

The literary field of queer cultural production in contemporary India: considering popular queer texts via Bourdieu

El campo literario de la producción cultural queer en la India contemporánea: La consideración de los textos populares queer a través de Bourdieu

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ABSTRACT

In *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu puts forward the idea that culture is discursively produced and that the field that informs, constitutes, and problematizes cultural production is crucial towards understanding how cultural transactions, dynamics, and politics work. Since literature is a key marker of society's outlook on and reception of sensitive subjects like non-heteronormativity, this article focuses on the queer literary field – LGBTQ+-related texts and publication – in/of contemporary India. To this end, I look into trends in publication of Indian queer literary texts in English since 1976 through Bourdieu's concept of the cultural production of the field of queer literature and consider popular texts like *Shikhandi: And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You*; *Our Impossible Love*; *She Swiped Right into my Heart*, and read them vis-à-vis Bourdieu's theorization, in order to conceptualize an idea about how texts and contexts interact with each other towards (re-)producing and (re-)constructing contemporary queer culture(s) in the Indian context.

Keywords: Bourdieu; India; queer; literature; popular culture

RESUMEN

En *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* el sociólogo Pierre Bourdieu plantea la idea que la cultura se produce discursivamente y que; el campo que informa, constituye y problematiza la producción cultural es crucial para entender cómo funcionan las transacciones, las dinámicas y las políticas culturales. Dado que la literatura es un marcador clave de la visión y la recepción por parte de la sociedad de temas sensibles como la no heteronormatividad, este artículo se centra en el campo literario queer -textos y publicaciones relacionados con el colectivo LGBTQ+- en/de la India contemporánea. Para ello, examino las tendencias en la publicación de textos literarios queer indios en inglés desde 1976 a través del concepto de Bourdieu de la producción cultural del campo de la literatura queer y considero textos populares como *Shikhandi: And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You*; *Our Impossible Love*; *She Swiped Right into my Heart*, y leerlos en relación con la teorización de Bourdieu, con el fin de conceptualizar una idea sobre cómo los textos y los contextos interactúan entre sí para (re)producir y (re)construir la(s) cultura(s) queer contemporánea(s) en el contexto indio.

Palabras clave: Bourdieu; India; queer; literatura; cultura popular

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1. Introduction

Research concerning human sexuality has yielded phenomenal studies, theories, and discourses in the Global North. In contrast, developments in the field of queer and sexuality studies in Indian academia have only recently begun interrogating complex questions. Given the dire implications of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalized homosexuality in India until recently, critical investments in the study of queer cultures, and their politics, have become both important and necessary. One of the ways in which the cultural politics can be studied is through the production of literary cultures and sub-cultures, especially wide-read, popular ones. Popular Indian mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik published his 27th book titled *Shikhandi: And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You* in 2014. It presents queer readings of Hindu mythic tales such as the stories of Shikhandi, Vishnu, Samavan, Aravan, Ila, Krishna, etc., in order to provide an alternative view on the validity of queer identities and queer-ness as accessible through the existing oeuvre of mythologies in India. Additionally, Pattanaik aims at making available to his readership a literature that is not only queer-positive but also queer-celebratory. In 2016, popular Indian romance fiction writer Durjoy Datta published his 13th novel titled *Our Impossible Love* that portrays a narrative of heterosexual romance. However, unlike his other 17 novels, it includes a character who is not only gay but who also plays a major role in the positive denouement of the plot. Additionally, Datta presents to his readership a narrative about the struggles of a gay character and his own share of romance, culminating in a happy ending of sorts. To have a popular mythologist who provides queer readings of Hindu myths and stories and a popular romance writer who presents an alternative view on romance beside(s) the heterosexual given to the established groups of readership nationwide marks a key shift in the production and consumption of literature in contemporary India in terms of non-normative sexualities and queerness.

In terms of the research aimed at the location of literary cultures within the socio-politico-legal milieu of contemporary LGBTQ+ issues in India, such texts present a curious entry point to an understanding of how location, and locate-ability, is influenced by the existing dynamicity of culture. In their own individual ways, they challenge and transform ideas of literary relevance and reception vis-à-vis the implicit politics of literary production and creativity. However, these texts must not be considered simply one-off examples of introducing queer narratives within the larger scheme of establishing a sustainable literary discourse on non-heteronormative sexualities. Rather, considering such texts where Hindu-myths enthusiasts, hetero-romance loyalists, and uninitiated onlookers alike are provided with an access to queer narratives in conspicuous ways presents to the analysis of literature an opportunity to delve into what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'the field of cultural production.' This article considers a reading of such popular 'queer' texts vis-à-vis Bourdieu's theoretical framework on how culture is produced, in order to interrogate, contextualize, and explicate the cultural production of a queer literary domain in contemporary India. In doing so, the article focuses on the positions and the possibilities that entail literary cultures in contemporary India with respect to representation of LGBTQ+ issues, especially when considered vis-à-vis socio-legal developments in the past three decades. It also explicates

how popular literary ventures have attempted to be inclusive in terms of non-heteronormative sexualities and what the underlying politics of such representation have been in the Indian English-language publishing field, toward sustaining a queer habitus in the literary field of queer cultural production.

2. Method

The idea of this article initiated in the classroom setting at the MPhil-level coursework at the Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India. As a part of the Locating Literatures paper, the researchers were required to implement Pierre Bourdieu’s core ideas in *The Field of Cultural Production* and provide critical insights into their respective fields/sub-fields of research expertise. As a part of the course, the author decided to look at the cultural production in the field of queer literature in English in the past 45 years. To this end, over a period of six months, the author compiled a (non-exhaustive) list of 531 known published Indian queer literary texts in English since 1976 till 2021 and created a first-of-its-kind *Timeline of queer Indian literature in English* that is free for everyone to access. Thereafter, to interrogate the trends of publication influenced by socio-legal, the author divided the periods of publication history into six sections, each separated by either important petitions that were filed at the courts or landmark judgments given by the courts, as mentioned below:

Figure 1. A table showcasing the timeline of major legal events and parallel English-language literary developments in relation to LGBTQ+ issues in India (1976-2021)

Date	No. of Texts Published	Major Legal Event
1976		
↓	27	
4 April, 1994		ABVA files a petition at the Delhi High Court challenging the constitutionality of Section 377
↓	37	
7 December, 2001		NAZ Foundation revives the struggle initiated by ABVA by submitting a civil writ petition to the Delhi High Court, challenging Section 377
↓	59	
2 July, 2009		Historic judgement by the Delhi High Court, reading down Section 377 and decriminalizing homosexuality
↓	72	
11 December, 2013		Supreme Court overrules the Delhi High Court judgement and recriminalizes all non-normative and same-sex sexual acts by upholding Section 377
↓	135	
6 September, 2018		Supreme Court overrules its 2013 judgement and again decriminalizes homosexuality and all non-normative & same-sex sexual acts by reading down Section 377
↓	198	
2021		

Source: Author

Figure 1 summarizes the developments in literary publication (specifically, texts published in the English language) in relation to the major legal events (specifically, cases admitted at the Delhi

High Court and the Supreme Court of India) that were taking place with respect to the resistance against Section 377 of the IPC. Subsequently, the author also prepared a graph (Figure 2) charting the proliferation in the publication of Indian queer literary texts since 1976, for which these time-periods were marked: 1976 to 1994, 1995 to 2001, 2002 to 2009, 2010 to 2013, and 2014 till 2021, wherein, each of the periods is separated by a major legal litigation/judgement at the courts, as mentioned earlier.

The second part of the article, using Bourdieu's theory of the politics of hierarchization and literary legitimacy, considers a few popular queer texts and qualitatively analyzes/discusses their position in the field of Indian queer literary cultural production, and how they might represent the shifts in contemporary queer literary dynamics in India.

3. Queer Positions, Position-takings, and Possibles

The construction of the spaces of 'positions' and 'position-takings' with respect to the field of cultural production, per Bourdieu, is implied within the interactions (and struggles) between the different positions that constitute any particular field (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30). In the field of the production of queer literature located within the cultural locale of how fiction influences and affects socio-cultural readings of realities, the position of representing queer identities, experiences, and cultures can be considered to be complicit in and furthered by the position-taking employed by writers, such as Pattanaik, Datta, Nagarkar, etc., that aim at situating a legitimate and legible discourse of homosexuality and queerness within and through such literary texts mass-produced for and circulated in the market.

In the context of the publication of queer texts in contemporary India, the newcomers can situate themselves in a more positive and sustainable position of re-interpreting queer cultures by virtue of their utilization of a field of cultural production. This, as Bourdieu points out, gets executed through a process of "appropriating the form of thought and expression by which they were formerly possessed" (1993, p. 31). This strategic appropriation is made effective, in Pattanaik's case, through a presentation of queer readings of traditional and, more often than not, normatively conceptualized Hindu myths, and in Datta's case, through an insertion of same-sex romantic possibilities in the construct of the heterosexual romance genre. The extent of this form of transformative appropriation and re-presentation located within equally transformed genres is reflected in what Bourdieu claims regarding the changes in the spaces of literary possibles as such:

[C]hange in the space of literary or artistic possibles is the result of change in the *power relation* which constitutes the space of positions. When a new literary or artistic group makes its presence felt in the field of literary or artistic production, the whole *problem* is transformed, since coming into being, i.e., into *difference*, modifies and displaces the universe of possible options (1993, p. 32; emphases added).

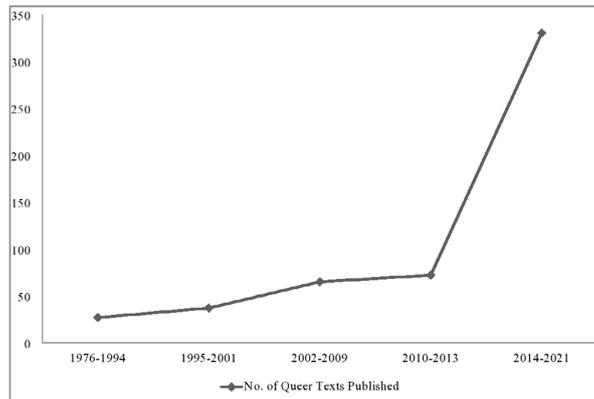
Three issues are of importance in the context of my discussion in this article: power relation, problem, and difference. In terms of the power relations that constitute the space of the positions in the field of contemporary queer literary production in India, this article is interested in the literary currency that specific texts like those of Pattanaik and Datta have in transforming the problem, vis-à-vis the projection of a different legitimacy within the market of dominant heteronormative representation.

Given that texts such as *Shikhandi* and *Our Impossible Love* have entered the existing field of the genres that they subscribe to and refashion, and also given that these texts have been published and marketed by a player like Penguin Random House India – one of the first popular/mainstream publishers to initiate a series of publication of LGBTQ+ literature in India, the implications of Bourdieu’s insinuations in terms of power relations become the more problematic. In fact, in relation to Hoshang Merchant’s now-iconic anthology titled *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* (1999), published by Penguin Books India, R. Raj Rao informs that “no mainstream Indian publisher had previously dared to bring out a compilation of gay writing with the taboo word ‘gay’ in the title itself” (2017, p. 64). Leaving aside the issue of the contemporary popular preference of such writers as Pattanaik and Datta, and the competitive domination of such publishing houses as Penguin Random House India, the fact that such queer texts and narratives have been made available to the mainstream market for ready consumption, reception, criticism, and appraisal is symptomatic of a discursive politics of framing and consolidating a field of market-able queerness – a definitive space of possibles/positions. When considered in the backdrop of the regressive 2013 Supreme Court of India judgment, the publication of such texts as Pattanaik’s and Datta’s seems more than just co-incidental. Nor is coincidental the fact that there has been a considerable increase and proliferation in the publication of Indian queer literary texts in English in and about India in the past four decades (refer to *Timeline of queer Indian literature in English* where the author has prepared the first non-exhaustive list of 531 Indian queer literary texts in English, from 1976 till 2021, that deal with LGBTQ+ issues and experiences in major and/or minor ways, has been provided).

As can be discerned from the list, the surge in the publication of queer texts can be observed to have occurred around and during certain periods in recent history. Given that the literary field of cultural production can be related to the cultural realities vis-à-vis contemporary socio-political issues and considerations, the proliferation in the publication of queer texts in the past decade (refer to Figure 2 below) can be considered to form and reflect upon the literary field of queer cultural production in its formative period. While the periods of 1976-1994, 1995-2001, 2002-2009, and 2010-2013 witnessed publication of 27, 37, 65, and 72 queer literary texts, respectively, 4.5 times more texts were published during the period of 2014-2021 that saw the publication of 330 texts. This trend and proliferation in the publication of LGBTQ+-related literature needs to be

considered in perspective; without claiming that co-occurrence equals to causality, this article will discuss this proliferation in publication in the context of the major legal events that took place towards challenging Section 377 of the IPC.

Figure 2. A graph showing the proliferation in the publication of queer literary texts (in English) in India (1976-2021)



Source: Author

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), in the context of “Unnatural offences,” state that,

[w]hoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine (Indian Penal Code, 1860, p. 88).

Though not explicitly stating that the Section refers to same-sex sexual activities, it has been considered and has been used to censure and criminalize homosexual acts, even in private, and subsequently, to criticize, otherize, and stigmatize individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. Following the long legal struggle that began in the 1990s, against this Section, Delhi High Court finally read it down on 2 July, 2009 in its judgment on the ‘Naz Foundation v. Government of NCT of Delhi & Ors.’ case, effectively decriminalizing homosexuality; this is considered a landmark judgment in the history of LGBTQ+ rights movement in India. However, following the Special Leave Petitions filed against the High Court’s judgment, in the ‘Suresh Kumar Koushal & Anr. v. Naz Foundation & Ors.’ case, the reading down of Section 377 was overruled by the Supreme Court of India and homosexuality re-criminalized on 11 December, 2013. As a result of the curative petitions filed against this particular judgment, in the ‘Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. v. Union of India thr. Secretary Ministry of Law and Justice’ case, the Supreme Court overruled the 2013 judgment and decriminalized consensual same-sex sexual activities again, by reading down Section 377, on 6 September, 2018. For a more detailed history of and discussion on Section 377 of the IPC, see Dave, 2012, p. 172-182; Narrain, 2007, p. 58-61; Narrain & Gupta, 2011, p. xxviii-xxix; Rao, 2017, p. 127-141; and Satish, 2014, p. 267-276..

What can be considered as a period of struggle between 1991 (when AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA) initiated the movement to repeal Section 377 by publishing *Less Than Gay: A Citizens' Report on the Status of Homosexuality in India* in December 1991) and July 2009 (when the Delhi High Court passed the historic judgment reading down Section 377), there can be witnessed a considerable rise in the publication of LGBTQ+ literature. After ABVA first filed a petition at the Delhi High Court challenging the constitutionality of Section 377 on 14 April 1994 (Dave, 2012, p. 173), publication of LGBTQ+-related texts saw more than 3.5 times increase from that in the preceding decade. In fact, after the NAZ Foundation revived the struggle initiated by ABVA by submitting a civil writ petition to the Delhi High Court Challenging Section 377 on 7 December 2001 (Dave, 2012, p. 178), in the intervening period, publication of queer texts saw an almost 2 times increase from that in the 1994-2001 period. Given that the landmark judgment of Delhi High Court vis-à-vis the unconstitutionality of Section 377 on 2 July, 2009 created huge ripples across the country in terms of sexuality, rights, and freedom, it does not come as a surprise that the fervor was reflected in the literary field too – texts continued to be published at the same rate in the period that constituted the years after the queer-positive 2009 judgment and before the queer-negative 2013 judgment. In fact, the proliferation of queer literary publication does not subside but increases to almost 2 times after the Supreme Court overruled the 2009 Delhi High Court judgment on 11 December 2013 (that effectively re-criminalized homosexuality by reviving Section 377) up till the Supreme Court's landmark verdict on 6 September, 2018 that not only reversed the 2013 judgment but also provided a robust defense (in the form of the document of the judgment itself) in support of the queer-positive verdict. This continuity of the positive trend is more evident in the period after the verdict on 6 September, 2018 – roughly, 198 texts have already been published within a relatively shorter period of 3 years.

The historical events and developments and the literary responses and trends cannot be considered in isolation. In order to demonstrate the utility of Bourdieu's theorization in this context, this article proposes that the socio-legal realities and elements can, and must, be considered and interrogated correlatively to bring to the fore the underlying politics and processes that have come to develop the literary field of queer cultural production in India in the recent past, as witnessed through the rise and rise of queer literature (in English) in the last two decades. For example, with respect to the issue that Section 377 menacingly highlights the definitive and restricted parameters of 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature,' the Supreme Court's 2013 judgment states this: "In our opinion the acts which fall within the ambit of the section can only be determined with reference to the act itself and the circumstances in which it is executed" (Suresh Kumar Koushal & Anr. v. NAZ Foundation & Ors., 2013, p. 77). In explicitly stating the restricted-ness of the validity of jurisprudence in the context of Section 377 and its ramifications on sexual rights and freedom in India, the legal text provides neither an intrinsically negative (to the rights and dignity of the sexually 'natural other') reading of the clause nor an extrinsically positive (to the potential possibles/alternatives to the 'unnatural' idea of queer sexualities) rereading of Section 377. When placed in this field of possibles, or to say impossibles, Pattanaik's introduction to *Shikhandi* presents a challenge to the existing socio-legal

power relation between the queer individuals (and their narratives) and the State, albeit within the purview of the subjectivity of literary re-presentation. In the chapter titled “The Discovery or Invention of Queerness,” Pattanaik questions and asserts this:

Who do we discover? Who do we invent? What we discover is deemed natural. What we invent is deemed unnatural, artificial, manmade or cultural. Significantly, different people discover and invent different things because people have different notions of what constitutes nature (2014, p. 9).

This line of questioning and assertion is used by Pattanaik to propose his own re-reading of cultural narratives in the form of myths that have shaped the field of cultural production down the ages vis-à-vis the reception (or side-lining) of queer lives and realities. Though situated within the fictive discourse of queer mythical re-telling, Pattanaik’s *Shikhandi*, and also his novel *The Pregnant King* (2008), provides a relatively optimistic view of the problem that such a production of literary culture holds in terms of a negative reception of non-heteronormative sexualities. The re-presentation of what is considered a problem, and thus rendered problematic, in terms of the ‘unnatural’ sexual lives of the ‘others’ is questioned and refashioned into a problem not of the basic idea of queer sexuality but of the reception and interpretation of it. In other words, the problem is transformed not into a clash of ideologies, like the basis of jurisprudence vis-à-vis legal definitions, but into that of interpretations and receptions.

It must be noted, then, that a text such as Pattanaik’s is in a bid to transform the whole problem, not just through ‘difference’ but through a reconciliation of difference into an idea of the ‘different’ but possible, valid, and sustainable. A similar idea of queer-positive possibilities and sustainability is also stated in the romance fiction of Datta, where the narrative saves the ending for the positive note on which the same-sex coupledness of Sarthak and Erskin is accepted by their family and friends. Similarly, in *She Swiped Right into my Heart*, also published in 2016, another bestselling romance author Sudeep Nagarkar provides the readers a narrative where the sexuality of the lesbian character, Shibani, is accepted by the other characters, albeit after some struggle. In fact, the author puts in additional efforts and makes one of the characters converse with others in an almost didactic manner, though infused with pathos, regarding the need to accept the different ‘natural-ness’ of queer people. In such a re-presentation of queer position-taking, the different narrative denouement transforms the problem upon its head and paints a story of possibles, where the difference is not merely of literary depiction of queer possibilities but also is implicit in a modification of the normative hetero-romance fiction and a displacement into the field of queer cultural production – where the sub-plot of same-sex romance presents an alternative form of power relations towards the transformation of the queer problem. In fact, in an interview about *Our Impossible Love*, Datta replies to a question about his inclusion of the same-sex love plot in the novel by claiming that “[r]omance fiction in India is not conventional at all; the grey area of romance is what Indian romance is all about” (Nath, 2020, para. 12). This gray space of possibles of cultural production is one of the multiple colors where the literary field reveals the transforming ideas of writing romance fiction in contemporary India.

Another example of this alternative and agential queered *locus standi*, in terms of cultural production, is also reflected in the interesting claim that Shobhna S. Kumar, founder of Mumbai-based Queer Ink – India’s first online LGBTQ+ bookstore that itself started publishing queer texts in 2010, makes in terms of the publication principles and strategies employed by her queer publishing company, that I quote as such:

On our new website we’ll include ... that every person, forget LGBT, forget queer, whatever, who is an Indian citizen has certain mandated freedoms and rights and responsibilities as per the Indian constitution. I have a very clear mandating Queer Ink that the Indian Constitution was where I will base our empowerment process. Instead of saying that section 377 is wrong, I will say that the constitution gives us this right. It’s about saying: you have to read this, to understand this, and claim your rights (Garel, 2020, para. 53).

Evidently, both writers of queer texts and publishers of queer literature do not enforce a definitive reading of the queer cultural re-presentations of/in the construction of the narrative, the re-fashioning of genres, and the analysis of such texts; rather, these texts, platforms, and interpretations posit in them, by virtue of being constitutive of a dynamic system of cultural production, the idea of multiplicity. In other words, the queer narrative discourse of such a literary field of cultural production functions within and through an idea of multiple possibles.

4. The Politics of Hierarchization and Queer Literary Legitimacy

Despite this discourse of multiple possibles of/in the queer literary field in contemporary India, if one is to remember that “the literary and artistic field is contained within the field of power” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 37), the duality in the nature of the relationship between literature and power relations, inadvertently, gets informed by a politics of hierarchy. In this context, Bourdieu avers that the structure of the field of production is constitutive of an opposition between the sub-field of ‘restricted production’ and the sub-field of ‘large-scale production’ (see 1993, p. 53).

Shikhandi presents an example of the sub-field of restricted production. A more relevant example for this will be Pattanaik’s short story titled “The Marriage of Somavat and Sumedha,” in *Close, Too Close: The Tranquebar Book of Queer Erotica* (2012). Through his fictive portrayal of a homoerotic romance between Somavat and Sumedha, drawn from the tale in *Skanda Purana*, and the unabashed acts of love and lust between them, Pattanaik fits in the oppositional element of Bourdieu’s sub-field of restricted production in the sense that the story, as constituting a sub-field of a homoerotic retelling of a religious myth/story, is located within an already restricted literary production of the Queer Erotica genre in the field of queer cultural production. It must also be noted that Pattanaik’s publication of the Hindu mythic story of same-sex romance and homoeroticism in a volume of queer erotic denotes not only a major shift in the publication of what is considered normative (or otherwise) but also a crucial re-visioning, stretching, and negotiating of/within the restricted field of queer erotica, especially and specifically by virtue of its audacious location in a doubly non-normative discourse that disrupts conservative literary propriety in India. On the other hand, *Our Impossible Love* presents an example of the sub-field of large-scale production.

Other relevant examples for this can be texts such as Indra Das' *The Devourers* (2015) and Jerry Pinto's *Murder in Mahim* (2017) where the narratives introduce queer sub-plots located within mainstream literary genres such as speculative fiction/fantasy and murder-thriller respectively.

The restrictive principle of hierarchization not only checks the increase in autonomy of the literary currency of texts by the likes of Pattanaik and Datta but also threatens to eventually arrest their efficacy in re-defining the literary field of queer cultural production by virtue of being located within a predominantly heteronorm-informed market politics. Implicit within this problematic is a question of symbolic inclusion and exclusion in defining and forming a definitive literary field of queer narratives: to what extent can a particular text with queer narratives/sub-narratives be included in the process of defining that particular genre? In the case of contemporary queer literature in India, how does one locate, and to what extent situate texts such as *Our Impossible Love* and *She Swiped Right into my Heart* by heterosexual writers such as Durjoy Datta and Sandeep Nagarkar, who write predominantly heterosexual romance fiction? A possible answer to this is situated in the already always present struggle with the binary politics – as Bourdieu calls it, the struggle for the dominant principle of hierarchization. He contends as such:

The literary or artistic field is at all times the site of a struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically ... and the autonomous principle ... who are least endowed with specific capital (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40).

Now, if one is to consider that the struggle is between the heteronomous principle that constitutes the heteronormative and predominant literature and the autonomous principle that is constituted by the non-heteronormative, one would essentially oversimplify the given-ness of the dichotomy. However, the line between the two sets of literary production is not definitive in the first place, since there aren't binaries anymore but multiple possibles of struggle in the field of cultural production.

Datta's novel is one curious example, as it narrativizes, rather optimistically, the possibilities of same-sex romance and relationship within what is basically marketed as a straight-as-it-comes love story. The fact that there are gay characters and a sub-plot of romantic liaison increasingly problematizes both the autonomous principle – the literary narrative capital is that of the other – and the heteronomous principle – the author and the text are situated in a mainstream literary market – alike. However, must this mean that Datta's novel must not be considered in the redemptive proselytization of the literary field of queer cultural production? Or is it presumed that some compromises must be made at sustaining this dominant principle, in some form or the other, to negotiate the politics of the field? Subsequently, is it so that the text of Datta is merely an appropriation in itself to make use of the possible market of queer readership through its portrayal of gay characters and romance, conveniently located within a larger normative framework of love stories? Similarly, one must also not ignore that in the case of both the mythical retelling of queerness in Hindu contexts by Pattanaik and the insertion of queer subjects in heterosexual

romance by Nagarkar, the politics of possibles is always already predicated upon restricted, and often problematic, historicization and/or fictionalization. For example, Pattanaik's glorification of the queer-positive aspects of select Hindu myths cannot exculpate the lack of queer-positive visibility and assertion in most Hindu texts and cultural norms. For example, in *The Pregnant King*, which retells the story of King Yuvanashva who accidentally drinks a potion that results him giving birth to a son named Mandhata, binaries of gender and sexuality still inform and construct the queer-positive myth-narrative. The dualist principles of the non-fictive world still bind Pattanaik's story for even as the transsexual protagonist is provided with a voice through narrative, ze is eventually transformed into a heterosexual character. Similarly, Nagarkar's romance fiction, also, does not provide a positive denouement for Shibani but re-locates her desire for Geet to the background as the heterosexual coupledness of Geet and Rudra takes centre-stage in the context of the romance that is portrayed as culturally possible and socially desirable by the end of the narrative.

Within this problematic of multiple possibles, then, is also implicated the definition of the writer – in this case, the writer who writes queer literature or contributes to it in some form or the other – and the parameters of the written text. The “monopoly of literary legitimacy” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 42), as Bourdieu puts it, renders the stakes in such literary struggles that are aimed at defining who writes contemporary queer fiction in India and who does not much problematic than expected, since the monopoly that Bourdieu refers to in this context seems to be often conflicted and mostly subjective (relatively so), in a case such as the one this article deals with. One might not call Datta or Nagarkar writers of queer Indian literature at all, and/or similarly, Pattanaik might not be considered so much an authority in re-visioning Indian myths as this article might make him seem in its deliberations. Though authorial intention can never be fully comprehended or justified, the investment of such authors of popular texts in non-heteronormative narratives cannot be properly considered without taking into account the thriving nature of the literary field of queer culture and its politics in contemporary India.

Within this problematic of multiple possibles of literary legitimization is also located the three competing principles of legitimacy that, as Bourdieu states, is constituted of these: producers of culture, the critics of such produced culture, and the consumers of these forms of production (1993, p. 50-51). In the context of contemporary queer literature and its field of cultural production in India, writers like Pattanaik can act as producers of this specific field of literary interpretation and re-telling of myths, while legitimizing the discourse in the process, and the likes of Datta and Nagarkar can provide a reference to other contemporary (and future) writers of the romantic fiction genre to introduce and explore non-heteronormative sexualities, while appropriating the politics of specific representation. Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theorization of 'Minor Literature' provides a referent framework in this context of contemporary queer literary ventures concerning romance fiction, where examples of generic re-fashioning discursively advance the formative genre to inform and locate the aspirations and politics of a subjugated group that “speaks as though it were representing, rather than forming, its identity” to a subject group that

“forms [itself] as an act of speech or demand, as an event of becoming” (Colebrook, 2007, p. 117). As the author has explicated elsewhere, the numerous examples of recently published gay romance fiction in India utilize the field that is being constantly culturally produced and function towards re-forming the field and production of culture itself – becoming a form of, what Deleuze and Guattari call, ‘minor literature’ of agency and cultural-literary refashioning that critiques and challenges the literary hetero-canon of love and romance in India (Pradhan, 2020).

The role of the critic, and the academic critic by extension, will be that of producing a legitimising discourse of the reception of such texts and writers within the field of queer literature and culture and also accommodation of the same within the field of the dominant/hetero-centered literary culture. As is evident from the gradual increase in the publication of critical texts on LGBTQ+ issues and literature in the past decade or so, this task seems to have been taken up with much interest and responsibility by critics and academics. In the context of literature, important work has been done by Brinda Bose, R. Raj Rao, Akhil Katyal, Kaustav Bakshi, etc. R. Raj Rao’s historicization of LGBTQ+ literature in India he not only highlights the serious, and discriminative, lack in the ‘mainstream’ literary histories of English literature available in India but also proposes that “LGBT writing ... will have to write its own history just as it must create its own aesthetics” (2017, p. 126) [For further discussion, see chapter 8 of Rao’s *Criminal Love?* (2017)]. The second example is Kaustav Bakshi and Rohit K. Dasgupta’s discussions on Indian academia concerning the pedagogical issues and contexts of teaching LGBTQ+ literature in educational institutions where they not only provide a detailed history on the various issues but also comment on the requirement to queer the academia [See chapter 8 of Bakshi and Dasgupta’s *Queer Studies* (2019)].

The role of the consumers – the readers, specifically – is also complicit with that of the critics in that their reception must form the basis of a particular form of legitimization of the discourses on non-heteronormative sexualities as portrayed and presented for consumption in the concerned texts. This seems to have already been reflected in the context of the readership of queer literature in English in India, as can be perceived in the statement of Shobhna S. Kumar of Queer Ink that her “online bookstore has seen a 30-40% increase in the number of buyers every year” (Malu, 2014, p. para. 3). Furthermore, up and coming, new publication houses, that do not necessarily focus on LGBTQ+ texts, have also taken note of the viable market of queer literature and its readership in contemporary India; for example, Chennai-based Notion Press, that was founded in 2012, seems to have taken this factor into much consideration and has already published at least 35 LGBTQ+ texts since the historic 2018 judgment by the Supreme Court. However, in the context of queer literature in regional languages, the same might not be the case. For example, in a session on ‘Knocking on the Door: The Challenges and Prospects of Queer Publication’ at the first Kolkata Queer Literary Festival (2019), representatives of some publishing houses in Kolkata – Mandira Sen (STREE and SAMYA - Popular Prakashan), Sourav Mukhopadhyay (Executive Publisher at Saptarshi Prakashan), and Subhankar Dey (CEO at Dey’s Publication) – discussed the various challenges in finding, publishing, distributing, and marketing viable queer literary texts in a regional language like Bangla. The tripartite structure of this legitimacy discourse is bound to form a basis for explicating the relevance of the producers of queer texts located within

the multiple possibles of the literary field of queer cultural production – an intensive critical investigation of which is an exercise that is beyond the scope of this article but nonetheless important and desirable.

5. Conclusion. A Queer Habitus?

To return to the initial discussion regarding positions and position-taking, Bourdieu revises his argument to re-frame it as a negotiated interaction and confrontation vis-à-vis time and space. It is necessary to understand that literary practices are often the result of the meeting of the history of the positions that writers and producers of literature occupy and the history of the dispositions of such subjects, influenced by socio-historical events and developments as inferred in the discussion provided in this article with respect to the Indian queer literary scenario. Furthermore, following Bourdieu, it can also be understood that within the dynamic construction of the field of cultural production and of the space of possibles, access to the different positions and the disposition of agents come within a correlative interplay of subjectively considering the role of contemporariness; effectively, this interaction of schemes constitutes the habitus for the particular field of cultural production. Following Bourdieu's idea of the 'habitus,' the field of positions and the schemes that they operate through and are constituted of must be key areas of focus for and towards a critically informed reception and analysis of the positions constructed through and entailed in contemporary trends in queer literary cultures and the possibilities in this particular field of cultural production in India.

To locate queer texts such those considered in this article in the queer habitus is also constitutive of challenges and struggles that, by virtue of antagonisms and homologies, conspire towards a prismatic cultural discourse. It is necessary that research in the field of queer cultural studies in India consider such queer habitus in terms of contemporary events, specifically legal developments and community movements, in order to arrive at a more holistic understanding of the varied trajectories of queer politics in a postcolonial India. Critical investments of such sorts will provide the study of this field with the understanding of the ways in which the space of possibles is concurrently constituted, fashioned, and defined within the queer literary cultures of/ in contemporary India. Akhil Katyal's recent enquiry into the underlying politics of contemporary 'gay writing' and publishing and its market dynamics in India in his book *The Doubleness of Sexuality* (2016) where, referring to some key LGBTQ+ texts and anthologies, he comments on the doubleness of gay writing in India and on the socio-sexual ramifications of queer literary publication, provides one such example of interrogating how queer literature is being produced, consumed, and revised.

Though it is beyond the scope of this article to delve into such an interrogation, research on contemporary queer literature being published in India can benefit in multifarious ways through in-depth and interdisciplinary critical studies concerning the politics, ethics, and logic of publication concerning LGBTQ+ issues, especially after the 2018 Supreme Court judgment that decriminalized homosexuality by reading down the much dreaded and hated Section 377

of the IPC. This article has also shown how Bourdieu's conceptualization of the field of cultural production is relevant in the contexts of contemporary queer literary cultures. Despite being limited to a discussion and analysis of English-language books, and not including other forms of publications like magazines, journals, weeklies, newsletters, special issues, etc., this article has provided a pointer for further investments into these contexts. For example, much is left to be done in terms of considering literary output in regional languages in India that has also seen a steady growth in queer literary publications. Nevertheless, any further critical enquiry into the positions, dispositions, and spaces of possibles that identify and qualify the literary field of queer cultural production in contemporary India must interrogate both discourses and praxes of/ in the queer habitus that is constituted by transformative and self-transforming literary works that continuously construct, de-construct, and re-construct the field of queer possibilities in the domain of literary production.

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