

Of the Body of the Queer and the Queer of the Body: Reading the Embodied-ness of Gender-Trespassing in Narratives of Gender Fluidity

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The paper pertains to the increasing availability of narratives about non-normative sexualities which are of the fictional, the autobiographical or other varied nature. Also, academic discourses on gender fluidity have been abound, the most visible of that being Queer Theories. The term, and often the conceptualization of 'queer' has, since, come to become the "shorthand for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community" (Giffney 2). This leads to the possible differentiation between the 'theoretical' queer and the 'narrative' queer derived from certain texts on transsexuality and intersexuality. One of the reasons behind this differentiation is the prominence of physicality as articulating a gendered reality through these narrating practices and gender as imitated and reified and hence, not connected with physicality, based on theoretical premises. The primary aim, here, is to look into the question of whether (and how) the depiction of physicality (or the lack of it) in comprehending non-normative sexualities problematize the extant modes of questioning and trespassing of gender boundaries.

These afore-mentioned writing practices have shown a propensity to portray the body and the bodily functions as means of breaching gender binaries, recreating them and hence, relocating the self beyond it. Examples include Rose Treiman's *Sacred Country* (1992), David Ebershoff's *The Danish Girl* (2000), Eugenides' *The Middlesex* (2002), and a number of autobiographical accounts like Kate Bornstein's *A Queer and Pleasant Danger* (2012). In the Indian context, to which this paper will also refer to, there is an increasing visibility of the hitherto stigmatized sexual identities, in novels like *The Pregnant King* (2008) by Devdutt Pattanaik, and autobiographical writings like *The Man Who Would be Queen* (2011) by Hoshang Merchant or A.Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010). Most of these writers have attributed prominence to bodily experiences that have had a direct bearing on their identities. Hence, the references to the body have been made, not merely as the supplier/bearer of knowledge pertaining to sexuality, but as a participant in the production of self-knowledge. Furthermore, the non-esoteric readability of these texts entails the need to analyze the texts as 'new actors' for disseminating knowledge about

gender and/or sexuality through the articulation of body and bodily metaphors. Therefore, the corollary research-question pertains to how such writing practices capsize the notion of gender as a socio-cultural construct in the popular imagination. The question gains relevance because of the already existing but not much explored debate in (de)-valuation of somatic experience in the Trans-Queer Alliance.

In fact, the academic grappling with 'gender' as a notional entity rather than an extension of physical reality has led to the exploration of masculinities and femininities as social decisions. Judith Butler's cerebration of gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 33) has proved to be a seminal concept to anthropology, social sciences, gender studies alike. The idea that "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler 519) has provided a huge impetus to the growth of Queer Theories. Some of the influential texts on Queer Theories have successfully deconstructed 'normalcy' as preordained and construed being queer as the "messiness of identity, the fact that desire and thus desiring subjects cannot be placed into discrete identity categories, which remain static for the duration of people's lives . . . marking a disidentification from the rigidity with which identity categories continue to be enforced and from beliefs that such categories are immovable" and hence "to designate a political persuasion, which aggressively challenges hegemonies, exclusions, norms and assumptions (Giffney 2-3). Others like Michael Warner (1994) David Haperlin (1995), and Annamarie Jagose (1996) have persisted on queer as "refusing to crystallize in any specific form" and hence "maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal" (99). Therefore, the conceptualization of 'body' has been solely in terms of social injunctions determining bodily practices and being Queer through acts of subversion to these social injunctions.

(Dis)Embodying Gender in the Trans-Queer Alliance

Though the body, since Foucault, has come to be "a central feature of contemporary Western social forms" (Martin 121), the focus persists on how body is perceived rather than what the body perceives. This disavowal of the biological ideation of body is intended to counter the clinical construction of body which is dominantly heterosexist. Sedgwick vindicates the tendency of "biologically based "explanations" for deviant behavior" to be "invariably couched in terms of "excess," "deficiency," or "imbalance" — whether in the hormones, in the genetic material, or, as is currently fashionable, in the fetal endocrine environment". The detrimental possibility of "any researcher or popularizer" advocating "any supposed gay-producing circumstance as the *proper* hormone balance, or the *conducive* endocrine environment, for gay generation" has dislocated the role of physicality in queer discourses. Hence as "things are, a medicalized dream of the prevention of gay bodies seems to be the less visible, far more respectable underside of the AIDS-fueled public dream of their extirpation" (79). Consequently, the clinical perception of the body has been exposed as heterosexist, operating on the "principles of centralized control and factory-based production" for neat categorization of bodies where "Men ... produce wonderfully astonishing qualities of highly valued sperm, women produce eggs and babies (though

neither efficiently)” and “either produce scrap (menstruation) or undergo a complete breakdown of central control (menopause)” (Martin 121-122).

This socio-biological imagery of the body has also been perceived in the field of Transgender Studies, with gender as a matter of perception by the other rather than individual’s body. For example, the “penis” becomes the “attributed” and “cultural” genital for determining gender (Kessler, Mckenna 173) without any reference to the bodily need for a penis. Some transgender studies scholars and theorists have sought an alliance with the Queer on such terms. Pat Califia, who much later sought medical intervention for sex changes, had questioned the transsexual desire “to become ‘real women’ or ‘real men’ instead of just being transsexual”, voicing a radicalized gender fluidity in pondering over the possibilities of “some advantages to being a man with vagina or a woman with a penis” (181-182). Judith Halberstam, without intending to “vilify male transsexualism as simply a reconsolidation of dominant masculinities”, vindicates “places where such reconsolidation threatens to take place” (160), criticizing Jay Prosser’s “little or no recognition of the trials and tribulations that confront the butch for whatever reasons (concerns about surgery or hormones, feminist scruples desire to remain in a lesbian community lack of funds, lack of phalloplasty models) decides to make a home in the body with which she was born” (163). Even Kate Bornstein, a post-operative MTF transsexual according to her autobiography, later came to suggest that “[straights] and gays alike demand the need for an orderly gender system ... neither willing to dismantle the gender system that serves as a matrix for their (sexual) identity” (107-8), thus not recognizing the body-based urges for a specific gender.

On the other hand the likes of Margaret O’ Harrington have disavowed the Trans-Queer alliance, referring to a somatic preference for a gendered reality. Transsexuality, for Harrington, is to “maintain and enhance a *gender continuity*” motivated by “her deeply-felt sense of femininity” (Beasley 153). Viviane K. Namaste who has repeatedly questioned how the queer, as the in vogue critical subject addresses transsexuality and transgenders has commented on Harrington’s position as not “making any claims to disrupt the sex/gender binary” but “doing the highly unglamorous work of research, lobbying and activism to ensure that all transsexuals can have access to health care, regardless of their economic and financial resources” (10). Moreover, Jay Prosser, writes that the transsexual “feels differently gendered from her or his birth-assigned sex” and the “transsexual narrative depends upon an initial crediting of this feeling as generative ground” and “demands some recognition of the category of corporeal interiority (internal bodily sensations)” (271) that cannot be confined within the hetero-normative rationale. He continues to explore the “idealization” of the *transgender phenomena* as “a queer transgressive force” by several queer theorists and activists like Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick as also Teresa de Lauretis, Sue-Ellen Case, Jonathan Dollimore, and Marjorie Garber through “the consistent decoding of “trans” as incessant destabilizing movement between sexual and gender identities” (259) . Subsequently, Prosser feels that there are several gaps and elisions in the Queer theories portrayal of experiences of transgenders and transsexuals. Among these, there is the disregard for the somatic urge or the “internal bodily sensations” about sex and gender. Prosser vindicates that in *Gender Trouble* Butler uses “transsexuality to exemplify not the constitutive significance of somatic feeling but the reverse, the phantasmatic status of sex”.

Yet, in “both its medical and its autobiographical versions, the transsexual narrative”, sex comes to be “perceived as something that must be changed underlines its very unphantasmatic status” (271).

This debate increases the relevance of the questions posed above which I will now try to answer by firstly, tracing the role(s) of physicality in the three selected narratives. And secondly, by juxtaposing the inferences from the ‘narrative’ queer with the ‘theoretical’ queer and, thus, construing the alternatively queer.

But before looking into the prominence of the ‘body’ in the narrating of queer, a brief exploration of the narratives themselves becomes necessary.

Cross-Generic and Cross-Cultural Connection of the Body

A comparative study of three representative narratives, an autobiography-, Kate Bornstein’s *A Queer and Pleasant Danger* (2012), and two novels, *Middlesex* (2002) by Jeffrey Eugenides and Devdutta Pattanaik’s *The Pregnant King* (2008), can be entailed based on their convergences in narrating corporeal experiences to respond to the afore-mentioned question. It also become imperative to note that these “patterns of connections” (Basnett 1) pertaining to experiences of embodiment shall be traced beyond generic and cultural boundaries. *A Queer and Pleasant Danger* is an autobiography in the established sense of the term and *Middlesex* and *The Pregnant King* are novels, or fiction in prose as it has come to be in the twentieth century. The generic appellations of the texts vindicate the fictional content (or the lack of it) in the narratives as also some of the narratological implications. Bornstein’s work pertains to the recent rise of personal narratives in the studies of sexualities and gender that informs and affirms existences beyond gender categories, often addressing those not in the know, or ignorant about such existences. Eugenides’s novel won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2003 and caters to the readership of the new literatures in English being at once, a bildungsroman, a family saga, a Greek immigrant story with a postmodern scattering of Greek myths and also a non-heterosexist love story between a hermaphrodite and an Asian woman. Pattanaik’s novel is a part of the contemporary trend of retelling the Hindu mythology through the globalized dimensions of Indian English Novels.¹ The generic formations, however, is motivated by the need to render a globalized comprehension of gender and sexuality. Hence, the dependence on body, its sensations and urges, gestures and transformations, memories and anticipations, seem to be of significance in the popular consciousness in terms of gender-bending and non-normative sexualities. While there is a possibility of uniformity in understanding this narrative trope, the advantage is that the trope is functionalized in each of the narratives through individualized and idiosyncratic agencies thus catering to the global and local anxieties of genders and sexualities, reducing the possibility of uniformity.

The changeability of the socio-cultural specificities of the three texts also signify that the usability of physicality in the narratives do not pertain to a specific body-culture.² Bornstein’s experiences of America in a Jewish family are very different from Eugenides’ depiction of the Greek- immigrant experience in America, in a family that still subscribed to

traditions. Both these narratives are vastly different from the depiction of Ancient India. Though the socio-cultural histories are differentiated in terms of the situation of the body, none the less the processes of bodily histories occur and at times, converge. The bodily realizations and practices that are of considerable importance in the narratives pertain to a variety of ethnographic, tradition-based practices and spaces, where the individual as trespassing gender is located. This recurrence of the moments with conspicuous connotations of the physicality irrespective of the differentiated contexts provide the scope for articulating gender fluidity that is different from the extant discourses.

So, before looking into the prominence of the 'body' in the narrating queer, it becomes necessary to look into the relevance of physicality in the theoretical understanding of queer.

Narrating Bodies and Bodies that Narrate

The 'narrative' queer may be construed based on certain specific trends of thoughts/depiction that arises in three of the texts when read with specific reference to the concept of corporeality. It begins with how the body becomes the basis of self-comprehensions and realizations throughout the text. This is followed by the initiation of communication based on this non-normative bodily history. On the third count it becomes necessary to look into how the functionality of embodiment in the 'narrative' queer interacts with the functionality of gender performativity in the 'theoretical' queer.

Trespassing Gender through the Embodied History of the Self

There is constant reallocation of the agency to 'maintain' or 'violate' gender boundaries to the personal construed through bodily images and impulses. Consider Bornstein's autobiographical narrative where she, initiates with the specific statement of her rejecting a gender, "I knew what a boy was—I could see them on television, but they weren't me" (7). Later, s/he found out a body image she would want her body to acquire: "those beautiful boy/girls" who "posed saucily in magazines with names like *Female Mimics*, *Chicks with Dicks*, and *Real Transvestite Beauties*" (37). This is clearly a body-based recognition of the self in the other. An explanatory parallel can be located in Eugenides' specific comments about the protagonist Cal/lie as a child of "an awkward, extravagant beauty' and "changeableness, too, as if beneath" her (yet to be his) visible face there was another, having second thoughts" (218). Here, the knowledge of the body that does not pertain to a heteronormative rationale is evident even before it is attained by the conscious self. Pattanaik's novel echoes the efficacy of physicality as the primary plot of the novel is about King Yuvanashva, a man who gives birth to his son and his travails to be recognized as the mother of the crown prince, seconded by congruent subplots about bodily expectations and explorations that re-construe the notion of gender boundaries.

This agency of the body is deployed through affectivity and power structures, of biomedical and moral conflicts, of the erotic and the emotive held together through the corporeal boundaries (real or fictional), entail a bodily history that helps in the process of

self comprehension, which subsequently questions and hence trespasses predetermined gender boundaries. For example, the autobiographical tracing of this history is the primary plot of Bornstein's narrative, beginning with his being with a prostitute to reveal that (s)he neither wanted boys nor wanted to be one (aspiring to be Holly Golightly played by Audrey Hepburn) and hence, acquiring anorexia to be 'skinny' to "almost see girl" (44) in the mirror. Three heterosexual marriages and fatherhood later, Kate Bornstein decides to undergo surgical sex change, having referred to how she had a few times "knuckled down to being a real guy" till it was not possible to take "being a man any longer" (35). But she does not need a vagina, "deep enough for the average penis" (187) because she is a lesbian. This entails a process of articulating the self that subsequently activates and violates gender boundaries with specific reference to knowledge acquired about body images and bodily desires.

Eugenides' narrative makes even more specific reference to this embodied nature of knowledge about the self that disrupts the heteronormative gender boundaries. Cal/lie urinated on the priest during her baptism but "no one wondered about the engineering involved" in how the "stream of crystalline liquid" reached that "far" to strike Father Mike "right in the middle of the face" (222). As a seven-year-old in the bathtub with a playmate, she had the "submerged softness on Clementine's body ... delivering crucial information" to hers which Cal/lie would "store away but won't understand until years later" (266). Later, when Callie is unable to react sexually to Jerome (had to "vacate" the body (383)) and being physically attracted to his sister, her mind begins to derive from her bodily history: "Clementine Stark and kissing lessons; and spinning together in a hot tub; an amphibian heart and a crocus blooming; blood and breasts that didn't come; and a crush on the Object that did, that had, that looked as if it was here to stay" (376). Finally, after several physically invasive sessions at the Dr. Luce's clinic, Cal defies the clinical destiny of having Callie's genital rectification because "the genitals as they are today would expose her to all manner of humiliation" though "the surgery may result in partial or total loss of erotosexual sensation" (437). Callie's choice to "operate in the society" as Cal is based on her defiance of the ethico-medical judgment: "The ability to marry and pass as a normal woman in society are also important goals, both of which will not be possible without feminizing surgery and hormone treatment" said Dr. Luce's report (437). This is evidently not a heterosexist decision of choosing the male privileges, of aligning sex with gender, of becoming a man to be with a girl. Cal/lie's bodily history culminates in a gender fluidity of sorts, as he remains in essential way "Tessie's daughter" and clarifies later: "I liked girls when I *was a girl*" (513). The relationship with Julie Kikuchi adds to Cal/lie's attempts to reconfigure gender boundaries where he never proclaims his masculinity but makes her aware of his 'emasculated' bodily situation, claiming her partnership based among other things, on the desire (again bodily) of always having wanted girls.

Pattanaik also uses the history of inexplicability of a non-heteronormative body as the chief narratological motivation. The centrality of physicality in King Yuvanshva's destiny is anticipated by the story of Illeshwara/ Illeshwari and blessed couples with fertility, alternating between "fourteen symbols" (15) of womanhood and manhood based on the lunar cycle. Expectedly, the deity is revealed to be Yuvanashva's ancestor. Later in the timeline of the story, but earlier in the chronology of events, the deity is found to be Ila or

Bhangashvana who had laid claims to masculinities and femininities. The “chaos his body had created” with the laws of the kingdom led to his “memory” being “restricted to the rituals of the temple” (316) but none the less positing the experiences of embodiment as one of the first signifiers of how natural cannot be constricted within the naturalized. Seconded by this ancestral history, Pattanaik had unraveled the non-heteronormative experiences of embodiment in the King in the anticipatory techniques of popular fiction: the early morning sickness, the taste for sour food, the lump with the “pulse” that “had a familiar rhythm” and finally Yuvanashva giving birth and breast feeding the child. The bodily compulsions behind his act of transgressing and re-construing those gender values that he had once upheld is recognized in his naming the crown prince Mandhata: “‘I want him to be called Mandhata ,’ said Yuvanashva” for “Mandhata meant ‘he who was nursed by me’” (205) implying the bodily connection which is maternal rather than paternal, articulating Yuvanashva’s non-heteronormative existence.

Sharing a Sense of Non-Normative Physicality

It should, hence, be noted that all the three narratives also articulate how these bodily histories lead to the possibilities a shared understanding of physicality which later develops into support systems. For instance, Bornstein refers to Doris Fish as her “first drag mom” and bonded on the basis of the connection that “drag queens dress up so they can become women, and transsexuals become women so they can dress up” (197) referring to two different but interrelated experiences of embodiment. In the last few chapters of the narrative, Bornstein refers to connecting with a number of “freaky people who were just like me” (197) which is not merely based on queer politics. The notion of “family” that Leslie Fienberg appeals to as she “quintessential transgender warrior, [drew] her sword in defense of” Bornstein (204) so that those from Transgender Nation, who did not support Bornstein’s gender politics did not boycott her speech, could *not* be said to *not* have references to the shared memories of embodiment that violated the heteronormative rationale of the society and transformed the gendered reality of the self.

Eugenides is again the most specific, structuring the phrase of “the solidarity of a shared biology” (451) and hence, referring to how Cal/lie came to terms with the non-heteronormative reality of his body in the sleaze-club with Zora, whose Androgen Insensitivity developed her along female lines in spite of her XY chromosome type and Carmen, a pre-op MTF transsexual. When Zora, who could easily ‘pass’ for a woman, claims that she wants the world to know of her body’s tryst with gender categories, she says she does so “Because we’re what’s next”(490). The word ‘we’ refers to a sense of solidarity for Cal who lived as a man with an intersexed anatomy, Zora who identified as a hermaphrodite, and Carmen who wanted to be a woman. True, social rejection contributes to this bonding, but the social dis-ease pertains to their bodily existences with which they are putting binated gender categories into disarray.

Hence, it is Pattanaik who uses the tool of complementary subplots to the primary one about King Yuvanashva to strengthen this notion of the shared experiences of embodiment. The ancestral history of gender fluidity has already been referred to. To

Yuvanashva's incessant worry "Has there ever been a man such as me?" (214), the bards bring to him the stories of Urvashi, with two male parents, Aruni, who could transform into a woman and was forced into mothering the King of Gods, Indra and Sun-God Surya's child and the priestess of Bahugami, whose "flesh is that of a man and but ... hearts are that of a woman"(214) . Then, the legendary warrior Arjuna, of ideal masculinity, who leaved as an eunuch for a year, recounts his tale, along with that of Krishna, who was a bride for a night and a widow for eternity to the sacrificial Iravan, which also works as a support system to Yuvanashava. There is also Shikhandi, brought up as a male in spite of a female body, to please the father and who acquired male genitalia for the sake of his wife. Finally, Yuvanashva acknowledges them who he had once as the king declaimed as 'unnatural' and had them burnt to death, as it posed a challenge to his 'dharma': Somvat(i), the man who became a woman and Sumedha, her husband reveal their truth about invoking the trans-condition in the King's body to make him "part of" their "truth"(323) about their bodies. The turn of phrase, the narratological implications and the communicability to the reader in these narratives, which deal with the free-play of gender boundaries, are all very emphatically accommodated in the comprehension of physicality that forms the basis of shared memories, experiences and anticipations.

Embodiment and Performativity: Conflicts and Corroborations

Most of all the possibility of being anything (queer or not) also includes modifying gendered performances motivated by physicality in the narratives. And the choice of gender performances are based on the body and actualized through the body in these narratives. Instances include Bornstein's decision that she was not "pretty, graceful, or feminine enough to make it as a drag queen or working girl", having already "ruled out cross-dressing as an option" (187). Again, the subsequent decision of the vaginal reconstruction with certain specificities as described above also pertains to the sense of embodiment. As Bornstein starts living as a woman, she continues to face the parochial gendered reality where her womanhood denies her fatherhood and her same-sex relationships makes her less of a transsexual. Added to that was the fact that women (with or without same sex relationships) often disqualified her as real woman. On the other hand, she finds people attracted to her physically and emotionally, and "gushed" about being called adorable (169). Hence, after several such recognitions and refusals, Bornstein reaches a moment of self-comprehension: "Cute is a valid way to express yourself, just like any other way you want to express the kind of man or woman or boy or girl or whatever it is you feel like being" (251), "being" being symptomatic of 'embodying'. This form of transgressing gender boundary is suited to among other things, her bodily experiences. The performative capacity of the male and the female thus may arise out of the sense of comfort/security of the body.

Eugenides uses similar techniques of articulating the body in relation to the self and even though the biomedical construing of her body may find her masculine existence incomplete and having learned to live as a girl, Cal choose to operate in the same society as a man while not detaching the girlhood he had experienced. Callie does not need to perish for Cal to exist as she remains like "a childhood speech impediment" while "doing a hair flip, or checking her nails" with her "girlish walk" in the image of "a forty-one-year-old man with

longish, wavy hair, a thin mustache, and a goatee. "A kind of modern Musketeer" (41-2). While being 'girl' and being 'man' may be performatively produced, her decision to live with a kind of flexible gender and not giving into a gender rectification stems from her decision to secure the body, addressing the (dis)comforts and (in)securities of the body. In loving the Object and knowing her as a girl, Cal/lie does not feel the shame, but trepidation initially and later the reminiscing of the same with her "body" which "like a cathedral broke out into ringing" (387). When s/he defies Dr. Luce's imposition of girlhood and the clinical rectification of the body, it is then that s/he begins her own kind of rectification and embraces a masculine existence, courtesy her body. Dr. Luce's report projected the necessity of a fixed gender identity, the most ominous part of the report, being that "the girl's gender identity was firmly established as female at the time her condition was discovered and hence, the "decision to implement feminizing surgery along with corresponding hormonal treatments seems correct" for "the genitals as they are today would expose her to all manner of humiliation" though "the surgery may result in partial or total loss of erotosexual sensation" (437). While Bornstein chose the medical rectification, Cal/lie denies the same. But both based their decisions on the need to be comfortable with their respective bodily images and sensations. Performativity, producing a certain gendered identity is only subsequent to this sense of embodiment. The narrative culminates into a corporeal fulfillment of desire in Cal/lie's physical union with Julie, where the social trappings of gender cannot play a role, but Julie's female sexuality is important. This ultimate moment of liberating the self pertains to the psychosomatic fulfillment rather than a resistance to social norms. Pattanaik works upon a similar strain of thinking through most of his tales in the novel, where the bodily prowess is shown to breach codes of gender performativity and also performatively produce a self-comprehended gender through that sense of embodiment.

The "body" as the space of the dissociation between the socially imposed and the individually aspired is also explored through the tale of Somvat(i) whose tribulation begin at the ceremony of cow-giving to Brahmana couples; there he was merely posing as a woman, the wife of Sumedha. The author avoids clarifying the motive (the king's wrath or the desire to be Sumedha's wife though dwelling upon both) behind Somvat(i)'s complete forsaking of manhood. Later, as King Yuvanshava questions Somvat(i)'s "aberrant womanhood" and orders him to live as a man, Somvat(i) denies the same, having "the body of a woman" and the capacity to "feel like a woman" (158) and the trans-woman and her husband proclaim "not to live a lie because it is convenient to *your* dharma"(158-160). The performative capacity of the gender is either fuelled by or repelled through the somatic comprehension of sexuality. Sentenced to death by Yuvanashva, they are later enshrined by the king as he begins to understand the turmoil of the flesh and the heart. Later, when Yuvanshava feels the need to be Mandhata's mother and not his father, the narrative refers to not only performative capacity of gender but the recognizing of the bodily connection with the child which is different for a father and a mother. The situation addresses performativity in the sense that motherhood is attributed to the woman who bears the child; the biological acts do not bear any actual connection to the psychosocial concept. Yuvanashva as a man who wants to be a mother and on one occasion also dresses up as a woman reveals the performative capacity of gender. On the other hand, as a person who gave birth and nursed

a child, Yuvanashava is urged by these somatic capacities to choose one gendered role over the other and prefers motherhood to fatherhood of that child.

The above specific references to the modes of inscribing the 'body' as a mode of trespassing gender boundaries is not always in tandem with the queer discourses or the modes of trespassing gender boundaries, therein, which leads towards the possibility of an alternative comprehension of queer.

Alternatively Queer through Embodied Trespassing of Gender

The effect of this bodily pronouncement of gendered realities through the narratives is that it becomes possible to interrogate the appeal to negation and the constant pertinence of resistance and disruption as the sole means of characterizing the theoretical discourses on queer. These narratives that pertain to queer or gender fluidity are, however, not used as a means to disavow the resistive conceptualization of the queer. Instead, the study seeks to explore gender destabilizations in other capacities, here, specifically about how bodily experiences respond to the gender boundaries. The narratives as 'new' actors in the popular consciousness trying to keep pace with the proliferating effects of globalized uniformity, articulate negativity as only situational among other comprehensive elements of gender destabilization like the somatic urges and practices. The comparative juxtaposition of the narratives also helped explore the pressing need to challenge gender system and the ominous gender binaries, which try to categorize bodies into diseased. However, the narratives also put forth the idea the bodily comprehension of the self, on the other hand, often pertain to a gendered reality of choice which does not put the individual but the society at dis-ease. In that sense, the gender boundaries are made functional not based on social expectations of the individual but the self's expectations as an individual and in a society. The narratives, therefore, do not follow the strategies of denaturalizing the gender boundaries but attributes to the same a sense of choice and changeability. The queer in the narratives, is therefore, more than 'defiance' to the 'normal'. Rather than resistance, here, the queer-self-body-comprehension, through the narratives, depends upon the modes of interaction and appropriation as also subsequent fulfillment of desire. An alternative queer that derives not from the newer binary of resistance and normalcy but that understands resistance as situational and subsequent to corporeal and other quotidian realities can be anticipated, especially based on three tropes of writing the body explored above.

As the first trope about writing of the history of 'body' as idiosyncratically functional in the narratives is analyzed, it is found to be very different from how 'body' figures in queer discourses as produced rather than the producer. Butler, for example, writes of how the "the regulatory norms of "sex" work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (xii). Sedgwick refers to a list of "the elements that are condensed in the notion of sexual identity, something that the common sense of our time presents as a unitary category" (7), including "biological (e.g., chromosomal) sex", "self-perceived gender assignment... (supposed to be the same as your biological sex)", "the biological sex of your preferred partner", "the

preponderance of your traits of personality and appearance” “ procreative choice”, “preferred sexual act(s)”, “most eroticized sexual organs” and “sexual fantasies” (6-7). All these ‘elements’ are perceptions of the body by the society. However, in the concerned texts, the narratological intricacies, fictional and otherwise, are made to pertain to a certain and constant reallocation of the agency to maintain or violate gender boundaries to the personal construed through bodily impulses. This is an alternative to pursuing gender boundaries as social injunctions. Instead the pressure is mounted on the same as fallacies that cannot accommodate the extent of bodily experiences. For Bornstein, as also Eugenides and Pattanaik, this conceptualization of the body cannot be within any uni-dimensional frame of conceptualization. In their narratives, the connotations are mostly erotic, emotive, and aesthetic and as also biomedical, though it is mostly not possible to enumerate the implications of physicality. The varied responses of physicality to the ideation of gender and sexuality disregard the construing of gender, only as social injunctions.

Moreover, as all the three narratives deploy physicality itself as being at odds with social injunctions; they also question how gender boundaries can be attributed at all, when they can only be decided through the self-explaining and multi-faceted physicality of an individual. The questioning of gender boundaries in the queer discourses are heavily dependent of the social functioning of these boundaries, thus often ignoring the experiences of embodiment that interact with these gender boundaries. More contemporary queer theorists like Michael Warner write about, different ways in which “queer politics” will entail “implications for any area of social life” (vii) and look into the political efficacy of the situation, given that “broad visions of social change do not follow from sexuality in any way that seems obvious and necessary to all those affected by sexual politics” and if “social vision were dictated in such an inevitable way, it wouldn't be politics” which leads to the “question whether or in what context queers have political interests, as queers, that connect them to broader demands for justice and freedom” (xi). Donald Hall develops a similar strain of thought referring to how “[queer] theories always recognize our own acculturation into notions of normality in ways that demand ongoing critical attention to the actions and belief systems comprising our “selves” (16). Thus, queer as a globalized appellation of non-normative sexualities has persisted in understanding sexual mores contained in the social structure and how the public reacts to the personal, and the resistance thus required. However, the trope of resistance is only one amongst the narrative intents in the texts revolving around the act of trespassing on gender boundaries. The ‘narrative queer’ offers bodily experiences as an alternative by which there is a necessity to exist, to create, to fulfill the self which precedes the necessity to negate. The three texts do not refer to the sociological existence of the stigmatized individual but their gamut of experiences which is often a form of embodiment. The pre-eminence of the bodily experiences in the texts traced through the comparative study of the text therefore question the very ontological basis of gender boundaries as social injunctions, positing sexuality as a felt experience and thus attributing the agency of activating, maintaining or transforming gender boundaries to the self.

Now, arguably the prominence of resistance also counters the danger of a uniform, naturalized understanding of ‘queer’. The emphasis on negation does not run the risk of

folding individuals into a category called 'queer'. Yet, while working towards the elimination of normalization of identity categories, queer theorists and scholars have also debated about the necessity of coalitional statuses for identities pertaining to queer. Notably, Kate Bornstein had referred to "the word transgender" to "inclusively ... mean 'transgressively gendered'" (qtd. in Sullivan 116). Nikki Sullivan had countered the ideation as that which "advocates a kind of queer utopia, 'one great big happy family under one great happy name'" where "unity takes precedence over, or blissfully ignores, diversity" (116). Theoretical writings about Queer disavow coalitional formations rendering multiplicity and polarization of identity positions as means to resist normalcy. However, O' Driscoll's notion of the "interrelated goals" of variegated existences that negotiate, modify and appropriate gender boundaries "to describe the concept of sexual transgression, without being confined to any particular practice" (35-36) becomes more relevant. It is further added that "[sexual] transgression breaks the bounds of what a given culture considers to be normal, appropriate sexual behavior and questions categories of sexuality" and can reach "beyond queer theory in that it incorporates the notion of fluidity rather than territorialization and opposition to the fields of study that have focused on identity categories" (36). While Bornstein (in her theoretical discourses) and O' Driscoll appeal to a sense of negation for the interrelated space of gender fluidity, the narratives go further to portray how this negation arises from the bodily desires, sensations and urgencies not accommodated by the established social structure as explained in the section titled "Sharing a Sense of the Physicality of Dissent" of this article. The 'narrative' queer is, thus, about a sense of solidarity based on these very desires, sensations and urgencies that is not developed en-masse but pertains towards a sense of connectivity between individuals. This alternative understanding of queer, therefore, refers to the personal agency in identifying the self with the other(s). The coalition formed in this alternative understanding of queer, ordains the prerequisite of choice of the individual to understand and act on the association (or not) with queer.

Finally, deriving from the section "Embodiment and Performativity: Conflicts and Corroborations", another situational interrelation for gender fluidity that occurs in terms of queer performativity can be looked into. While positing all gender as performative and produced through the performance and citation of certain culturally intelligible acts, queer performativity "is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma" (Sedgwick 61). Sedgwick further clarifies that "forms" of "shame" are not "distinct 'toxic' parts of a group or individual identity that can be excised" but "integral to and residual in the processes by which identity itself is formed" and hence "the shame delineated place of identity doesn't determine the consistency or meaning of that identity, and race, gender, class, sexuality, appearance and abledness are only a few of the defining social constructions that will crystallize there, developing from this originary affect their particular structures of expression, creativity, pleasure and struggle" (63). The sense of embodiment of the individual is, thus, avoided to make way for a culturally-constructed nature of the shame-related identities.

This position, however, differs from those of some contemporary discourses on gender and disrupting gender. Wilcox, for example, writes that "theory must come from the

lived experience of gendered embodiment” (96) for the body “is always perceivable and can be perceived as phenomena, can be, and is, both the subject and object of perception” (97) and hence, “experience of the body can change due to different relations with other bodies in given situations” (98). Therefore, Wilcox deploys the body to challenge gender categories through re/creation of gender categories through idiosyncrasies of bodily experiences:

The embodiment and experience of being a boy with a lived female body is a different embodiment to that of a boy with a lived male body... based on the experience that the subject has of their body, gender presentation, body image and identity... By questioning the apparent subversion of cross-gendered identification, and by claiming that such an embodiment is not contradictory, a new gendered category could be produced that questions the intelligibility and logic of the matrix itself. The cultural assumption that the term ‘boy’ can only be ascribed to a male body can be undermined through the use of ‘boy’ to re-codify the body. In this way, the terms available to describe one’s gendered presentation can be used in a subversive manner that questions any notion of a ‘natural’ link between biology and gendered presentation. (103)

In the narratives, the sense of physicality often takes precedence over the possibility of being anything (queer or not) also includes modifying gendered performances motivated by physicality. And the choice of gender performances are based on the body and actualized through the body in these narratives. Such ideations that pertain to ‘real’ experiences (or for that matter simulated reality) poses a challenge to the performatively produced gender as a basis of discourses on non-normative sexualities, a conflict that Wilcox mostly avoids but a conflict that has nonetheless arisen in this study by juxtaposing the theoretical-queer and the narrative-queer. While Wilcox writes about experiences of embodiment as a source of multiple and hence, subversive gendered positions, these narratives pertain to the sense of embodiment of sexuality as prior to a self-authorized gender reality.

The centrality of embodiment in these narratives also refers to gender as more than surface reality. Rather, the choice of gendered reality is sustained through the somatic experiences. The narrative tension is created through how the bodies are made incumbent to the self through the social injunctions about gender. In resolving this tension, the narratives pertain to how the bodies become necessary as means and site of self-comprehension that appropriates gender categories to create idiosyncratic gender realities. Thus, the juxtaposed readings of the narratives contribute to specifically three positions pertaining to the supposed conflict between performativity and embodiment. Firstly, there need not be a conflict with gender being an assumed interiority, produced through stylizations and repetitions of gestures and the psychosomatic urges of choosing one mode of gestures over another. Annamarie Jagose writes that ‘performativity’ (in Butler’s sense) is misunderstood as being pretence and therefore “less real than some underlying gender truth” (88). It can, thus, be added that the possibility of some “underlying gender truth” only propels an individual towards one mode of producing gender over another and need not delegitimize the reified nature of gender. Instead, it often entails a performativity that pertains to a sense of intermingling of conformity and choices. Secondly, and this follows

from the first, that the sensitization to performativity of gender renders the possibility of being queer not merely through the subversion to the heteronormative modes of existences, but also by appropriating and modifying the same. When all the characters as described above, in one way or the other resist the gender assigned at birth, they are also choosing to produce either the other gender or an intermingling of both. In fact, the resistance is subsequent to this new, self-chosen articulation of sexuality. Finally, queer performativity may in terms of theory be associated with “shame” and “stigma”, but the narratives pertain to a content-related parallelism with the necessities of existence, certain senses of attachment and responsibilities which cannot be disassociated from gendered realities.

Hence, the alternative discourse of queer in these narratives, or rather the narratorial practices based on the prominence of physicality, pertains to a constitutive bodily-fulfillment that leads to gender destabilization instead of only negation and an optional subscription to a coalitional status which is based on every-day and affective experiences (here, in relation to physicality) rather than political complications as also the possible lack of distinctiveness between performativity and embodiment in the day- to-day living as determined by these narratives.

Conclusion

This study not so much disavows the conceptualization of queer as destabilizing gender boundaries, as tries to juxtapose the theoretical development with every-day and affective issues and find alternative means of trespassing gender boundaries. This leads to contesting and also expanding the scope of the queer. Mostly, the necessity to explore the agency of transsexuals and intersexed, here specifically, corporeal, is enabled; instead of using conditions of cross-gendering or mis-gendering to validate certain theoretical positions. The comprehension of physicality as distinctive from the requisite of negation in theorizing ‘queer’ will also contribute towards a certain trend of critical thinking that seeks to move away from the binary understanding of consolidation and deconstruction, in this case, of sexual identities. Instead of focusing on the binaries of ‘toleration/acceptance’ and ‘resistance and the lack of it’, the possibilities of ‘manipulation’ and ‘appropriation’ and ‘modification’ as applicable in the processes of existences are also opened up as newer avenues of research.

Notes

¹ In the recent past, a number of writers, have delved into India’s vast legacy of myths and created fictional tales based on them: Chitra Bannerjee Divakurni’s *Palace of Illusions* (2008), Amish Tripathi’s *Immortals of Meluha* (2010), Pratibha Ray’s *Yajnaseni* (1995) or *Chankya’s Chant* (2010) by Ashwin Sanghi to name the more popular of the lot, the most recent being *Karna’s Wife* released in April 2014. Devdutt Pattanaik’s works like *Jaya: A Retelling of Mahabharata* (2010) and *Sita: A Retelling of Ramayana* (2013) are contributions to this new indigenous sub-genre of novel. *The Pregnant King* also queers Indian mythology.

² This entails the reading of bodily practices vis-à-vis the larger socio-cultural processes. The concept has mostly been attributed to Henning Eichberg (1993) who had traced the root of the phrase to “the German notion of *Koperkultur*... which first appeared around 1900-5 during the “free-body-culture” movement that advocated diet and clothing reform, nudism, sport, gymnastics, folk dance, abstinence from nicotine and alcohol and so on”. But “in West Germany and Denmark the corresponding concepts underwent a renaissance after 1968, and have become the keywords in the new perspective of the body” which “looks at the body primarily as cultural; which to say, as, socially constructed and historically variable” (Bale, Philo 41). Since then body-culture-studies have developed to have the ‘body’ as “contextualized in relation to local symbols, beliefs and practices and history” (Bale, Philo 42).

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