

De-stereotyping Indian Body and Desire

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Edited by

Kaustav Chakraborty

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This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5253-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5253-1

To
My Parents
Chhabi Chakraborty and Maniklal Chakraborty

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PREFACE

Poststructural / Postcolonial theories have argued that the body is a cultural construct rather than a natural entity. This argument is based on the assumption that there is no unalloyed body with singular signification, but there are bodies onto which a multiplicity of meanings is inscribed and enforced. The responsibility of this 'inscription' lies in the agencies that hold power in a culture, and the infused meanings will consequently facilitate the ideologies of such agencies. In other words, the bodies of a certain culture are the 'embodiment' of the ideas of those who hold power in that culture. The corporality of the body, in this sense, is a cultural site in which the subtle political ideologies are deftly imposed, and accordingly the 'correct' / 'sanctioned' desire is expected to germinate. So, it can be argued that the apparently unified or non-contradictory bodies with 'normal' desire should be suspected of having subtle hegemonic mechanisms in their formation. As a corollary to this, an investigation into such 'abnormal' bodies with 'unnatural' desires may have the effect of the subversion of a power structure. Today's world believes in de-stereotyped thinking and stereotyped living. Language has already been declared as a means more of camouflage than of revelation. Hence there is also a need to deconstruct the so called 'radical' representations and expose the undercurrent of the norm. This book, which is an outcome of the U.G.C. sponsored national seminar, organized by the Department of English, Southfield College, Darjeeling, tries to focus on the parallel de-stereotyped portrayal of the marginalized Indian body and 'invisible' desires by writers/artists along with their critique through deconstruction, of the stereotyped—and thereby motivated—approach to Indian body and desire as reflected in mainstream literature, art and media.

I am obliged to U.G.C. and all the contributors for assisting me in my de-stereotyping effort. Finally I express my sincere gratitude to my publisher.

Kaustav Chakraborty

INTRODUCING 'DE-STEREOTYPE': RANDOM THOUGHTS ON SEX, SEXUALITY, GENDER AND CULTURE

R. RAJ RAO

My thesis is that homosexuality does not in itself amount to de-stereotyping the body. I shall attempt to prove my thesis by constructing it around two key words: performance and sodomy. In Judith Butler's famous formulation, gender is performance. Butler calls gender a performative gesture, and echoes Simone de Beauvoir who said that one was not born but became a woman. The formulations of both de Beauvoir and Butler, of course, emphasize the social construction of gender. What these formulations seek to question, at one level, is the linguistic interchangeableness of the words man/woman and male/female in everyday speech. Eve Sedgwick seeks to avoid the confusion by introducing her concept of 'chromosomal sex' to distinguish biological sex from gender. Sedgwick says that the sentence "I can only love someone of my own sex" is wrong. It should actually be, "I can only love someone of my own gender." The meaning of the word "sex" in such a sentence would refer to the prevalence of X and Y chromosomes in one's genetic makeup, and would possibly imply that one can only love a person who shares his or her exact chromosomal makeup.

If gender is a performative gesture, can the idea be extended to sexuality? Can we say that sexuality, and especially heterosexuality is also a performative gesture based on performance? One obvious difference here would be that, just as the performative aspect of gender applies more to women than to men ("I was not born a woman but became one"), the performative aspect of sexuality applies more to men than to women. This is because it is the man who is in possession of the penetrative organ, the penis, through the aid of which he enters (colonizes) the woman. This of course recalls the French feminist Andre Dworkin, but what I am really concerned with is erection as a precondition to penetration. Now erection is an involuntary rather than a voluntary act. It may happen when a man least wants it to happen, and stubbornly refuse to happen when a man

wants it to happen. The autonomous existence of the penis has frequently been referred to in literature. In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, for example, the ayah says of the young Saleem Sinai, that "His thing has a life of its own." Erections not taking place when they ought to, have a medical name. We call the syndrome "erectile dysfunction," and the Bombay-based sexologist Dr Prakash Kothari has often revealed in newspaper and magazine interviews that over half of Indian men suffer from temporary or permanent erectile dysfunction. The male penis thus is not just a penetrative organ, but a performative organ as well. Performance, fundamentally, is a theatrical attribute, and it is interesting how the word 'climax' refers to both the high point of a five-act Shakespearean play, as well as the high point, or orgasmic moment, of sexual intercourse. Thus, a biological male child must grow up to become a man, the word connoting not merely the heroic values of strength and courage, but also the ability to *get it up*. In the expression "So-and-so is not man enough," for example, a likely meaning of the sentence, depending of course on the context, is that he is impotent.

I call sexuality a social construct because it is society that expects a male (a state of being) to grow into a man (a state of becoming). Furthermore, such obligations are more incumbent upon the self-identified heterosexual man, rather than on the self-identified homosexual man, who, potentially at least, is freed of the obligation to perform by virtue of his non-normative sexual orientation.

However, the word homosexuality is not a monolith. We all know that there are plural same sex identities that exist in the world today. Homosexuality existed long before the invention of the term 'homosexual' in the nineteenth century. Foucault thus relies on the word 'sodomite' to refer to the homosexuals of ancient Greece, but the word connotes at least as much as it denotes. What it connotes is the need of the homosexual subject to penetrate, regardless of the gender of the object. Penetration was equated with freedom (patriarchal male privilege) and with morality. In Foucault's words, "It was *immoral* for a *free* man to be *fucked*." (Emphasis mine). The sodomites of ancient Greece may have been homosexually inclined, but they sought sexual gratification in stereotypical, rather than creative ways. They used their bodies as they thought they were designed to be used. On the other hand, their object choice, who they penetrated or fucked, was, naturally, neither *moral* nor *free*. He was a slave. He was also a boy (as opposed to a man), which implies he was underage. In a supreme twist of irony, then, the onus of de-stereotyping the body, which Foucault equates with creativity, rested on the slave and the boy. The slave and the

boy, unlike the sodomite, deconstructed the idea of sexuality as performance, because he was never the the penetrator.

The sodomite of ancient Greece may be said to have his counterpart in modern-day India in the MSM community. MSM stands for men-who-have-sex-with-men. MSMs do not want to be referred to as 'homosexual' or 'gay' even though they are attracted to people of their own sex (gender). MSMs wish to be a part of the mainstream, as a result of which, they get married and produce children. They keep their MSM identities hidden from their wives and children throughout their lives, and thus end up leading 'double' lives. This is because marriage and the creation of a family do not automatically put a stop to their same-sex sexual activity. Post 1990, the MSM community in India has been thought to be the number one cause of the spread of AIDS, which they acquire from multiple male partners, and pass on to their wives. In a way, it is they who are responsible for the softening of the stand towards homosexuality on the part of the Government of India, which led to the reading down of Article 377 of the IPC in the Delhi High Court in July 2009: the government softened its stand, not because it is progressive, but because wanted to contain the spread of AIDS by legalizing homosexuality.

But AIDS certainly is not the point of this discussion. The point of this discussion is to argue that the MSM communities in India, like the sodomites of ancient Greece, exercise their patriarchal privilege as *free* and *moral* citizens by not allowing their masculinity to be challenged in spite of their sexual attraction for their own gender. Notwithstanding their fantasies, they achieve this, among other things, by not allowing their bodies to be feminized during sex with other men (males) through a touch of its 'female' parts like the nipples and the anus, which, for men, is the equivalent of the vagina. In other words, they always insist on the 'active' sexual role in bed, and a violation of this code on the part of their partners can even lead to homophobic violence. Their 'passive' same-sex partners would be the equivalent of Foucault's slaves, who are *not* moral (in terms of social and ethical behaviour) and *not* free (in today's of social and ethical nity to be challenged in spite of their sexual attraction for their ownder, excluded young males that society would identify as male prostitutes, or hijras. They are ugly people for whom perverse sexual activity is frequently their only means of livelihood. But once again, ironically enough, it is these excluded men, rather than MSMs from the conservative middle class, who anti-essentialize the body.

Diana Fuss is of the view that homosexuality has its roots in patriarchy. This, in a way, is proved by the sodomites of ancient Greece, as well as by the MSM community of India, whose patriarchal homosocial

bonding, and domination and oppression of women, finds its objective correlative in latent homosexuality. What fosters the link, though, between patriarchy and latent homosexuality is homosociality, and this is equally true of ancient Greek society and modern Indian society. Homosociality implies a bonding that is non-sexual, and is gender-specific rather than gender-neutral. It serves the interests of homosexuality by becoming its alibi. Thus in modern India, as in ancient Greece, men can establish non-genital physical contact with each other in public spaces, without arousing suspicion. Such nebulosity, incidentally, has all but disappeared from contemporary Western society, where the disappearance of homosociality has probably weakened the link between homosexuality and patriarchy. The sight of men holding hands, or walking with arms around each other's shoulders on Indian streets is too commonplace to be commented upon. But it sometimes leads to 'misunderstandings' among first time Westerners in India, who wonder if all of India is like Castro Street in San Francisco, or Greenwich Village in New York City! Literature and cinema help us understand the concept of homosociality better. The post-Amitabh Bollywood film is full of instances of patriarchal homosocial bonding between men, as in the film *Satya*; this is also true of some regional cinema, such as Malayalam cinema. The first anthology of gay writing from India, edited by Hoshang Merchant, was appropriately called *Yaraana*, but much before Merchant cashed in on the word 'yaar', Raj Ayyar, a contributor to the volume *A Lotus of Another Color: An Unfolding of the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Experience*, dwelt on the word 'yaar' at length, and concluded that there is no word in the English language that can approximate it in breadth and meaning; not even the words 'friend' and 'buddy' which he calls "superficial". 'Yaar' then emerges as a culture-specific term that best describes the homosociality to be found in South Asia. That homosociality has also been written about by Pakistani-born British writer Hanif Kureishi in his essay "The Rainbow Sign" where Kureishi expresses his culture-shock during his first ever visit to Pakistan, at the sight of Muslim men in tight embrace on the streets of Karachi and Lahore. In my introduction to my own book *Whistling in the Dark: Twenty one Queer Interviews*, I identify several male homosocial spaces in the public arena that give a fillip to patriarchy.

Because homosociality implies a non-sexual bonding, it enables closeted but practicing homosexual men for whom sexuality is *not* an axis on which identity must be mapped, to establish an alibi of yaari that successfully serves to hoodwink family, friends, employers, neighbours and society in general. It becomes a survival tactic that at once ensures that the homosexual subject is not repressed, and not persecuted by

homophobic witch-hunters. In a sense, the homosexual subject here successfully manages to invert the hetero/homo binary, a point that I shall return to later, which is a necessary step in the deconstruction of the binary, as both Barthes and Derrida have argued. But while he inverts the binary as a homosexual, he keeps it in place as a patriarch, more so if he is married. Surveys have indicated that the majority of homosexual men in India (including MSMs, as pointed out above) are married. The homosexual man's 'double' life, then, may be said to oppress his wife, more so as it is carried out in secret, without, as it were, keeping her in the loop. This is exactly what happens in Amol Palekar's Marathi film *Thaang* (its English version is called *Quest*). The writer of the film, Sandhya Gokhale, is a mainstream feminist who sees the narrative from the wife's point of view and castigates the husband; whereas I, as a queer theorist, see it from the husband's point of view and call him a victim. The interface between patriarchy and homosexuality is thus complicated.

Homosociality cannot effectively function as an alibi for homosexual men without abetment by its comrade-in-arms, heterosexism. The concept of (hetero)sexism originally derives from feminist theory. Heterosexism may be said to be the hegemonic construction of heterosexuality through performativity. Sex, a biological construct, expresses itself through gender, a social/cultural construct (masculine/feminine), and then through heterosexual desire which is projected as essential, natural, and universal. This compulsory heterosexualization of desire, a phrase made famous by Adrienne Rich, is responsible for the treatment of homosexual love as deviant and pathological. Heterosexism is widely prevalent in India on account of the obscuring of historicity, and scholars like Ruth Vanita, Saleem Kidwai, Devdutt Patnaik and Giti Thadani have done seminal work in an attempt to de-obscure history. Simply put, heterosexism is the belief that sexual attraction is always gender-specific, never gender neutral. That is to say, a biologically born male can only be sexually attracted to a biologically born female, and vice-versa. A biologically born male cannot be sexually attracted to another biologically born male; likewise, a biologically born female cannot be sexually attracted to another biologically born female. However, if homosociality provides the linkage between homosexuality and patriarchy, then heterosexism must be culpable too. In real terms, this was best proved in India in the year 1998, when the Hindu right sought a ban on Deepa Mehta's lesbian film *Fire*. Ironically, the fieriest protests came from women rather than men. The men *did* make half-hearted noises, but eventually withdrew them in the knowledge that lesbian sexuality, when portrayed on screen, titillated them in a way that perhaps even pornography did not. But the women went on

record to vituperatively ask that "If women turn to each other to satisfy their [sexual] needs, what happens to the institution of the family?" Doubtless, this was a rhetorical question that implied two things: first, that heterosexism notwithstanding, the protestors were aware of the fact that a biologically born female could, technically and potentially, be attracted to another biologically born female; and second, that what scandalized them was that if women gave expression to such 'deviant' desire, the institution of the family, one of the most solid manifestations of the patriarchy, would be under threat. The women who asked this question represented womankind at the opposite end of the feminist spectrum. They were co-opted by the patriarchy in so fool-proof a manner as to be completely blind to the film's liberating possibilities. In all probability the majority of them had husbands who had outside love interests, who regularly came home late, who drank regularly, and who regularly indulged in wife-beating.

The protests against the protestors were equally revealing. The lesbians who joined the marches against the banning of *Fire* were inverting the binary. However, the mainstream feminists who accused the lesbians of rches against the banning of husbands who had ping the hetero/homo binary in place. As such, the latter refused to call the film a lesbian film, and explained that the lesbianism portrayed in the film was at best 'situational' lesbianism, because the women in question were both married (they were actually sisters-in-law, which to some, may even introduce an incest angle) and turned to each other only because their husbands did not sleep with them!

To my mind, nothing can be more simplistic. In a homosocial and heterosexist culture where no sex education worth its name exists, situations often allow people to discover their true sexual natures (in the chromosomal sense) and true sexual identities (in the homo-political sense). The notion of situational or circumstantial homosexuality must thus be dismissed as a myth, or at least taken with a pinch of salt.

If the women's wing of the Shiv Sena that protested against the screening of *Fire* was co-opted by the patriarchy in real life, exactly this is what happens in a 1970s Marathi film, *Umbertha*, in reel life. The film is set in a home for destitute women in rural Maharashtra. When two of them, one butch, the other femme, are caught making out on the roof one night, the other women, ironically, turn against them. Ironically, because as destitutes, one expects them to bond with anyone who is marginalized. As dinner is served in the community kitchen the next day, one of them suddenly flings a bowl of boiling hot dal on the butch lesbian and scalds her. A better instance of homophobia probably does not exist in Indian cinema.

Two 19th century writers, Andre Gide and Oscar Wilde, become focal points in any discussion on de-stereotyping the body and desire. Both were homosexual, but their approach towards their homosexuality was poles apart. Gide was steeped in his religion, Christianity, which he must have found difficult to reconcile with his homosexuality. He accepted his homosexuality as natural to him, and as his essential identity, but in the conservative heteronormative environment in which he lived in 19th century Europe, his method was to downplay it, to not be loud about it, and perhaps to even abstain from sexual activity altogether. This is what brought him into conflict with Oscar Wilde. When they once met by chance in a foreign country, Algiers, Wilde tempted Gide to transgress by introducing him to a very handsome Muslim sexworker, Mohammed. Gide spent the night with Mohammed in a state of absolute bliss, but the next morning he was overcome by guilt: he had sinned, and doubtless the man responsible for it was Oscar Wilde. He wrote a letter to his mother, in which he described Oscar Wilde as “a more dangerous product of modern civilization, his method was to downplay it, to not be loud about it, and perhaps to even abstain from sexual activity altogether that made him equate his homosexuality with transgression. Sexual transgression was but a stage in Wilde his methoment of his transgressive aesthetic, and political homosexuality. Wilde’s trials that led eventually to his death are legion, but the trials were as much on account of his sexual transgression as his aesthetic and political transgression. Wilde substituted moral attributes, such as truth, sincerity and maturity which society held in high esteem, with their opposite, lies, insincerity and narcissism. In this, he was similar to another gay writer, Jean Genet. Homosexuality, to Wilde and Genet, outlawed by the church and the state, and pathologized by medicine, could never be a part of one’s essential identity, as Andre Gide believed. The only viable option left to the homosexual, then, was to transgress. Transgression, here, amounted to sexual perversion, as well as the belief in radical views expressed through literature that went against society’s established norms. Both Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Genete’s *A Thief’s Journal* belong to this category of literature. As for sexuality, perversion has many forms, but for the homosexual, the one form of sexual activity that is ideologically ruled out is monogamous vaginal sex with a woman one is married to, that is practiced not for pleasure, but for procreation. All other forms of sexual activity, arguably, have pleasure as their main aim. Thus, it is through perversion that a successful de-stereotyping of the body is achieved.

At this point, I must return to Foucault. In an interview, Foucault says, “Not to be gay is to limit the effects of my choice in such a way, that my

life does not change in any significant manner.” Earlier in the piece, Foucault also says that “It is not necessary to be homosexual, but it is necessary to be set on being gay.” To Foucault, being gay is tantamount to “being creative of ways of life.”

What does Foucault’s distinction here between ‘gay’ and ‘homosexual’ mean? Foucault uses the term homosexual in an essentialist sense to indicate a sexual preference and a sexual identity, such as that possessed by Andre Gide. On the other hand, he uses the word gay in an anti-essentialist sense, the sense in which Oscar Wilde was gay. The homosexual man or woman who is convinced that homosexuality for him/her is an axis on which identity can be mapped and/or is a natural sexual preference, effects a simple inversion of the hetero/homo binary. Such a person may be said to substitute heteronormativity with homonormativity. In doing so, the homosexual subject resorts to appropriation, no doubt, but it is an appropriation combined with the transformation. Within the homosexual subculture, the homosexual subject has transformed ‘homo’ from a position of victimhood to a position of empowerment. This, however, leads to stasis; it does not amount to a successful dismantling of the status quo. If homophobia is the concomitant of heteronormativity, then the concomitant of homonormativity may be said to be heterophobia. The binary, rather than being displaced, continues to exist, albeit in inverted form. Literary theorists differ on the importance of inverting the binary as a necessary stage in its displacement. While Barthes prefers to skip the stage, and head straight for utopia, Derrida sees inverting the binary as a crucial way station in its deconstruction. In Foucault’s view, in the interview referred to above, a gay man is a homosexual who uses his homosexuality to perceive the world differently. The different perception, then, amounts to exercising free choice in a way that is not conducive to maintaining the status quo. This includes a change in lifestyle, especially in the sexual sense, that gives the gay man a veritable *carte blanche* to live as debauched a life as he pleases (as perhaps Foucault himself did). I say ‘gay man’, because the lesbians were not so sure. Their sympathies were still with the feminists, though in the post-AIDS world, they were written off by the feminists who regarded them as no different from gay men, whose promiscuity had given the world AIDS. But residues of their love affair before AIDS still lingered. At that time, in Sedgwick’s picturesque phrase, “Feminism was the theory, lesbianism the practice.” The lesbians were not as ‘moral’ as the feminists, but they still preferred the stability of relationships to the destabilizing of normativity, as advocated by queer theory. The result was that the lesbian project all over the world branched off in a somewhat different direction from that

taken by gay men. For lesbians today, the interface of gender and sexuality remains a much more pertinent issue than it does for male queer theorists. This is manifested, for example, in diametrically opposed attitudes that the former and the latter may have towards issues like pornography and paedophilia. In my own experience, lesbians are unwilling to make any compromises, especially with regard to paedophilia. Literature and cinema on the subject that could once be freely discussed, such as Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, or the Canadian film *Montreal Main*, are today suspect. Organizations like NAMBLA (North American Man Boy Love Association) are thoroughly discredited by feminists and lesbians alike, and are today outlawed.

I would argue that the phrase “de-stereotyping body and desire” which is the title of the present volume, is a similar formulation to Wilde's anti-essentialism as analysed by Dollimore, to Derrida's idea of deconstructing the binary, and to Foucault's view that equates gayness to creative lifestyle change. One contemporary scholar who comes across to me as a disciple of Wilde and Foucault is the York University professor of English, Terry Goldie. Terry Goldie's book *Queersexlife* is an amalgam of scholarship and pornography. The author takes a close look at his own life, at his own sexual life to be precise, and deconstructs his own sexual behaviours and practices that range from cross-dressing to fathering children to being anally penetrated by men. In the end, it is impossible to pinpoint the real, or the essential, Terry Goldie. Just when we begin to think Terry Goldie is homosexual, he surprises us by revealing that he was “born to be a parent,” and what is more, has actually produced children. If we think of him as heterosexual, then, he says he is not that either, because he has the best orgasm when he is anally penetrated by another man. This may lead some of us to describe him as ‘passive’. But Terry Goldie prefers to think of himself as ‘active’ because, he says, he uses his penis in exactly the same way that other men do. That is to say, he has erections and ejaculates just like other men, but unlike them, does not ejaculate in a vagina, but masturbates and ejaculates *as* he is being penetrated by another man. Eve Sedgwick calls masturbation “autoerotic sex,” (as opposed to sex with another person, which she calls “alloerotic sex”). Sedgwick suggests that autoerotic sex has so many practitioners all around the world, that she wonders why the sexuality binary is not made up of alloerotic/autoerotic, instead of hetero/homo. Terry is a man's name. Though Terry Goldie wears his hair long and usually dresses in men's clothing, i.e. shirts and pants, which is to say that in terms of gender, he is socially and culturally constructed as a man, his book has photographs of him in an Indian sari, and in other female attire. The photographs look so real, that it would be

impossible for anyone who does not know Terry Goldie to say that they are of a man. Once again here, essence eludes the author.

The most anti-essentialist and creative part of Terry Goldie's book, however, is the chapter entitled "I Never Took it Up My Ass". Here the author speaks of the time when he has sex with a woman but does not use his penis at all, which he uses when he has sex with men. Instead, both he and his female partner gratify themselves by using what Terry Goldie calls a "double-ended dildo." As the author describes his sexual practice, which is undoubtedly *creative* of ways of life, he becomes graphic, even pornographic, in his attention to detail. He says one end of the double-ended dildo is inserted in his partner's vagina and the other in his own anus. In doing so, the author successfully manages to feminize his body during sex with another *woman*, not another man. Heteronormativity, patriarchy and masculinity are, thus, all destabilized in one go. Heterosexuality ceases to be a performativity gesture. The body becomes a site which, through its de-stereotyping, heralds change. But the change is no ordinary change. On the contrary, it is utopian. Foucault says one cannot stabilize oneself in a position, including that of homosexuality. To Foucault and his followers, the key lies in destabilizing normativity, in toppling its stable foundations and reducing it to rubble. Debris. That is why, according to one view, the sexuality revolution generates more power, more energy, than even the Great Wars.

DISEMPOWERING GENDER-NORMATIVE
DESIRE DISCOURSES:
A CONCISE CASE STUDY
IN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

SAROTTAMA MAJUMDAR

In my attempt to untangle the different registers in which norms are accepted as ‘control terms’ in culture studies, I should like to begin by briefly discussing the parameters that cultural relativism imposes on normative studies. Herskovits in his seminal work defines it as “Judgments (which) are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation” (Herskovits, 351). This primarily brings to the fore the essentialist dilemma on the nature of reality to which one important perspective in terms of our thesis, is that of Cassirer, who looks at the symbolism of language as the only means of experiencing reality (Cassirer, 25). This posits the contemporaneous existence of an infinitude of languages, symbolisms, and therefore realities. Enculturation by this argument, both temporally and geographically, acts as an agent of norm definition. The psychological foundation for the judgment/experience relationship was arrived at by Sherif in his work on judgment and relationships to deliver what came to be considered a path-breaking study on the establishment of social norms as a result of “formation of common frames of reference as a product of the contact of individuals” (Sherif, 106). It may be noted at this juncture that the concepts he included in the table, namely “stereotypes, fashions, conventions, customs, and values” (Ibid), have applications for the elements of the discourse we will engage with shortly; gender normativity in desire, ritual and religious doctrine. These concepts are centrally located in classical anthropological definitions of culture from the nineteenth century as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1:1).

From Tylor to Foucault may seem to cover the whole spectrum in cultural discourse, from institutional theorization to applied deconstruction of institutional power over a century that saw profound cultural impositions and dislocations. However, if one considers how seminal Foucault's work on each of these institutions has been in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, to our understanding of the power structures inherent in their functioning, it seems clear that Foucault's intellectual structuring is following a definite academic pattern in accordance with the classical model.

The analysis of the power structure of sexuality and desire, which includes asseverations on gender and cultural norms, has come under scrutiny repeatedly from the nineteenth century onwards (or the eighteenth, to follow Foucault) partly as an adjunct to the patriarchal, civilizational, racial rhetoric of European imperialists, partly as an offshoot of evolutionary biology and Darwinism, and partly in an academic atmosphere which increasingly engaged with the pathological dissection of the functional human mind in its cognitive and intuitive capacities. *The History of Sexuality (Vol 1)*, entitled *The Will to Knowledge*, published in French in 1976 and translated into English in 1977, deals with the emergence of the discipline (the science of sexuality) and of biopolitics in the western hemisphere. Foucault's construction of the hypothesis of repressed sexuality resulting in sexual normativity forming a key source for identity formation is undoubtedly one of the most far reaching and influential reworkings of Freudian dialectics to have emerged in the late twentieth century. For Foucault, speaking of power relationships in the western cultural model, all domains are fraught arenas of power struggles and "relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities and disequilibrium and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations." (Foucault, 1:94). Interestingly, in the case of a geopolitical entity like India in the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, already engaged in a cultural indoctrinating project in a heavily unequal power relationship, with its imperial masters (in the guise of mentors), sexual and gender expectations are formulated in a manner which seamlessly interpolates an extrinsic normative model into the fabric of national social identity formation. So skilful a process in so complex a discourse has resulted in the disappearance of the fault lines which once marked the rupture between the old socio-normative view and

the new. An understanding and acknowledgement of other, older indigenous forms of comprehending desire and power theories extant in India overwritten by but always challenging colonial formatting, is a method of rewriting a partial and erroneous chapter of Indian socio-cultural history and reopening the debate on normativity in a specific ethnic and religious context.

On the principle that a proposition is only as valid as the strength and clarity of its first principals, I shall briefly discuss the confusion about the definition of normativity engendered by the debate over the advisability of universalizing the theory of power. While Foucault's contention is that genealogical historiography is the attempt to form "a different grid of historical decipherment (recurring) advancing little by little towards a different conception of power through a closer examination of an entire historical material" (Daniels), Jurgen Habermas' influential critique is of Foucault's inability to "sustain any fuller normative contestation" (Daniels), though his critical descriptions implicitly indict the objectifying and subjugating operations of technologies of power. Habermas calls Foucault's position 'cryptonormative'; a position defined as an engagement in critique without appeal to the 'right side'. One attempt to work our way around this seemingly insoluble dilemma is to look at Foucault's position on power as methodologically pluralist, and since power and knowledge for Foucault, unlike the position held by Habermas or Nancy Fraser, have a correlative but not causal relationship determinable in historical specificity, and human identity (including sexuality) is tied to power structures, "it would seem incumbent on Foucault to use his work to locate the endangered species of resistant practices and to consider how they could be strengthened in nontotalising, nontheoretical and nonnormalizing ways. If truth is to operate in society so as to resist technological power, we must find a way to make it positive and productive. Whether such a possibility exists remains an open question." (Dreyfus, 201-202).

Two such identifiable resistant practices of precolonial provenance have continued to flourish over large tracts of revering Bengal, Orissa and the Eastern Himalayan region, technically theological in origin but for purposes of usage and application, socio-political in influence, which have run parallel courses both subversive and resistant to the official sex/desire norm formation that is a colonial trope in pan-Indian identity formation, and merit brief exposition. Saleem Kidwai and Ruth Vanita have proved conclusively that in pre-modern India (as also earlier evidenced in later Vedic texts such as *Manusmriti*) Hinduism accepts the existence of a range

of sexual preferences and possibilities, thus valorising desire as one (though not the only) motivating factor in the sexual act. This is not to say however, that the duty of procreation was not prioritized as the active mobilizing force of communal life. But writing homophobia and heteronormativity into the narratives of education, law and politics in India was very much a colonial act which decisively ossified all patriarchal norms in gender hierarchy and normative practice within the coital act. This is the accepted thesis in postcolonial feminist critiques by theorists like Tanika Sarkar, Himani Banerjee, and Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan. However, let us contrast this position with the central doctrinal position of Gaudiya (from Gaud, i.e. Bengal) Vaishnavism, which was and continues to influence, sometimes directly, often insidiously and always pervasively, the intellectual and imaginative landscape of Hindu Eastern India. Gaudiya Vaishnavism, whose origin as a Bhakti movement is traced to Nimai Pandit of Nabadweep (later titled Sri Chaitanya), flourishes globally today through the missionary activities of a number of protomonastic sects which trace their origins to his teachings. This movement follows the philosophical structures of the *Bhagavat Gita*, *Purana*, *Isha Upanishad*, *Gopala Tapani Upanishad* and the *Kali Sanatana Upanishad*. The deity worshipped as Krishna has been called by Arjun on the battlefield as monastic sects which trace their origins to his *Bhagavat Gita*, 14:4); He is also in terms of the theory of “Achintya Bheda Abheda” (inconceivable oneness and difference), both the godhead and the soul: the union achievable through “Raganuga Sadhana” (spontaneous devotion, in pursuance of which no material service, including sexuality in all forms, should be repressed). But most importantly, the Gaudiya Vaishnav worships Chaitanya, the first guru, as a manifestation of both Radha (the consort or feminine principle) and Krishna (the masculine principle). The vocation of the Gaudiya Vaishnav which is “Hare Krishna” bears witness to this in that Hara is one of Radha’s many names invoked by devotees always conjoined to Krishna as coeval in worship of a single form. Most Vaishnav teachers draw upon this dual recognition of gender principles by declaring the self to be essentially genderless (Swami Prabhupada, founder of the Vedanta Society in the USA, on hearing of Oscar Wilde’s trial was quoted as saying “poor man, all lust is the same”). Jayadeva’s 12th century text *Gita Govinda* also draws upon and highlights the two rasas of the love and union between Radha/Krishna: svakiya and parakiya in an esoteric but also highly un-hierarchized form. The gender hierarchy that is often taken without question as a part of classical Hindu theological discourse in carnal and social intercourse seems to be absent if not subverted in the tradition of Vaishnavism in this part of the country. Interestingly however,

while SriChaitanya's revolutionary subversion of the racial and caste hierarchy of the traditional Hindu Society is a bona fide inclusion in the narrative of Indian social and religious reforms, his daring reading of gender hierarchic normativity and its influence in social discourse is largely ignored. This is a historiographical omission that presents a biased perspective on the resistance power narratives operative within a given social space.

Buddhism, within decades of the death of Gautam Buddha, had split into different sects or schools, each with separate ritual practices, often drawing upon the elements of existent ethno-religious practices of the geography in which it flourished. In Tibet, through the influence of a missionary possibly from around Taxila, later worshipped as Guru Padmasambhava, by the synthesis of elements from esoteric ritual magic often collectively, or by the spirit worship of Bon religion prevalent among the inhabitants then residing in the plateau of Tibet, and the practice in North Western provinces of what is now Pakistan (the Swat valley, which is the geographical location of Taxila) of preserving Buddhist teachings in encrypted language or *sandhya bhasa* to ensure secrecy (Bucknell, vii) created what came to be called Vajrayana Buddhism (the term *tantric* as an adjective was of later origin). The literature of Vajrayana Buddhism, now practiced in Tibet, parts of India which have seen a large influx of Tibetan settlers, and other parts of North Eastern India, is not as old as the Pali canon of Buddhist teachings and the Agamas. The tantric (*tantra* or *upaya* simply represented a means to an end) techniques and approaches to Vajrayana were developed no earlier than the 7th or 8th centuries CE. The eponymous *Vajra* or *Dorje* in Tibetan is the symbolic representation of a sceptre with a sphere and variable spokes representing method or bliss, usually seen as an instrument in the hand of the Buddha, the Maitreya (manifestation of the deity), or a Tara (manifestation of wisdom). The point again about Tantric *upaya* incorporated in Vajrayana is an understanding and synthesis of pre-patriarchal ritual magic practices that accepts the importance of sensate rites involving liminal desires and fears, and revolving around feasting, coitus, the charnel ground and human waste. Not all practices are a part of the public ritual practices which define social life, but non-hierarchizing coitus and accepting the pleasure principal as involving both partners as equals is an act of great esoteric importance in Tantric practice that Vajrayana accepts and propagates. The magical attributes and the obvious allure of esoteric gratification have in the recent past exposed Tantric practices both in Hinduism and Buddhism to much prurient curiosity. It is unfortunate that the same enthusiasm has not been brought to bear upon

the real nature of the revolution and liberation represented by a ritual communal practice as a religion which actively encourages equal rights to sexual pleasures as a means to the attainment of spiritual goals.

The object of this study has been to prove, that what we term normativity, is the reification of the experiences of individuals in a group at a given time. The danger is when this process begins to be perceived as historical and super-organic; which is to deny that it is conditioned by circumstances. In order that this error of critical judgment is not committed, we need to be alert to resistant discourses within the existent power structures, and whenever detected these practices need to be included into the dominant narrative so as to constantly challenge the tyranny of cultural fundamentalism in its various guises.

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BODY-POLITICS: VISUAL ART, A CASE IN POINT.

CHILKA GHOSH

This article intends to look at de-stereotyping Indian sculpted and painted bodies from two different angles: one, from the angle of creation and the other from consumption/appreciation. It is necessary to clarify from the outset that by de-stereotyping I do not only mean departing from the norms of beauty but also departing from our normal understanding of beauty that has a history and to consider both the human body and its representation in all its materiality with a historical perspective. With reference to sculpted bodies of ancient India and our modern historiography of the same, I would point out how our present understanding formed through several discourses has typified these works of art, bringing into play a second order of typicality, that forms our present understanding not only of representative human bodies but of the real human body too. It is important, I argue to question some of our understanding of the patron client relation of the past and reconsider the questions of (male) gaze and desire vis-à-vis female gaze. I do not, however, suggest that typification was in any way innocent in the past or that a proper understanding of it would solve our present problems with body stereotyping. I mean to say that proper materialist understanding both of the body and its representation and historicity is a crucial step towards de-stereotyping the human body. By way of comprehension of the past, I propose to cite de-stereotyped created bodies from modern Indian art and the politics behind these, though I shall not move beyond the 1950s because after that variations in representation have been both rapid and far too multifarious and would require several papers for complete discussion.

Clarification of certain Theoretical Points

Since a person makes sense of the personal self through the body, to control the sense of the body is a means to control the owner of the body. In order to control the sense, it is important to distance the self from its

material understanding of the body, or in other words, it is necessary to make the body transparent and a receptacle of meanings created by the dominant discourse. In art the icon of the body is the signifier of the material body; in a chain of signification the signified may become signifier bereft of history and frozen, fit for mythologizing. There is no doubt that so long as objects including human bodies remain objects, art cannot be created; objects have to lose some of their translucency to be represented but it is not necessary to deprive them of history in the process unless definite politics is involved. During the dawn of human civilization, humans existed not in relation with but as a part of the material world, which Lacan termed the *ot* in relation with but as a, so to indicate that sense of the whole body and a self as a subject never existed; hence there could be no art.

The Mirror Stage of Indian Civilization and entry into the Symbolic Order

The body was made sense of as a whole when reflected in the mirror of the wish to control the production process with its ability to work and to procreate. The body now had meaning and the owner of the body was the subject for which even the personal body was an object of deep interest. In other words its physical experiences were taken into account and represented in art in abstraction. I would cite the male seated figure of the Indus Valley, surrounded by animals and erect penis vis-à-vis the female statues with pronounced genitals, large breasts, and sometimes with plants sprouting from the naval. While the former was a symbol of virility, the latter set was a symbol of fertility, both frankly expressed. I do not for once suggest that the Indus Valley Civilization had not entered into the symbolic order of language or the phallic phase that Lacan called “Name of the Father”. What I mean is that at that stage they were still close to the phase of the *st* that the Indus Valley Civilization had not, the sculpted bodies symbolized their material experiences. On the other hand, now when the grip of the phallic order is firm, when we are far away from the phase of the ‘Real’ and when we have entered into the phase of ‘Desire’, we explain the female figures in terms of fertility while we refer to the male figure as Yogi and underplay its sexuality. It is important to note that the animals that surround the male figure could not be signifiers of animal wealth and affluence for they were wild animals such as rhinoceros and tigers; they were rather signifier of virility associated with animals that do not have skin covering the penis. While reading the created bodies of the past we tend to tear them away from their context and project our