Delhi	235
10.3	Marriage and Its Other	236
10.4	Blurred Desires	237
10.5	Discipline, Spaces, and Modernity	239
10.6	Savita Bhabhi: The Erotics of Tradition (1)	243
10.7	Savita Bhabhi: The Erotics of Tradition (2)	244
11.1	Monopoly Over Production and Circulation of Valentine's Day Greeting Cards and Gifts by Archies	256
11.2	Archies Valentine's Day Greeting Card Addressing Intimacy, Affection, and Sexual Desire, Embodied by a Couple Dressed in Western Clothes, Entangled in a Kiss	260
11.3	A Jumbo Greeting Card Relating to the Seasons of Passion and Romance	261
11.4	'You're So Sexy' Greeting Card with Different Materials, Including Mini Dress and Two Hearts Stuck on Top	262
11.5	Laila and Majnu Calendar Print	264
11.6	Valentine's Day Greeting Card to Underline a High Court Decision on Legalizing Homosexuality in 2009	269
11.7	Photograph from a 'Photo-hunt'	272
11.8	The Pink Chaddi Movement's 'Brand' Poster Announcing Their Campaign Online, 2009	276

Introduction

Sanjay Srivastava

Discussions of sexual culture in India have an almost ritualistic nature in their invocations of beliefs and practices that lie between the instructional mode of the *Kama Sutra* and Gandhian efforts to erase desire. However, beyond some vague notion of 'Indian heritage', it has never been clear how a text intended for the elite of its time, and idiosyncratic applications of principles of asceticism have much to say about the sexual cultures of contemporary India. The politics of colonial nationalism (Roy 1998) and a postcolonial one that concerns middle-class (and increasingly, diasporic) remaking of 'Indian heritage' have significantly contributed to a continuing focus on both 'ancient' texts and practices as representative of modern Indian realities and beliefs. The continuing salience of the *Kama Sutra* might also derive from attempts to throw off the historical accusation of prudery against Indian culture. Here is a text, public discourses surrounding it suggest, that 'proves' that Indians were no less 'advanced' in such matters—indeed, even more so—than Westerners. This much appears to have been also accepted by Michel Foucault with his ahistorical formulation of the putative difference between Western and Eastern sexual cultures as 'scientific' and 'erotic'. This collection is part of a growing body of work (for example, Adams and Pigg 2005; Alter 2011; Bose and Bhattacharyya 2008; John and Nair 1998; Menon 2007; Narrain and Bhan 2006; Narrain and Gupta 2011; Srivastava 2004) that seek to offer alternatives to the *Kama Sutra* and Gandhian narratives of Indian sexual cultures (that utilize spurious ideas

of 'stable' Indian traditions) and Foucauldian frameworks (that posit too sharp a difference between Western and Eastern sexual contexts); in the 'land of the Kama Sutra', there are considerable audiences for both *Sex and the City* and the surreptitiously made 'cut piece' pornographic film clips (Hoek 2010).

Notwithstanding the ground that this volume shares with the many recent anthologies—such as those listed in the previous paragraph—that address Indian sexual politics and cultures, there are also some differences in the approach and content that make it distinct. Firstly, all chapters employ methods that are drawn from sociology or historical sociology. That is to say, authors are singularly interested in the network of social contexts—power, kinship, legality, class, gender, for example—through which sexual cultures are produced, controlled, and contested. In this way, the volume proceeds from the assumption that scholarly analysis is not only a powerful ally of activist intervention, but also that it has a place and character of its own. Secondly, and just as significantly, the volume is explicitly organized as an exploration of *relationships* between the 'mainstream' and its others, in order that we might more fully understand the making of the former. If cultures of sexuality are to be seen for what they are—unstable, contested, and in flux—then it is important to juxtapose different kinds of sexual claims. Finally, in this context, the book is also interested in exploring *why* it is that we talk about sexuality at *this moment in time* and *in the ways that we do*. That is to say, what is specific to the social, cultural, and political processes of our time that makes for the kinds of discussions that this book contains? And further, why are histories of sexuality important to the present?

These concerns show up in this volume through another way: *absence* of those frameworks that are a familiar part of a certain strand of scholarship on sexuality. So, for example, it is noticeable that none of the chapters included here make use of psychoanalytic (or psychologized) frameworks that have found favour in studies of Indian sexuality. Rather, the idea of 'sexual culture' is scattered across a number of domains that both implicitly problematize it as an independent (or self-referential) arena, as well as forcing us to think about the various ways in which different domains (the law, the state, 'middle-class' opinion, science, and 'sexual-health' programmes, for example) contribute to its construction. And though there are no overarching narratives through which the significance of sexuality is explained, the exploration of sexual meanings in this volume is implicitly organized around certain key themes. Firstly, contributors demonstrate how 'sexuality' carries different meanings

across cultures, such that terms that conventionally gather around it—such as ‘desire’, pleasure, anxiety, control, and ‘need’—travel along multiple trajectories of local histories, producing hybrid meanings. That is to say, the terms of address that seeks to capture sexual meanings only become intelligible through a specific understanding of the ways in which localized and wider processes coalesce to form an inherently unstable social world. ‘The meaning of erotic, emotional and sexual practices differ widely ... among various ... societies and over time’, as Morgan and Wieringa point out, speaking of the African context. ‘Various forms of physical attraction are recorded’, they add, suggesting that ‘Whether these were called “sexual” differs widely’ (Morgan and Wieringa 2005: 297–8). While Morgan and Wieringa speak of how sexuality is imagined at the level of individual and group experience, contributors to this volume extend this line of discussion through explorations of the multiple sites of modernity within which individual lives are enmeshed. These are points of negotiations between individuals and the broader structures within which they are located, producing meanings about sexual ‘nature’ and culture. They are also pointers to why sex and sexuality constitute significant topics of discussion.

The negotiations—or, the struggle—over sexual meanings might be understood in another way, one that also informs perspectives within the covers of this book. Referring to a long-standing debate, Jeffery Weeks suggests that ‘The real problem does not lie in whether homosexuality is inborn or learned.’ Rather, he says, it can be expressed in the question: ‘what are the meanings this particular culture gives to homosexual behavior, however, it may be caused, and what are the effects of those meanings on the ways in which individuals organize their sexual lives’ (Weeks 2003: 34). The relay between ‘culture’ and the ‘individual’ is precisely the process this volume seeks to track.

This relay of sexual meanings is, to wit, the ‘history of social relations’ (Padgug 1989: 20). Further, since this history is itself both unstable and culturally specific, there can be ‘no abstract and universal category of “the erotic” or “the sexual” applicable without change to all societies. Any view which suggests otherwise is hopelessly mired in one or another form of biologism’ (ibid.: 21). In seeking to explore the ways in which ‘We become human only in human society’ (ibid.: 20), these essays move between two levels—‘human’ and ‘human society’—that form the grounds for fashioning quotidian existence.

By insisting that we can only productively engage with this topic through understanding the different contexts which influence the

making of sexuality (or, more accurately, 'sexualities'), these essays problematize the notion that it constitutes a world-unto-itself. A significant consequence of thinking that sexuality as a world-unto-itself has been that it tends to be simultaneously regarded as a very narrowly confined domain that has nothing to do with, say, politics and economics, *as well as* something that is of very general significance that is absolutely fundamental to the way we are and the very 'truth' of our being (Padgug 1989). We tend to both inflate its significance *and* downplay its role as a *social* process by treating it as a private 'thing'. So, for example, if you're a bad cook, it's a minor blemish, but being 'bad' at sex is seen as both a major crisis that requires intervention (through seeking help of 'sexologists', for example). It is ironic that Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), whose writings were fundamental to providing new—non-biological—directions in the study of sexuality in the West, was, nevertheless, a believer in sexuality-as-a-biological drive theory (Weeks 2003). Despite literary, historical, artistic, and other evidence that suggests that sexuality—both its expression and control—is fundamentally linked to contexts such as class, religion, wealth, and gender norms, we nevertheless tend to delink it from these social realities. If anything, we are inclined to think of these aspects as incidental, choosing to believe that 'underneath it all' there lurks a fundamentally fixed essence—and a drive—we can identify as sexuality.

The preceding discussion points to a significant aspect of the history of sexuality in the Indian context: that it may be difficult to trace its outline in the manner in which it has been done for the West. Michel Foucault's writings have, as is well known, outlined the ways in which sexual identity became a central category of European modernity. His analysis shows how the 'conversion of acts into roles/personalities, and ultimately into entire subcultures, cannot be said to have been accomplished before at least the seventeenth century, and, as a firm belief and more or less close approximation of reality, the late nineteenth century' (Padgug 1989: 21). Further, as Foucault pointed out, the 'roles/personalities' that emerged through the classification of 'acts' were 'the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult' (Foucault 1979: 105). Subsequently, sexuality became focused on the family. That is to say, an entire range of experts (doctors, psychiatrists, priests, teachers, and so on) turned their attention to the family, advising against the perils of 'bad' sexuality and ensuring its 'good health'. Through these processes, the family was both 'sexualized' and acted as an agent of sexualization. Further, the family

became the benchmark for debates on 'good' and 'bad' sexuality, and 'healthy' and 'aberrant' sexual behaviour. In these ways, sexuality became a very important topic of discussion, rather than being banned from being discussed (or, repressed) as is commonly thought. 'Good' sexuality within the family—reproductive sexuality, able to produce a suitable labour force—then became part of the development of capitalism.

To what extent is it possible to apply Foucault's analytical framework (as distinct from subscribing to his political project—the exploration of power relationships) to the Indian society? While this is not a question that can be answered at any length in this introduction, it is certainly an aspect worth thinking about. So, for example, how suitable is Foucault's disciplinary model of power—which assumes that ideas of 'discipline' and 'self-discipline' permeate an entire society—for a context that is characterized by multiple and fragmented public spheres? That is to say, the processes of transmission of information—and the establishment of mechanisms and discourses of power—in India would appear to be quite different to that in Europe. The historically fragmented nature of Indian public spheres—along, say, the axes of linguistic identity, ethnicity, status, profession, religion, and kinship organization—makes it difficult to assume that 'centrally' fashioned ideas of discipline and 'roles/personalities' might have been easily absorbed across various populations. Further, colonialism—which goes almost unacknowledged in Foucault's work, except, perhaps indirectly through references to racism (Stoler 1995)—would seem to have fundamentally altered the possibility of finding coherent objects of knowledge—the hysterical woman, the masturbating child...—that might have shared currency within Indian social formations (as distinct from fragments within it, say, the native intelligentsia) (Foucault 1979: 105). What we need, therefore, are ways of understanding a fragmented (sexual) past that might be transforming into a complex present due to the effect of certain modern technologies—such as the media and the internet—that are more powerful agents of change than, say, state power.

HISTORIES OF SEXUALITY

In order to think about the social field within which sexual cultures are embedded, it is important to *historicize* sexuality simultaneously as we localize history. Making history local does not, however, mean (in terms of sexuality studies at least) a search for self-referential 'indigenous' sexuality. For, as Pigg (2005) points out 'the historicity of sexuality

outside Europe does not begin, suddenly, with colonialism, urbanization, and other changes associated with modernity. So-called traditional social norms were never as stable and unchanging as current AIDS-related discourse portrays' (Pigg 2005: 53). That is to say, the histories of non-Western sexual cultures are—like all histories—in themselves signs and products of such cultural and social instability so as to make it pointless to speak of well-defined (say, Foucault's 'ars erotica') and enduring contexts. So, as Pigg further suggests, 'Rather than trying to rescue an image of a purely indigenous sexuality, distinct and untainted by "outside" Western influence, it is more useful to ask what kinds of interactions, connections and conflicts emerge in the... porous zones' (ibid.: 54).

The colonial era was—it need hardly be laboured—an important one both for the making of 'porous zones', as well as the elaboration of sexual discourses as discourses of colonial power. A significant justification for colonial rule lay in the frequently reiterated notion of 'reform' that was required within colonized societies. Native sexual mores were frequently regarded as key objects of such reform and were also held up as proof of the 'moral' inferiority of colonized populations. So, colonized societies were seen to be characterized by 'passionate unreason' and 'unruliness' (Levine 2006: 125) with regard to sexual behaviour, and it was common belief that native religious and other belief systems justified 'loose' sexual mores. This 'lack of reason in the sexual arena mirrored colonial incapacity for self-rule' (ibid.). Further, while on the one hand a significant colonial fear centered around the threat to the white woman resident in the colonies from the 'uncontrollably' lascivious black man (see Inglis's discussion for Papua New Guinea, 1978), non-Western women were frequently characterized as sexually 'permissive' (see Alloula 1986 on colonial Algeria). Many of these stereotypes remain with us to this day. In India, the rationale for 'sexual reform' was also accepted by an indigenous intelligentsia in its search for the reasons for colonial subjugation. The writings of eugenicists and sexologists in early twentieth century India (Hodges 2006; Srivastava 2007)—seeking to promote 'scientific sexuality' among natives—are good examples of this.

There were both differences and similarities between the sexual cultures of the colonial masters and their colonized subjects around the world. And yet, the similarities tended to be largely denied. Why was this? For example, there was widespread prevalence of homoeroticism among European populations in the colonies and, for many European men in particular, the relative lack of proscription against homoeroticism was a