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Between Silence and Invisibility: Queer (Lesbian) Desire as a Mark of Excess in Selected Indian Literary Texts

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Research Article

Abstract

In recent decades, the representation of queer women and their desire has gained significant attention in Indian Literature. This paper explores selected literary works by Indian women writers and aims to shed light on the complexities of their characters, some fictionalised while others autobiographical. The paper further examines a diverse range of life writings, ranging from short stories, autobiographies, memoirs and fictionalised accounts, authored by women from different region and linguistic backgrounds within India. The paper investigates various strategies employed by these writers who sometimes succumb and at times challenge heteronormative structures and patriarchy through their literary works. Through the idea of silence and invisibility, the social intolerance towards female sexuality and queer women desire has been reflected in most of the narratives. The paper further investigates the ways in which these writers negotiate their multiple identities, including gender, sexuality, caste, class, and religion, while grappling with societal norms and prejudices. It further explores the themes of self-discovery, coming out, resistance, and activism, as well as the narratives of love, desire, and relationships that emerge from these texts. The study will do an extensive analysis on the works of women writers like Ismat Chugtai's Lihaaf (1942), Kamala Das's autobiography titled 'My Story' (1977) and Shobha De's novel titled Strange Obsession (1992), The paper reflects how the mainstream literature at times refuses to address the idea of queer desire and compares it to fleeting adolescent traits of experimentation and even if addressed, it is seen as deviant in nature.

Keywords: Queer, Desire, Lesbian, Identity, Narratives.

Introduction

The debates surrounding the concepts of "woman" and "lesbian" remain central to feminist and queer theoretical discussions. The term "queer" itself continues to provoke a range of questions: What does it mean to be queer? Is there a distinction between being lesbian or gay and being queer? Is it possible for heterosexual individuals to identify as queer? Traditionally, the word "queer" has been defined as both "eccentric" and "homosexual." Within queer theory, this definition is used to challenge established norms, disrupt familiar assumptions, and draw attention to the fluid and unpredictable aspects of desire—particularly lesbian desire. Such desires often become obscured within patriarchal social structures, where women are expected to conform to heteronormative ideals and fulfil prescribed familial roles. This critical inquiry seeks to unsettle conventional boundaries and foreground the complexities of identity and desire that resist easy categorization. Within the Indian semantic and linguistic field, the word lesbian has been incorporated to convey negative meanings associated to the West. In "Silence and Invisibility", Giti Thadani comments: "The self-identified Indian lesbian is viewed as inherently Western and is subject to frequent criticism on this account." (Sukthakar, 1999) Thus, lesbianism is seen as a Western importation that refers to abnormal sexuality or sexuality against the law of nature. Likewise, the term lesbian defies "correct" gender roles, claims feminist

independence and attempts against the moral codes and traditions of the country. From the Indian perspective, the construction of the west holds layers of materialism, sexual vices, moral corruption, capitalism, pornography, violence etc. As lesbianism is at times seen "un-indian", especially for those in power who are upholders of the Hindu Right, the hegemonic discourse defines the Indian lesbian or lesbianism, by producing social myths, and cultural prejudices that are inscribed on the lesbian body (Butler, 1990). Giti Thadani further opines that it is "vital to ask other questions pertaining to the new constructions of the 'West' in ideologies emerging from the geographic "Orient". Thadani posits that the prevailing discourse reflects a form of reverse Orientalism, or what might be termed "Occidentalism." Drawing on Edward Said's framework—where Orientalism is understood as a system of thought that culturally and ideologically serves to dominate, restructure, and assert authority over the "Orient"—Thadani suggests that constructing narratives around lesbianism which are shaped by negative perceptions of the West operates as a dual mechanism of control. In this context, the negative framing of lesbian identities through the lens of Western influence not only reinforces cultural boundaries but also serves to regulate both gender and sexual norms within Indian society.

Hence, this paper endeavours to discern instances of lesbian representation within a curated corpus of Indian literary compositions. It engages with a curated selection of literary creations authored by Indian women writers and endeavours to illuminate the intricacies inherent in their character portrayals, which span a spectrum from wholly fictionalized to semi-autobiographical depictions. Moreover, the study delves into a heterogeneous array of autobiographical and semi-autobiographical life narratives, encompassing short stories, autobiographies, memoirs, and fictionalized renderings, composed by women hailing from diverse geographical and linguistic origins across the Indian subcontinent. The study will do an exploration of diverse strategies employed by these authors, at times acquiescing to, and at other times contesting, established heteronormative frameworks and patriarchal constructs through their literary endeavors. By examining the themes of silence and invisibility, the pervasive societal intolerance towards female sexuality and the desires of queer women is elucidated within many of these narratives. Additionally, the paper scrutinizes the intricate interplay of multiple identities, including gender, sexuality, caste, class, and religion, among these writers as they navigate the landscape of societal norms and biases. Furthermore, the study delves into the overarching themes of self-discovery, the process of coming out, acts of resistance, and the propagation of activism, in tandem with an exploration of the narratives surrounding love, desire, and interpersonal relationships that emerge within the literary texts under consideration. It undertakes an exploration of this trajectory through the literary works of female authors, including those who identify as queer (in case of Suniti Namjoshi), such as Ismat Chugtai's "Lihaaf" (1942), Kamala Das's autobiographical work "My Story" (1997), and Shobha De's novel "Strange Obsession" (1992). The paper discerns how conventional literature occasionally avoids engaging with the concept of queer desire, often equating it with fleeting adolescent experiments, and, when addressed, stigmatizes it as deviant in nature.

Origins of Lesbian Writing: Ismat Chugtai's *Lihaaf*

While there's is a considerable amount of contemporary feminist as well as gay writing in India, women's writing on lesbianism are comparatively sparse (Sandhya, 2003). One of the first instances of lesbianism in Indian literature are to be found in the short story *The Quilt (Lihaaf)* by the Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai. The plot of the story and the writer's submission to a trial in Lahore remains to be one of the controversial moments in literature, and subject for critically acclaimed film *Fire* by Deepa Mehta. Upon its publication, Chugtai was hailed as a progressive writer challenging social norms while also questioning lesbian desire when the society even

refused to acknowledge female desire. It was published in Urdu literary journal *Adaab-i-Latif* in 1941, Lihaaf is a first-person narrative by an unnamed adolescent narrator (now an adult) who upon visiting her aunt Begum Jaan comes across her illicit 'sexual' relationship with her maidservant, Rabbu. The writer never refers to lesbianism explicitly, yet some homoerotic tropes, massaging, hugging and above all the exciting action occurring beneath the quilt, confirm the lesbian relation. Besides, the last sentence that closes the story: "What I saw when the quilt was lifted, I will never tell anyone, not even if someone gives me a lakh of rupees" (Chughtai, 1942). Throughout the narrative, there are subtle hints of queer desire as the narrator first talks about her experience while staying with Begum Jaan. The narrator first describes Nawab Saheb, Begum Jaan's husband, as a man "of ripe years" yet virtuous as he doesn't engage in adultery and performs 'haj' (holy pilgrimage for muslims). However, despite marrying Begum Jaan, there's no marital conjugality between the two and Begum Jaan is treated as a 'priced commodity', "tucked her away in the house with his other possessions and promptly forgot her." (Chughtai, 1942). The narrator further hints at homosexual orientation of Nawab as:

> **He kept an open house for students- young, fair and slender waisted boys whose expenses were borne by him. (Chughtai, 1942)**

The above-mentioned instances also indicate how both Nawab Jaan and Begum Jaan are victims of both patriarchy and religion which subdues their queer desire and this becomes a catalyst for the illicit yet intimate affair between Begum Jaan and Rabbu. Throughout the narrative, there's mention of a 'persistent itch' that Begum Jaan suffers from which no doctor can find a cure to; and the only way it subsides is through constant oil massages by Rabbu. This indicates how marriage becomes a space of repression for Begum Jaan and how her sexual desire is satiated by these massages by Rabbu, a massage "more important than life's necessities" (Chughtai, 1942). Ashley Tellis in his work describes this as,

> **...where prayers, vows, vigils, and charms, necromancy, seances and 'romantic novels and sentimental poetry' failed to come to Begum Jaan's rescue, sexual bonding with Rabbu proved to be the potion she seemed to have needed to come out of her 'melancholy and despair' and become a vibrantly healthy woman" (Tellis, 2006).**

Lihaaf reiterates the stereotype of the homosexual as the "victim or villain" (Russo, 1981) where Begum Jaan is first portrayed as a 'victim' then as a 'villain' by the narrator. Begum Jaan's character is type casted and stereotyped as a 'lustful woman' as she takes advantage of her social hierarchy to begin an illicit yet intimate homosexual relationship with her maid servant, Rabbu. The story doesn't highlight whether the relationship was 'consensual' in nature, but clearly power dynamics operate between the two. Chughtai through her narrative also hints towards Begum Jaan's perversion and paints her as a woman with 'paedophilic' tendencies as there is a sequence where Begum Jaan grabs the narrator tightly and counts her ribs and forces her to massage her in the absence of Rabbu.

The narrator however encounters several illicit acts when she shares the room with Begum Jaan and Rabbu. The writer uses several euphemisms to describe possible sexual acts including "sound of someone smacking her lips, as though savouring a tasty pickle", "Begum Jaan's quilt was once again swaying like an elephant." The narrator witnesses these acts in horror in the dark and is unable to comprehend it till she becomes an adult. Through Lihaaf, Chughtai reflects and represents female desire, sexuality, and touches upon the topic of lesbian relationship. "This story is an expose, a tight slap to the oppressive politics of patriarchal set up which try to bind and restrain female sexuality and confining them within the zenana" (Debnath). Chughtai depicts Begum Jaan as a woman who refuses to be victim of patriarchal

beliefs and decides to live her life on her own terms. However, representation of homosexuality is rather seen as 'deviant and situational' since absence of marital conjugality causes Begum Jaan to succumb to homosexual behaviour.

Chugtai's representation in Lihaaf resonates her own politics as a writer who views homosexual behaviour as 'aberrant' as narrated by her unnamed protagonist. While Chugtai was only representing the signs of the times where precolonial India considered homosexuality as sinful and aberrant and in tandem with Victorian beliefs; the text becomes a stereotype painting the queer community as 'deviant' or 'sinful' and reflects author's own homophobia and repulsion towards queer behaviour. One wonders whether the story can be seen as radical and progressive in portraying 'lesbian subjectivities' as political or sheer convenience?

The next section would reflect on a memoir by another popular Indian fiction woman writer Kamala Das aka Madhavi Kutty and representation of female homosexuality.

Kamala Das's My Story: Memoir or Fiction?

Kamala Das's name stands as an eminent presence among the foremost poets of the 20th century. In critical works and anthologies, she is introduced as "a unique literary phenomenon in India. Frank, bold and controversial in life and literature, Kamala Das made an enormous contribution to the growth of Indian poetry in English." (Mittapalli, 2001, p. 5). She is pre-eminently a poet who surprises the reader with her "compelling originality and freshness." (Rahman, 1981 , p. xi). Rajeev Patke describes her work as "fierce and unsparing honesty about the difficulties of being a woman and a wife in a time and for a culture which had trained women to a long tradition of silence" (Patke, 2003). Collectively, scholars concur in highlighting her profound examination of sexuality and her distinctive perspective on love, qualities that permeate the entirety of her literary corpus. Nevertheless, a salient observation arises from their varied analytical approaches: a conspicuous oversight in recognizing instances of same-sex desire within her literary oeuvre, notably evident in works such as *"My Story" (1977), "The Sandal Trees" (1988, trans., 1995), and "Iqbal" (1992).*

In this context, the discussion will revolve around Kamala Das's autobiographical work, *"My Story,"* which was published in 1976. Within this narrative, the rationale employed to depict and rationalise same-sex love aligns with the prevailing sexual biases or societal taboos of that era. *"My Story"* chronicles the author's personal experiences during her adolescence, when she profoundly falls in love with an eighteen-year-old young woman.

> **The girl I admired was beautiful, then she lay near me holding my body close to her. Her fingers traced the outlines of my mouth with a gentleness that I had never dreamt of finding. She kissed my lips then, and whispered, you are so sweet, so very sweet, I have never met anyone so sweet, my darling, my little darling…When all had left for the lunch my friend took me to the bathroom and coaxed me to take a bath with her…Both of us felt rather giddy with joy like honeymooners" (Das, 1977, pp. 82-83).**

The brief glimpse of the same-sex encounter of the protagonist is explained as an adolescent phase something that becomes a trope in describing fleeting sexual flings between teenagers, which some people describe as gay till graduation or lesbian till graduation.[i] Soon after, Das comments that the fifteen-year-old girl is married to a much older man, whose rough hands bruised her body when he wants sex. The young wife remembers the love and caresses of her girlfriend and longs to be with her:

> **On a sudden impulse, I phoned my girlfriend at the hostel…Can't you take me away from here, I asked her. Not for another four years, she said. I must complete my studies" (Das, 1977)**

Despite the protagonist's thwarted wishes, the quotation confirms that it is not mere illusion but rather there is love and desire between the two young women. Further on, the story narrates that the protagonist also falls in love with other women later on in her adult life. These relationships are not articulated as lesbian on the grounds that sexual desire is something that affects a man and a woman only. The protagonist expresses this idea with these words: "I kept telling my husband that I was in love with the doctor and he said, it is all right, she is a woman, she will not exploit you" (Das, 1977). Rosemary M. George interprets the term "exploit" as a safe relationship, which means that within heteropatriarchal parameters this kind of relationships do not deserve much consideration. (Das, 1977). What Das seems to convey is that within the hetero-patriarchal system these lesbian relationships are invisible and unacknowledged. However, by naturally telling her own queer story and placing queerness within the hegemonic straight culture in India, Das subverts the domination of constructed attitudes and social taboos.

Kamala Das's literary oeuvre, particularly her autobiographical work "My Story," led to the author acquiring a reputation characterized by terms such as "controversial," "promiscuous," and even "nymphomaniac." Her advocacy for the concept of free love, she contends, attracted the attention of numerous men who corresponded with her through letters or phone calls, often presenting proposals or making indiscreet suggestions. This period was marked by the propagation of scandals, the circulation of rumours, and a general lack of respect directed toward her. In response, Das's narrative voice resolutely denounces societal transgressions and moral lapses that remain concealed within the veneer of social hypocrisy and complicit silence. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the price exacted upon the writer for her steadfast belief in and defense of love and human dignity is social ostracism.

Lesbianism as a Western Import: Shobha De's Strange Obsession

Shobha De is a prolific writer whose novels are placed in the in between of "Western popular and pulp fiction" (Dwyer, 2000). Her writing style reflects a new cultural expression of the interests of the new urban cosmopolitan middle-classes. Rachel Dwyer posits that De's celebrity status can be attributed to the amalgamation of several conflicting attributes: her role as a devoted spouse and mother to six offspring, her adherence to the Hindu faith, and her public persona, which is often characterized as that of a femme fatale due to her literary contributions pertaining to women's sexual desires and gratifications. Dwyer further assess, "In her status as celebrity and in her writing Shobha De promotes a new kind of modern, bourgeois family, a modern Hindu family for the next millennium." (Dwyer, 2000). The values upheld by the emergent middle-class or bourgeois households are rooted in a dual framework that encompasses metropolitan patterns of leisure and consumption on one facet, and concurrently, a commitment to notions of destiny, religiosity, tradition, reverence for familial ties, and regulated expressions of sexuality on the other. Shobha De's literary works prominently exemplify these characteristics through the portrayal of male antagonists and female antagonists who manifest Western "obsessions." Within De's narratives, the charismatic protagonists strive to negotiate a delicate equilibrium between adherence to tradition and engagement with modernity.

In "Strange Obsessions" (1992), De' delves into the exploration of the theme of lesbianism; however, she approaches this subject matter with sheer homophobia. De tends to equate lesbianism with an "obsession," characterizing it as a peculiar Western fixation, a connotation that is explicitly conveyed by the title itself. Within the narrative, De' embarks on an examination of the realm inhabited by female supermodels, individuals who have acquired a status as iconic exemplars of beauty, serving as aspirational models for young Indian girls. The author not only makes reference to the encroachment of Western ideals of beauty upon indigenous Indian standards but also portrays women's emotional connections, including lesbian

relationships, as both infectious and fraught with peril. The portrayal of the lesbian protagonist, Minx, within the narrative of "Strange Obsession" aligns with the utilization of stereotypical and homophobic discourse that is emblematic of heterosexist societies. Minx's affection rather obsession with Amrita, the supermodel, is a central facet of the narrative; nevertheless, her overt exhibition of romantic feelings for Amrita is met with societal censure. Primarily, Minx is characterized within the text as an affluent, Westernized character who engages in behaviours such as drinking and smoking, and she is portrayed as being ensnared by an unconventional form of love. This portrayal aligns with the perception of Minx as an evil figure, as a 'villain' or a 'criminalized pathological subject' in accordance with conventional stereotypes. Amrita conveys this perspective in the story as:

> **I don't want to be your friend. Why can't you accept that? We can never be friends. You are weird. Abnormal. I knew girls like you at school." (De, 1992, p. 22)**

A few pages further on Amrita repeats the same opinion:

> **You say 'I Love you' to me as if it's perfectly natural for one woman to say it to another. I think it's abnormal. You are abnormal. I don't know what you're looking for in me. (De, 1992, p. 42)**

Secondly, De further attempts to influence the reader as she continutes to describe Minx as a stereotypical lesbian who can become a subject of pathological study. She delves into Minx's path and see her upbringing as 'dysfunctional' and 'traumatic'. In the novel, Minx is abused and raped by her own father because of lack of marital conjugality between her parents. De attempts to sympathise with Minx but perpetuates the stereotype of how 'queer people come from dysfunctional homes' and see the lesbian as an "unhappy miserable creature without a man". However, what the writer subtly seems to point at is that both actions, raping, on the one hand, and loving another woman, on the other hand are equally deplorable by society and have to be punished. Amrita's words confirm this perspective: "Get away you filthy creature,' she said. 'I always knew you were a pervert. You and that father of yours" (De, 1992, p. 46). By drawing sources from Adrienne Rich's seminal work, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Chris Weedon contends that the concept of "lesbian" has been subject to reductionist and clinical interpretations enforced by heteropatriarchal norms. Within this framework, relationships characterized by love between women have been systematically divested of their erotic and sexual dimensions, instead being relegated to a status akin to 'mere platonic friendship' (Weedon, 1999). To transcend this constraining association, as exemplified by Minx's actions in "Strange Obsession," entails the act of challenging the prevailing hegemonic norms, thereby inevitably subjecting oneself to societal censure. In addition to subverting the constructed stereotype of the lesbian, De also incorporates a quintessential motif found in Western literary tradition: that of sexual inversion (Faderman, 1994). The narrative explores the concept of a person who has been assigned female at birth but identifies as male, thereby grappling with issues related to gender dysphoria. Minx harbors a deep aversion toward her feminine attributes, with a particular focus on her breasts, and subsequently opts to undergo plastic surgery to reduce their size:

> **It's a tit's job. Where do you think I'd gone for a fortnight? Why do you think I wasn't in touch, wasn't around? Well…most women go to this plastic surgeon for cosmetic surgery to enhance their breasts-boy! I could give you a few names- but actually asked him to reduce mine. You know, slice them off. Don't ask me why, but I got the feeling you didn't like that them- their huge size put you off. I didn't like them either" (De, 1992, p. 93).**

Within narratives exemplifying traditional constructs reflective of a heteronormative society, a recurring trope is the emergence of a heroic male figure who assumes the role of the saviour, thereby rescuing the heroine from the clutches of a stifling lesbian relationship in which she has been ensnared. The ultimate culmination of liberation within such narratives is typically depicted as occurring upon the institution of marriage. This is exactly what occurs in De's novel:

> **We shared an unnatural relationship. She forced me into it…blackmailed me…tortured me…scared me…And then…I began to enjoy it. To respond. I became dependant on her… so dependant I thought we'd spend our life together till I met my husband. It was he who saved me from her clutches." (De, 1992, p. 204)**

Remarkably, the narrative appears to earnestly endorse a notion akin to a "peculiar fixation," by foregrounding the institution of marriage and the traditional family as unassailable and stable constructs that fulfil the fundamental needs of individuals. Within the framework of these dynamics, any exploration of alternative sexual orientations is portrayed as a source of discord. In a 1999 interview with Bombay Dost (Vol. 7 no.1), Shobha De articulated that, although the cultural climate surrounding homosexuality in India has experienced shifts, the degree of comfort in openly acknowledging one's homosexuality remains a subject of contention. She criticizes the advocacy efforts undertaken by the LGBTQ+ movement, specifically the public displays of one's sexual orientation and overt demonstrations. De views such actions as superfluous provocations that may inadvertently lead to a reactionary response. Instead, she advocates for individuals within the LGBTQ+ community to adopt a discreet and low-profile stance, particularly if their objective is to instigate legal change.

According to De, the utilization of provocation in a manner akin to Ashok Row Kavi's approach is not conducive to advancing the cause of the LGBTQ+ community. De posits that the LGBTQ+ community in India has inadvertently adopted a Western model, a pattern she views with skepticism. She describes the Indian feminist movement today as: "a bunch of often quite unpleasant ladies in Delhi with some agenda of their own" (Bombay Dost Vol.7 No.1, 1999). Nevertheless, De openly acknowledges herself as a "progressive mother" who would unreservedly support and safeguard her own children, just as she advocates for and defends marginalized groups, should any of them identify as queer. It is apparent that De's viewpoints align with what Daniel Borrillo has termed "liberal homophobia," a phenomenon that is prevalent in contemporary societies.[ii] Numerous manifestations of homophobia, as elucidated by Professor Borillo in his work "Homofobia" (2001), exist. One prominent form of this phenomenon, termed "liberal homophobia," ostensibly advocates for a stance of tolerance toward individuals with homosexual orientations, while concurrently upholding heterosexuality as the sole legitimate sexual institution. Within the framework of liberal homophobia, individuals identifying as gays and lesbians are relegated to the confines of the private sphere, with homosexuality being construed as a matter of personal choice. Consequently, liberal homophobes advocate for the decriminalization of homosexuality, yet concurrently consign homosexual individuals to the seclusion of their private lives, rendering them virtually invisible. Liberal homophobes purport to espouse tolerance and progressive ideals; however, it is imperative to note that tolerance, in this context, does not entail the acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ individuals' rights or their equitable acceptance. Instead, it implies a hierarchical division in which those in positions of power, typically heterosexual individuals, dictate the societal norms, relegating LGBTQ+ individuals to a marginalized status. The phrase "I tolerate you" thus signifies an assertion of superiority, permitting one to coexist with another group while refraining from recognizing their equality.

De's critique of the "provocative" activism undertaken by the gay and lesbian community in India to politicize sexual identities underscores a nuanced manifestation of homophobia known as "liberal homophobia." This form of homophobia seeks to address matters with a veneer of political correctness. The construction and perpetuation of stereotypes, as exemplified in De's work "Strange Obsession," serve to reinforce and perpetuate homophobia, while also constraining the portrayal of lesbians within narrowly defined boundaries, relegating them to the margins.

Conclusion

Across these texts, several recurrent themes emerge: the negotiation of multiple, intersecting identities; the pervasive influence of silence and invisibility; the fraught process of self-discovery and coming out; and the ever-present specter of social censure. The writers examined deploy a range of strategies—irony, ambiguity, confession, and subversion—to navigate the constraints imposed by patriarchy and heteronormativity. Their works testify to the resilience of queer women in asserting their desires and identities, even as they grapple with the contradictions and limitations of their cultural contexts. Therefore, the literary representation of queer women's desire in Indian literature is marked by both progress and persistent challenges. While there has been a gradual move toward greater visibility and complexity in the depiction of queer identities, the legacy of stigma, erasure, and stereotyping endures. The texts discussed not only document the lived realities of queer women but also invite readers to question the normative assumptions that govern sexuality, gender, and belonging. By foregrounding the voices and experiences of queer women writers, this paper underscores the vital role of literature in both reflecting and shaping the ongoing struggle for recognition, dignity, and freedom. The act of narrating queer desire—whether through silence, confession, or resistance—remains a powerful tool for challenging the boundaries of the possible and imagining new forms of kinship, love, and community.

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End Notes

I. Lesbian until Graduation (LUG), Gay until Graduation (GUG) and Bisexual Until Graduation (BUG) remain popular slangs used to "describe men and women primarily in high school or college who, for personal or logistical reasons decide to be lesbian, gay or bisexual till they graduate, experimenting or adopting a temporary identity for the sake of convenience. Seriousness of this varies between officially identifying with a particular identity which includes elaborate process of 'coming out' to not labelling oneself and simply using it for one's benefit". This term was appeared for the first time in a 1999 article in the Seattle Weekly by writer A. Davis, where she related "her experimentation with same-sex relationships, and how as a result she experienced hostility from her gay and straight friends alike, with some of her lesbian friends pushing her to identify herself primarily as bisexual, despite the fact that Davis identified herself as heterosexual and briefly experimented with women in college". For see A. Davis (1999) Confessions of a College Lesbian, Republished on 10/9/2006 Accessed on 1/30/2019 http://www.seattleweekly.com/news/confessions-of-a-college-lesbian/
II. The term homophobia first appears in the USA at the beginning of the 1970s and describes a systematic hostility, aversion, fear or prejudice against homosexuality or homosexuals, which is a result of an established and "naturalized" hierarchy of sexualities that prioritizes heterosexuality. See, for example, Byrne Fone's Homophobia, a History (2001).

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