

QUEERING POPULAR CULTURE: SOUTH ASIAN- CANADIAN LITERARY, CULTURAL AND FILM SCENE MAPPING

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Abstract

The research paper metaphorically draws from fiction (novels) to reality (non-fiction), which here, are the documentaries, the literary magazines, queer safe spaces and live events to veraciously plot the trajectory. It charts the queer subculture as it brings together individuals from varied races, ethnicities and classes. The need to desentimentalise while writing about queer memoirs to dissuade any invoking of sympathy for the marginalized is showcased. Focus is laid on the sustenance offered and the optimistic steps taken in this arena showcased in the magazine TriKone that supports and empowers LGBT South Asians. The following section is on documentaries, the way they originated in Canada and how they are appropriated by lesbians and gays. The impact of such cinema is coupled by power and psychoanalysis that should engage at the level of the signifier where queer has to always be in the defensive. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of three queer South-Asian Canadian documentaries. Atif Siddiqi's Solo (2003) takes an unflinching stance towards accepting minoritarian identity in a self-centered and self-absorbed experimental documentary format. Marx, Althusser and Lacanian psychoanalytical methodologies are applied to invoke base-superstructure, structural causality and societal codes respectively. Faceless (2012) by Karan Singh philosophically touches upon the outcasts of race, society, colour, gender, nation and culture that draw striking parallels with the Dalits of India. Rex v/s Singh (2008) maps the queer urban geography with its oppressive gay sodomical history coupled with the painstaking three-tier way in which it was made at the level of its text, documentation and symbolism. Cultural sensitivity, translation, religious identities and the colonial context are the areas it grapples with. The films are essentially chosen in comparison with novels 'Cereus blooms at night' by Shani Mootoo and 'Funny Boy' by Shyam Selvadurai. The thesis statement gathers strands from queer South Asian-Canadian identitarian crises through popular cultural lens and psychoanalytical understandings from history and current situation.

A study of the Pride Parade is done for the critique of space as opposed to dissidence. The differentially progressive and grandiose elements of the Canadian and South Asian parades are pitted against each other as an overt marker of the inclusivity in the society and of the difference in approach and magnitude across the nations. Queer Publishing House Queer Ink acts as a catalyst in the journey towards empowering and bringing about non-oppressive change in the fragmented sectors and voices of India through litigation, books and events.

Queering Popular Culture

Popular culture is a site where meaning is made and not simply given or assumed. For any genre of work to be popular, it should fit into the discourses used by the readers to make sense of their experiences. A popular text ensures the readers that their worldviews and discourses are meaningful. Due to disabilities, race, poverty and many other reasons queers are often shut out of the possibilities of commercialized gay culture. They are rendered more or less invisible in the glamorous contemporary media representations of subcultural life. The exclusionary aspect of commercial gay and lesbian culture is one of the most important criticisms made of it in the anti-commodification arguments. This should not divert our attention from the fact that queers of colour and from the working class also help make queer urban worlds what they are. Gay and lesbian subcultures may bring together individuals from different races, ethnic groups and classes, as their brotherhood may enable them to rub shoulders with people from different strata of society.

Queer subcultures can accommodate various kinds of difference and be changed through that accommodation. The preference of the term 'subculture' as opposed to 'identity' or 'community' by a gay theorist Alan Sinfield is made as it retains a "strong sense of diversity, of provisionality, of constructedness" (Davidson: 25). The ground reality can have stark contrasts with the aforementioned statements. As in this case, people from the diaspora battle subcastes in their country of origin like in South Asia but when they arrive in a nation like Canada they have to further resolve issues of racism that deters and creates hierarchies in bonding.

Having interviewed Dr. Raj Rao, the researcher learnt that many gay people are writing memoirs because that then becomes a factual account of their life. To instantiate, Siddharth Dubey writes a gay memoir about school and gay children, in which the main technique is to desentimentalise, that is, to refrain from invoking sympathy for marginalised people as Dr. Rao does in his *Hostel Room 131* (2010). He says that, "Fiction and poetry do not allow you to victimize yourself." When asked about the politics of publishing queer content, he quickly retorts

that it is necessary to jump out of the ghetto and there is a need to fashion a queer aesthetic. This would arise from the need to defy and rebel that is a part of queer politics.

Normally only the universities that have queer faculties teach the course of queer studies like Kalyani Bannerji, Niladri Ray, Hoshang Merchant, Hemadri Roy and a few others. There are many gender and sexuality studies courses but there the gender quotient tends to dominate. There are many professors who cannot bring themselves to even use the terms gay or homosexual, they use archaic terms like, 'that-way inclined'. Attending any talk on sexuality addressing the queer person is always in the manner of 'they', there is always the 'us'-ing and 'them'-ing. There is no generational change; even young people do that although there are almost 50 million homosexual men in India as per a study based on having had at least one homosexual encounter. This means to say that people are not honest about it because of the stigma attached to it. These are the things that need to be exposed. Nothing can bridge this gap as long as sexuality is linked with morality through religion. Dr. Raj Rao says in an interview with the researcher, in his unforgiving style that, "If the whole world would turn atheists overnight then there could be a change! We cannot somehow see sex as natural; we can only see it as moral". There are many more cultural events for the queer community, many gay bars in Canada; it is so much more entrenched in the culture than it is over here. The levels of ignorance are lower. Nonetheless, there is homophobia, as the West is trying to go back to religion. They think during the 1970s post Vietnam war, things had become worse (drug-culture, etc.) and so it is trying to reform itself. There would be those lobbies but as far as the University students are concerned, they are more in-tune with the discourse. Almost every University does offer a course, without being self-conscious about it. The need to be in the closet is much less and above all the law is not the same as over here, gay marriage, civil unions all of that are accepted. One comes 'out' to the family easily in Canada than they would in South Asia where they put you on a guilt-trip: so there is a pleasure of openness. The issue of self-censorship with respect to queer studies and/or movement is a virgin area to be worked upon when discussing any topic with a large gathering.

Literary Magazine: Trikone

Trikone magazine is an endeavour of a non-profit organization for LGBTQ people of South Asian origin. It is the oldest group of its kind that has now made its global presence. Having started in the year 1986, it now caters to people in every continent. The organisation hosts incredibly diverse audiences and a celebration of their uniqueness. The magazine is divided into three major sections: Departments, Columns and Features. It starts with a hopeful and positive editorial coupled with sound advice from a youth counselor for LGBTQ that falls under the 'Departments' section. This is followed by different parts strewn across the magazine, one being 'A Letter to our Readers' addressing directly to the subscribers and readers for direct correspondence about *Trikone*. 'Proudly Yours' takes pride in setting a standing example for others to follow and also to get the feel that despite the hardships things will get better. 'Panache' is the poetry section on varied topics. 'The Journey' is a section that posts photographs of the magazine against the backdrop of landmarks, cityscapes or skylines, anywhere and everywhere that the magazine travels. The last one being 'Resources' that gives the entire list of the resources spread across the world for others to get in touch with. Then there are different 'Columns' like 'Wandering Thoughts' for any roving ideas of being gay which could be a gay coffee date or poems on the body. 'The Traveller' etches vivid details of an exciting holiday destination for all the travelling enthusiasts. The travel writer maps uncharted territories and gives information about getting there and accommodation details. 'Guest Column' is upon invitation to famed writers on their noteworthy gay experiences. 'Offshoot' has stories in continuation and 'Socio After Taste' the recent trends of the other aspects in the world along with sexuality for instance, fashion and so on. The 'Features' section includes an 'Interview' of any renowned frontrunner of the Queer movement, 'Perspective' caters to books or on films, reviewing them for the readers and some others that keep changing as per the article under consideration. *Trikone* offers wide-ranging topics that are in vogue for the queer movement for the people of South Asian decent. Along with showcasing the recent trends in varied spheres of life, it also builds hope for those finding it tough to cope with the triple marginalization of diaspora, race and sexuality. The celebratory tone of the magazine with its bright and cheerful cover coupled with glossy paper reinstates the optimism. It lends a voice to the LGBT community so that they may all be together in offering resistance to others and showing solidarity towards the community.

Unraveling Queer Documentaries

The scenario changes shifting from the print culture to the moving images culture to chart the territory. John Grierson, the founder of the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada preached a doctrine that only films using socially effective, realistic imagery were worthy of public support. He believed that a truly democratic society could exist only when citizens participate fully in the political process; that ordinary citizens must possess information in order to participate; and that films and other mass media could provide them with this information. He had the curious notion that form can never be subordinated to content which indicated the tension that characterized Grierson's early ideas on documentary. He rejected both studio reconstructions and trained actors in favour of location shooting with real people. He proposed that, "the aesthetic value was reducible to social utility and that aesthetics itself was reducible to a social theory based on morality" (Elder: 93). He single-handedly initiated state-sponsored filmmaking with the foresight that it should be documentary.

He set the tone for the ideals of documentary making in Canada. He remained the driving force until the Canadian governments policies coincided with the NFB. He took pride in showing how, “the documentary film could be put to social use and that he advocated that art should become a form of propaganda [...] (which) was really a form of education” (100).

There are many factions now in the once miniscule quota of queer representation even in the 1990s. Splits occur over the matter of method, with some wishing to identify a gay cinematic language in the tradition of *écriture féminine* (feminine writing), some wanting to focus exclusively on self-declared and typically avant-garde or independent lesbian or gay films by lesbian, gay or queer authors. There are others who wish to work concertedly on popular culture, reading hegemonic texts against the grain, looking for the queer within the straight. Lesbian, gay and queer work further divides over whom or what is the proper subject of research, whether they are queers, straights, texts and so on.

Interest in lesbian, gay and queer film and media historiography is strong as well as there is a positive concern for the historical presence of lesbians, gays and queers in reel life during prior decades. In the domain of nonacademic publishing, it has an outpouring of multi-national guides and reference works. The focus is contemporary as well as on historical images of gayness that indicates a burgeoning, extra-academic epistemophilia for this aspect of the gay past. Fabienne Worth (1993) notes the split-tendency in gays and lesbians for cinema research that gay men conduct “historiographic archival work” and lesbians carry out “text-based, psychological analyses of, more often than not, contemporary films” (Miller and Stam (Eds.): 170). “A recurring challenge to lesbian, gay, and queer film and media historiography is that of presentism, or what I would call the anachronistic fallacy” (Miller and Stam (Eds.): 167). There are few premises established in the area of contemporary spectatorship in an essay by Laura Mulvey being that, “there exists a relationship between power, objectification, and looking that neatly divides up along sexual lines, with men being the agent of the look and women the object viewed; second, that the mechanisms of cinema foster such relationships; third, that psychoanalysis helps delineate and indeed undo such mechanisms; fourth, that the mode of analysis needed to bring about change must engage at the level of the signifier, i.e. the text” (170).

The term queer provoked a reevaluation of the object of the critical enterprise itself. This is particularly true in the area of film and media studies, where the notion stimulated discussions about aesthetics, marginality, and the relationship between art and audience, in addition to conversations about the difference between ‘queer’ and the terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’. Typically in film and media studies, queer was defined oppositionally that possessed the qualities of being ‘non-, contra-, or anti-straight’. Queer was a representation that made heterosexuality strange and continued to signify images that were doomed homosexual, but stood also for non-homosexual imagery.

“How lesbians, gays, and queers keep on negotiating the thorny terrain of popular culture- especially film, which is irresistible and everywhere, stunningly affirmative and furiously homophobic, engaging a legion of desires, anxieties, and fantasies, sometimes all at once – is a matter which none of us can afford to ignore” (177). Reviewing some selected documentaries that map this terrain shall add to the corpus.

BEING ‘SOLO’

Contrary to the Canadian narcissistic critique of Atif Siddiqi’s documentary on self-actualisation and self-discovery, it is perceived as a bold statement of coming to terms with one’s minoritarian identity. Siddiqi brings up this notion in the film, as he adores taking up a starring role in his creation. This film was released in 2003, when Atif recognized himself as a gay. He had been exploring his identity and what best suited his inner desire, which he now contends is that of a transsexual. He was born in Pakistan, then went over to study in Los Angeles and has settled in Quebec, Canada. His works revolve around identity issues, gender politics and notions of personal transformation and metamorphosis by incorporating elements of symbolism and iconography from mythology. ‘Solo’ is an unabashedly self-centered and self-absorbed experimental documentary. Siddiqi attempts to overcome life-long fears and insecurities around intimacy as he searches for a deep and meaningful first relationship with Mr. Perfect. He lays bare his life and emotions in this video/ art diary. His movie is a part documentary and part performance art. ‘Solo’ has recurring images of him swimming dressed like a mermaid. It is symbolic of diving into the subconscious, as water represents the subconscious. Also, his zodiac sign is Pisces, which is a fish and since this film is about him, it looks at multiple imageries that define him. It begins with him narrating about his first crush, a Danish boy of ten, while he was six years of age. This was also the time, when a servant sexually abused him. All the scenes alternate with therapy sessions, as he has all those traits that require healing. Attempts are made to break through in being intimate, to overcome shyness and to consciously stop avoiding being involved with men. He feels that he is a girl trapped in a man’s body and that if he were born as a girl, all his life would be different. With this theme, Atif seems to create intimacy with the audience. The whole concept of self-portrait or a biographical video work was not all that common and popular at that time in 2001-2002. It also predates the whole current selfie revolution where it is so common to share everything about oneself.

He claims that fantasy is better than reality, which is a recurrent theme in many South Asian works. The reason is that they are at a stage where they are groping with so many issues and so they have a need to hide or verbalise in a very subverted manner. This has been exemplified in Shani Mootoo and Suniti Namjoshi’s work

depicting the fantasy land of Lantanacamara and all the fantastical imagery of Suniti respectively. Parental figures become very important in the context of the South Asians due to their close-knit structure. This is evident in 'Funny Boy' where Arjie gets the sanction and permission from his parents to play what he likes. For Atif, the most important opinion is of his parents and what they think of his newly found self. They do not seem to be convinced that he was born like this, they feel he might have got into bad company and that their prayers will make him straight. Apart from the therapy sessions, Atif is seen going to the grocery shop and the laundromat, which is reminiscent of Hanif Kureishi's 'My Beautiful Launderette', which hereto stands to say that one can find his Mr. Right anywhere. A very unique feature of this film is that he has a *tête-à-tête* with this childhood self, trying to advise and heal it as if acting out a role.

The role of his homeland and the reason why he moved to Canada has been answered in his interview with the researcher that: "Given the context of Sharia (Islamic laws), sodomy and same-sex acts are punishable by death. So either people turn a blind-eye to it or it happens behind closed doors. It is not an open society." He came out in Los Angeles far way from his homeland and relatives. His mother remained supportive right through, but his father was in denial. His parents were brainwashed by Muslim religious practitioners and made sure that Siddiqi's lifestyle was unacceptable. He never felt comfortable identifying himself as a Muslim, but also felt somewhat alienated by the Canadian gay community. There are scenes of performance art that is another aspect of Atif's personality. They symbolically stand for unison of God-man-animal as all these aspects are there within us. It is about letting go of the older self and being reborn into a new and more evolved identity.

Althusser's concept of structural causality is redolent of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The term refers to the way in which, "[m]en are no longer agents actively shaping history, either as individuals or classes, but rather are supports of the process within the structure" (Lapsley and Westlake: 6). Lacan emphasizes the primacy of societal codes (in the form of the symbolic order) in the shaping of subjectivity. Althusser as interpellation describes the way in which the subject is inculcated into the social order: a process explicated in all its complexity by Lacan through the Oedipus and castration complexes, the mirror stage and the acquisition of language. According to Althusser, interpellation takes place through ideological state apparatuses: family, religion, education, media and so on. In Lacanian terms, these social and familial structures are saturated with symbolic law. *Solo* shows the gays to be the victims of the ideology of the ruling class, which rejects them in their entirety. The Lacanian subject here (Siddiqi) ceaselessly develops and changes through his language (therapy) and although constituted by the symbolic order is "the producer as well as the product of meaning" (Lapsley and Westlake: 53). Meaning is produced by the subject through the retroactive nature of punctuation in the subject's enunciation. However, the subject is also produced by signification, as the meaning of the signifier at the first point of signification is a differential meaning, not an inherent meaning. This means that the subject must choose from a selection of signifiers that are available to him or her, which themselves shape and define the signified. Collectively, they construct the world in which the subject exists, and so construct subjectivity itself. For Lacan, there is an unending flux between the subject and signification, and this idea occurs in film studies as it does in *Solo*.

Solo can be compared to Trin Minh-ha's documentary *Reassemblage* and its understanding of culture. Her film is unlike other ethnographic documentary films; it is a montage of fleeting images from Senegal and includes no narration with only occasional statements by her. There is music, silence; sometimes she views a movie, refusing to make the film about a culture. It points to the viewers' expectation and the need for the assignment of meaning. The sound used here accentuates the discontinuity of the film reality. She demonstrates the power of the film and the ability of the filmmaker to alter reality. She demonstrates how cultural standards can infiltrate one's perception of others. *Reassemblage* is making the point that these methods of documentary adulterate the culture they are attempting to describe by constructing and forming that infinitely complex reality into a neatly packaged hour-long docudrama about the romantic lives of primitive peoples. The fact is that reality is delicate and any attempt made at fathoming any understanding of the rough cut images gets easily destroyed by the transformation into words.

The film ends with the metaphor of a cube that represents compartmentalization and that there is light at the end of the dark tunnel. It has a hopeful message as the fantasy of finding Mr. Right gets fulfilled. As also that one may or may not find the perfect partner but despite all that, your parents and friends stand by you and are always supportive of you.

FACELESS EXISTENCE

This film is about anyone who does not fit in, and therefore the Director Karan Singh chose to keep the title and also the protagonist of the film 'Faceless'. South Asians here can be openly gay but it comes with a price, they are like the Dalits (outcastes). It is a partly autobiographical film; only the interviewee is fictional as he is a representative of the many minorities. The documentary begins with dialogues of self-reflection where the narrator walks around and questions his own place in the community; he strives to seek a sense of belonging. As he starts to talk about the present with Melanie (writer and activist), the first mention is of his father just like in *Solo*, where parents or family is the most important influence. The point is not to just find a partner but also the sanctity of the monogamous relationship is equally important which is a very Indian concept. Melanie then walks down an aisle, which has posters of white men in all the advertisements, showing that the popular

cultural representations are always white dominated. The use of other black or brown faces is just a matter of tokenism. The representation of a miniscule minority is done to depict that they support all the races. The common man is always looking at the more dominant white, macho and sculpted body as its ideal. This hegemonic popular cultural representation builds a sense of low self-esteem and makes the minority to try to emulate what they can never be.

Melanie's interview with the psychologist brings to light the presence of ghettos in Canada. 'The village' (a specifically delineated area) is supposed to be the only place where lesbians and gays can be themselves. Although a safe space is made available to them, it constrains them from being able to be themselves everywhere.

When compared with the Dalits of India who are also the outcasts, queer identity holds striking resemblances. Queer community has distinctions at the rung of sexuality, nation and race whereas Dalits face it from caste, class and division of labour(ers). The difficulties of seeing the effects of these markers are because of the dichotomous ideology which functions as a 'glass screen' that hides the social reality by scattering social divisions along the whole length of a formal hierarchy. It 'invisibilizes' the oppressors and helps to sustain the system. The saviours for both of them are the reservations for higher education (for Dalits) and at workplace (for both).

In South Asia we are still struggling to hold small gatherings for the lesbian and gay community. Canada has gone a step further. To aid in this step was the representative on organization that helps the non-status queer people. By extending support, the organization helps build hope for those in need. The frame of the colourful bubbles, festivity and colours is taken from the Toronto Pride Parade. After having focused on the issues that the queer community is surrounded with in Canada, albeit more so for those who belong to any different race, caste, nationality and so on, it moves on to show that there is merriment. People do celebrate their queerness and distinct identity despite all the odds. The film ends with many cheerful queer faces of various socio-cultural backgrounds showings solidarity to the cause. The short documentary opens the vista for many causes that need attention from the people at large.

ENCOUNTERING REX VERSUS SINGH

Ali Kazimi's film has a Marxist framework where family identity is linked to the identity of the nation. There has been a litany of abuses in history that has been heaped upon people charged with sodomitical behaviours in the more visible lives of men. This makes it more difficult to celebrate the homosexual tradition. However, the lack of evidence of homosexual behavior may also be seen as unsurprising. Sodomy was made a capital offence in 1533. Therefore it seems unlikely that people who engaged in it would leave any trace of it. In the early-modern period, sodomy was not restricted to the anal penetration of one man by another, but expanded to encompass all the carnal sins of excess that characterized the inhabitants of the city of Sodom in the Bible. Foucault thus designated it as a complicated category. The term homosexual was not coined until the latter end of the nineteenth century. This means that the use of textual evidence when studying earlier periods is subject to post-structuralist problems of slippage of both the signifiers and signified of sodomy.

Famously indifferent to the regulatory forces of gender, Foucault's discussion of the origin of homosexuality hinges on its specifically male subject:

As defined by the ancient civil canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away.... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (Jagose 2002: 11).

The background and the uncut scenes that went into the making of the film give it a unique perspective. The documentary *Rex v/s Singh* came about through Ali Kazimi's friendship and previous collaborations with John Grierson and Richard Fung, he had worked with them as a cinematographer on various projects. They both had known his work on early South Asian history in Vancouver and specifically on the Komagataru. The Vancouver Queer Film Festival approached John for 'AltermsScreen' (documentary) on their twentieth anniversary to put Vancouver Queer history on screen. They got a small grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, which is the federal arts funding agency. With John's acquaintance with a queer urban geographer, Brent who is in the film, he had done a queer mapping of Vancouver history that was like an overlay on the regular map. As a geographer he had mapped out the sites specifically looking at the criminal records where these acts of indecency had occurred. As he was going through the files, there came up the case of the Crown versus Singh. Subsequently, he started looking up the history and managed to get hold of the transcripts. Through the queer connections, John was acquainted with Brent as an inventive filmmaker and thought of making a collaborative piece with him. He has a very distinctive practice of working within a postcolonial/postmodern structure. He is deeply influenced by the Brechtian approach and so brings in that element. Then he approached Richard Fung

and Kazimi. Richard is also a queer activist and he had done a film called 'Dirty Laundry' which looks at the Chinese-Canadian experience around queer identity and history. So, given Kazimi's work specifically around the Komagatamaru, he suggested that there should be a collaborative work. Firstly, one case was taken up, the transcripts were looked into and a particular case drew everyone's attention that had a connection with the Komagatamaru, so it became yet another layer of the history of the Komagatamaru. Kazimi had done several layers of excavation and the most important and distinct contribution that he has made to the history of Komagatamaru is of the British-Indian army (military) history and its ramifications. This history comes as an antithesis to that, as there is this very patriarchal/hierarchical mode to it that applauds the ideal 'as male as you can get'. There is an entire history not talked about within the Sikh community, clearly not acknowledged anywhere else and layered in so many different ways. Therefore, all three decided to do the film and the classic thing to do for any kind of court transcript was to take the 'The Prosecution' as the inspiration of how a classical courtroom drama would be like.

This was an extremely low-budget production, so there was only one day to shoot in a wonderful courthouse that held the entire scene. They worked with Kazimi's students, as per their philosophy, "That if we can create them then we can work with them and we can trust them to deliver and we have done this repeatedly". One of the issues was of casting and Kazimi really wanted to make sure that they found professional actors in a limited time period and without any money. They also had to ensure that they found actors who will be able to play Sikhs, not just Sikhs but bearded and 'turbanned' Sikhs. Kazimi in his interview with the researcher vents out that:

"The life-long growing of one's beard and unshown hair and the turban as an embodiment is hard to pull off for just an actor. One has to live through your conviction of being visibly different, whether it be in India or here. This was the intention of Guru Gobind Singh when he gave the five Ks of Sikhism, which is to embody a distinct Sikh identity that will force both the bearer of the identity and others around to come face to face with the idea of Sikhism. It is not only a physical act of embodiment, a spiritual act but also an assertion of one's identity and that identity is very personal for every person. It is simply an assertion of a cultural identity in a distinct form. So, I wanted to find actors who were bearded and turbaned and would be willing to take on this role."

He immediately knew that the challenge inherent in it was huge because there is homophobia in South Asian communities the manifestation of which he had seen over and over again. Presently in Canada, same-sex marriages are fully legalized; there is not just gendered inequality but equality for sexual orientation. Some of the most virulent opposition to same-sex marriages and to the teaching of same-sex education has been unfortunately from the very conservative South Asian communities which has pitted them against the queer community.

The other aspect that they were worried about was that a lot of the transcripts were translated. The issue of translation becomes key and central; who is the interpreter, how are things being translated, who is typing the text, why is some of the text typed out while the other part of it is written in long-hand were the intriguing questions. They approached a Punjabi poet who re-translated from English to Punjabi, so the actors spoke in Punjabi and the interpreter would then play his role. There was a lot of conceptual work around it but also a lot of practical issues as well. They edited the script and enacted the drama. Apart from all the cultural issues, language played a challenging part. The word 'fuck' was used several times, the idea of an erect penis being thrust from behind is being used and this goes completely contrary to any notions of Edwardian/Colonial life. These kinds of words were just not used and this was not what was happening in the public courts. Fung, Grierson and Kazimi collectively did the courtroom drama. Then they decided, each one of them would do their own version of this history and what it means. John did the piece with the elephant, Richard did the piece with the text and Kazimi did the piece with the straight documentary. Context was of prime importance to Kazimi along with the history of Komagatamaru in spite of the apology made by the government. For Kazimi it was very important to put this history within the context.

One of the radical interventions that were made publicly was to rename the idea of Canada as the white-settler State. The notion of Canada as a white-mans' country makes people terribly uncomfortable. The Canadians have a notion of Canadian exceptionalism, like the American exceptionalism. The Americans believe it is their exceptional qualities that make them an exceptional nation. Canadians also have this notion of being distinct from the Americans because they somehow believe they are from a higher race. Canada was and continues to be based on very violent acts of cultural genocide against its indigenous people and the on the ongoing colonisations. The idea of colonization is still not over, there are land claims still going on with the indigenous groups and it a very complex situation. Nevertheless, whiteness is the central identity of Canada or has been for the first hundred years. To challenge the idea of whiteness has always been the central part of Kazimi's project, "Not to challenge it but to remember it, to name it and to place it". In this case, the whiteness plays a central theme and his role is to contextualize it. There is also a sense of cultural sensitivity in his piece, within South Asia where sexual identities have always been very fluid. If one looks at the larger historical-cultural and popular notions of sexualities, there is a great degree of fluidity initially. This then starts to get more rigid due to religious identities within the colonial context that make these very clear demarcations. Kazimi's perception is that, no one thinks otherwise about the idea of two men who are friends and holding hands and walking on

the roads in India. However, when seen from a European or North American White queer perspective, there is a degree of homoeroticism imbued with that action immediately.

In this documentary there is a play around the notion of the courtroom drama as a genre and getting the story out straight, that is to say this is the drama according to the transcript. Kazimi's contribution has been to map the macro-history around this drama, what is the larger picture around it and how the Komagatamaru fits into it. Richard made the micro-picture and the forensic exploration of the written archive. Sometimes the actors put in their own lines and they are not corrected. If you see the way the text is written and what the actors are actually saying, there is a discrepancy, but the makers of the film did not correct it because a part of it was to suggest that there are many such discrepancies not only in the act of translation but also in the act of transcription. Buggery and sodomy were as illegal in India as they were in Canada, both being framed by British colonialism. The early cases had the idea of indecency and assault that became formalized within Canadian jurisprudence.

Canada is fundamentally marked by race, the idea of Canada stems from a white colonial, white settler nation. Whiteness is deeply imbued in the identity of the country. When people talk about race, identity politics, Richard Fung said that, "The biggest identity politics is that of the white community." It excludes everybody and whiteness has defined Canada for a hundred years. For the first hundred years of its existence, Canada enacted a set of rules, regulations, legislations that were seemingly disparate but amounted to a creation of a white man's country as was declared openly even in the Parliament. Kazimi felt there could not be a foundational process like that; it cannot leave long standing legacies that will take generations to undo. The current Prime Minister Trudeau said that there is no majority, which is a remarkable statement, given that the constitution of Canada itself declares that there are two founding nations, the British and the French. It also refers to a God in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and that Canada is a constitutional monarchy, which is a highly racialised system of ruling. Only one particular family from the self-identified people can be the monarch. So, there is no getting away from race, although everyone wants to duck and cover and not discuss race. The Canadians refer to all people from British India as Hindus. This is more of a self-created/self-asserted term that speaks of the commonality of the experience of race, regardless of the fact that one may be from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India. It does not matter, because as far as racialised context is concerned, there is a reality that we all share. The peak of this stems from when the South Asians came soon after Canada dropped all the existing race-based quotas and restrictions in 1968. For a hundred years from 1867-1967, Canada had a whites only policy. It opened its doors in 1968, because the 'traditional source countries' as they were called and all this language is highly codified. These were mainly Northern-European countries because among whiteness there is a hierarchy and levels of desirability, the Southern Europeans and the Eastern Europeans being the bottom most rung of the hierarchy. The immigration from source countries started drawing up but the Canadian economic system is based on immigration. Its notions of growth and sustainability, of a particular kind of lifestyle that they are engaged in demands an influx of new immigrants. Given that, its Native-born population has a very low birth rate.

There are a lot of demographic factors involved. Canada opened its gates without any public debate; these were purely bureaucratic decisions that were made. So, race was never really discussed, there was not even a public referendum about the opening of these doors. As a result, when large numbers of South Asians started coming in, there was a massive backlash. This mirrored the backlash that was happening in the UK in the 1970s, leading to a so-called phenomenon of 'Paki-bashing'. This particularly vicious term and everything around it was imported to Canada from the mother country, which led to a lot of trauma. There was a counter pushback, where the gangs and community organisations started forming defense leagues to fight racist thugs on the street.

Documentary Format

Ali Kazimi was trained by a man called Jim Bevir, who was the founding Chair of the Department of Cinema and Media Arts at York University that is now occupied by Kazimi himself. It was a very humbling experience for him to be elected for this position; it was as if life came full circle for him. Jim himself was a protégé of John Grierson, the man who coined the term 'documentary'. Jim along with John founded the National Film Board of Canada. So the idea of the documentary as a tool for social change was deeply embedded in Jim's way of thinking. This was one of the reasons that he founded the Jamia Milia Mass Communication Research Centre, where Kazimi differed with Jim and Grierson. One of the important things to recognize about Grierson is his idea of social change that was within the context of the empire. He was an imperialist through and through, apart from being a socialist, but within the context of the empire, he worked with the Marketing Board, worked with large American corporations. He has an interesting and chequered history, which is important to recognize. Jim also worked within that context and his idea of social change was with Nation building. So within the Indian context, Jamia emerged as a source of nationalist project.

The National Film Board of Canada has been very much a part of the nation building project, part of its mandate has been to reflect Canada to Canadians. Now the question arises as to what kind of reflection do the Canadians want to see: do they want to see nationalist reflections or do they want to see reflections that are more complex that challenge the processes that are growing within? The films division is also a part of the same continuum of

nation building in India, very much part of the nationalist discourse. Kazimi's filmmaking was deeply inspired by Anand Patwardhan's first film that he did in Canada along with a Canadian filmmaker Jim Munroe called 'Time to rise'. This was the film that Kazimi saw when he started making films and it deeply moved him. It is not a nationalist film but it deals with the issue of race. Like most documentaries, this film is not about the attempts of the South Asian farm workers to unionise, but also is a great snapshot on how race worked within Canada in the late 1970s.

Kazimi's films have increasingly become overtly subjective, he sees them more as personal essays. The reason that they become necessarily personal is because he wants to locate himself. He feels he is not just an Indian filmmaker or a Canadian filmmaker, he is someone that has a particular history and a trajectory that link to both places and in turn that allows him to see both the places in a unique way. Making that framework evident to the viewers is important, because they are not just watching a generic film made by a filmmaker from here or there. He has never felt constrained by the notions of the new orthodoxies of documentaries that say that, "All voice over is bad" or "All talking heads are bad" or this outrageous notion that "Only a documentary that has no commentary from the filmmaker, that allows subjects to speak for themselves is somehow the purest," which is untrue, because, the subjects or the participants in any film do not speak for themselves in the camera but what the audiences see and the stringing of sequences entirely shaped by the filmmakers.

The problem with this kind of filmmaking is that it allows filmmakers to hide behind the veil of subjectivity when they choose to. They say that these are the facts that they are presenting and that they actually do not have a point of view but it is the world that they see. Kazimi does not believe in any of that. His work is very subjective but yet he wants everything to have integrity to it. He wants to vouch for any factual information that he presents, take responsibility and accountability for everything that he presents and then the audience can have a discussion with him. He has always been accused of being subjective. The activism in his work lies in naming the silences that are around him, which, at a personal level always fill him with trepidation each time he does it. That fear tells him that there is something there that is not talked about; there is a collective will to keep it unspoken. There are consequences to that; one of the interesting things about '*Continuous Journey*' (2004) is that it was turned down by the Vancouver International Film Festival as well as most other festivals. It went on to win awards in South Asia, Kathmandu and Mumbai. It was screened in Asian-American and Asian-Canadian Film Festivals where it won awards, but most so-called white mainstream film festivals did not accept the film.

Heavily Pocketed Class Issues

Class still forms a marker that is also a stumbling block in terms of embracing this history. A lot of South Asian families of the twentieth century have had their ancestors come in as labourers or merchants and established themselves through the generations. Many of them do not wish to embrace the humble roots of their beginnings. This idea of class still exists and this happens everywhere. The idea of dressing in class is very important, for example the clothes the men wear in *Rex v/s Singh* are three-piece suits to create the idea of 'class', where one dresses-'up'. There was a directive issued by the *Gurudwara* (holy place of worship of the Sikhs) in Vancouver that in order to combat everyday acts of racism, everyone should wear three-piece suits and walk in polished shoes.

A religious institution gave such classist directives for a harmonious racial existence. This religious institution was also a social/community-center at that time. A film called '*Random Acts of Legacy*' (2016) is based on a Chinese-American family. Henry Hugh, who is a historian from the province of British Columbia whom Kazimi interviews in the film, speaks of exactly a similar history. Even to this day, people always dress up looking at the Black (African-American) experience. This dressing up is not only an act of resistance but also a sign of oppression through the ages. They do not have the white privilege of dressing shabbily. Dressing is very important for queers to conform to their compartmentalization. In this case, there are so many markers that already exist.

Rex v/s Singh covers Vancouver's sodomy and buggery cases between 1909-1929. These cases were against immigrants that the white authorities used to maintain the status quo. It was a no-holds-barred attempt to limit the influence of the Asian community, and corruption, racism, homophobia and xenophobia were the order of the day. Vancouver was not alone in its approach: in the same period, similar lawsuits were filed against Sikhs in California as well. This short film mixes the documentary, musical and drama genres, in a story told in four parts described as a deconstruction of history. The fictional characters are Naina Singh and Dalip Singh who are on a trial for attempted buggery. The documentary is based entirely on a court scene that gets dramatic and at times historical and philosophical. It begins with the Komagataru incident wherein the court upheld Canada's right to deny entry to the Indians onboard the ship into Vancouver. Then comes the scene in which Gordon Brent Ingram, the Environmental Planner and Queer (urban) Historian, recounts history from 1995. While researching on the early twentieth century sodomy trials, he comes across several dossiers involving Sikh men. They were test cases to be used for consensual homosexuality law. The Blacks and Whites were in constant tension often leading to riots. In 1907, the Asiatic Exclusion League led hundreds of White workers who destroyed property in the Chinese and Japanese sections of Vancouver while singing, "White Canada forever". This race riot accelerated the 'White only' immigration policy. Vancouver's South Asian community

got divided between those who supported the Crown and those who felt betrayed. Bela Singh, an intelligence informant, had provided crucial details to help Canada turn away Komagatamaru. Ousted as a mole, he shot his way out of the Sikh temple. This brought out the convergence of xenophobia and racism with a kind of homophobia and sexual fascination with well-built bodies. Similar cases were reported in California at the same time. These people were not able to bribe police and so they were looking out for ways to bust them. The reasons behind these historical instances remain unexplained till date. The courtroom trial goes on and then comes the symbolic scene of the interpretation of an elephant by various blind men as is a much acclaimed and followed theory as is applied in *Anekantavada* as well. Here, the trunk is initially compared to the Judge and a man is shown covering his nose as if removing mucous. The elephant's ear is compared to a purse, which is compared to the accused person, and a man is shown pulling his ear. The elephant's tail is perceived as a whip and a human penis, which alludes to the detective. The legs are considered as the legs of a naked man symbolized as the lawyer. These allusions and similes lash out against the class, race and national boundaries piercingly.

QUESTIONING POSSESSION

There was a seventh Parliamentary Canadian poet, a descendant of the American slaves, who migrated to Canada in the province of Nova Scotia in the East Coast while there was slavery in Canada. His family history of being in Canada dates back to more than a hundred years and yet he is asked the question where he is from, which alludes to white supremacy being deeply embedded within the Canadian social-political and popular thought. One of his ideas is that history is radicalizing. He contends that once you know history, specifically the histories of marginal groups, then there is no other way out, but to be radical. Everybody inherits history differently, the large marginal ones being discontinuous. Historical memory is usually fragmented and given the nature of the LGBTQ community, it is necessarily fragmented. There is the passing of the torch from one generation to another, there are discontinuities, so then how is knowledge retained, how are these markers remembered? The act of remembering and naming itself are absolutely the ongoing ways of doing it.

Segmenting Pride Parade

Gay Pride or LGBT pride is the positive stance against discrimination and violence towards the LGBT community, to foster equality of rights, self-respect, increased visibility and to celebrate sexual diversity and gender variance. Most of the Pride Parade marches take place annually and are done so to commemorate the Stonewall riots. The Parades are intentionally organized all over, mostly around the same time as the riots. Brenda Howard is known as the "Mother of Pride" for her instrumentality in organizing the march. As the message spread far and wide, it gripped the imagination of so many other countries. The rooted ideology behind the parades is a critique of space that has been produced to seem heteronormative and therefore any act appearing to be homosexual is considered dissident by society. The Parade brings this homosexual behavior and appropriates the space. A cultural shift in the gay movement led to it being named 'Gay Pride' after 'Gay Liberation' and 'Gay Freedom'. Studying the Pride Parades of Canada and South Asia in comparison would enable the inferences to be drawn from both the hemispheres. It shall also be a ready reckoner for the intensity, progress and outreach of them in each location.

Edmonton Pride Parade (2016): Edmonton's first Pride Parade took place in 1980, and has grown from a small gathering of about 75 people who partook in a baseball game and campfire to a massive congregation. Some of the events added over the last 35 years have included rallies, fairs, poetry readings, art shows, picnics, sporting tournaments, a film festival, an awards show, and of course the Parade. Its mission statement is to endeavor to unify and educate by celebrating gender and sexual diversity through a sustainable annual festival and year-round community outreach.

There are widespread goals that it purports to achieve through an annual parade, festival and a wide variety of cultural and educational activities. The Parade thus serves to celebrate the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Two Spirit, and Queer community (LGBTQT) and its allies. They ensure that the members of the LGBTQ community have access to resources and a platform to celebrate their diversity and individual identities within the larger community. Its core values are to respect the dignity of individuals and the rights of all members of society regardless of their sexual orientation, gender, gender choice, cultural or ethnic background, colour, age, physical or mental ability, religious or social affiliation or beliefs. Their contention is to honour their past by remembering their history and educating others. They believe that these statements provide a significant catalyst for growth and development in all people. They respect the individual potential for human growth and development. They uphold that diversity and that is the strength of the LGBTQ community.

As a typical parade would have it, the EPP is largely dependent on the political, economic and religious settings of the area. As Edmonton is a more ideologically advanced city, the parade took on a festive character, whereby the political stage was built on notions of celebration. The 2016 Parade was a rather large parade that involved floats, dancers, drag queens and amplified music. There were some local politicians and marching groups from LGBT institutions of various kinds. It also had representation from the local LGBT-friendly churches and from the LGBT employee associations of large business houses. It also had the aspect of remembering the victims of

AIDS and anti-LGBT violence. The bystanders too became almost a part of the parade with so many give-aways and memorabilia for them as they cheered them on encouraging their 'pride'.

India is one of those nations whose situation is totally different due to its many ethnicities. Therefore, its queer movement differs in every way with a lot of stratifications. Mumbai Pride Parade (MPP) 2015 is one of those parades that is neither funded by the government and corporate sponsors nor is promoted as a tourist attraction for the cities that host them. The dividing line between onlookers and those marching in the parade was very evident, as the marchers would not make eye-contact with the them and most of them remained masqueraded. Drag queens and their much celebrated performances still continue to be an aspect of awe and novelty in the MPP. There are neither floats nor amplifiers nor extravagance on the streets. The foot-falls are almost one-eighth of that in Canada despite the much higher population in Mumbai. There are some quintessentially South-Asian elements in the Parade, where applying henna on the hands is considered a mark of coming out and being Gay. It is more of a silent march, where the marchers have a mixed bag of feelings of fear and anger whereas the onlookers look upon them as 'specimens', considering them as pariahs. The Pride Parade that takes place in India does not encourage any corporate sponsors as it does not want to serve as an advertisement but wants to stick to its core values. Its a long way ahead for the South Asians to be able to keep pace with the nations that are more accomodating and uphold gender inclusivity.

Pride Parade can be appreciatively summed up as: "A walk with friends is always synonymous with entertainment and celebration of an arduous and long journey together. It depicts a mutual journey of internal turmoil, upheavals, human action and epic dramas, which triumphantly culminates in the conquest of space and a sense of community" (Garcia-Arroyo: 84-85).

Queer Publishing

Queer Ink is a compassionate catalyst in the journey towards empowerment aiming for non-oppressive change in the process. Its focus is on sexuality and gender diverse communities, their families and colleagues in India, on bringing about the queer, the quirky and the wonderful into the mainstream. When the researcher interviewed the Publisher Shobhna S. Kumar, she recalled that she was working for an NGO for AIDS awareness, which enabled her to visit many places in India and know their plight. She looked up so many websites but there was little or no information on the Indian Queer movement. This drew her to start Queer Ink, and the rest, as they say, is history. The need to have such organisation comes from the necessity to create safe spaces for the congregation of the queer community. Borrowing from Sedgwick's alteration of the closet, this initiative electrifies public places and gets it in the purview of the postmodern culture. Although the choice of places now is limited but it is indeed not a homosexual ghetto. The queer community in India does not have one voice, it is fragmented. There are some who are fighting for it from the legal perspective, others from the socio-economic perspectives and so on and so forth. It will take a while to assimilate them and create cohesion amongst those who are working towards the same goal. The judges pass politically correct judgements for the sake of their own personal career, which acts as a roadblock for the progress of the queer community. Queer Ink also hosts Qfest that is a monthly festival that brings together art, performance and all other expressions of queer creativity, with an overall view of enabling entrepreneurship and fully representing queer lives in India. The queer movement in India has a totally different situation due to its many ethnicities; therefore its queer movement differs in every way with a lot of stratifications. Queer Ink has contributors from the mainstream and the people of the community that write queer content but the books are read more by the mainstream. There has been an increase in e-books having queer content and queer youth groups have been formed like 'Harmless Hugs' and others, indicating that the movement is gathering momentum. She shares her hopes in an interview with the researcher that the young queer community is, "Self-empowered and self-introspective, as there is always an impact of choices that one makes."

Chronicling the territory from documentaries, magazines, Pride Parades to a publishing house gives a sense of the present-day situation of the queer community and its various facets. Having known the pace of the frontrunners, it empowers one to ascertain the future course of evolvment and initiatives.

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