

# **Hetero-normative Neo-Nationalism Vs. Past of Plurality: Destabilizing Section 377 through Recuperation of a Tolerant History of Multiplicity of Gender and Sexuality**



**Kapil Sharma**

## **Abstract**

The modalities of gender and sexuality are not divorced from the over-arching ubiquity of the idea of nation. The politics of gender and sexuality, queer issues, religion, nationalism and nationhood are all inextricably inter-connected and continuously enter into negotiation, intersection, coalition and opposition. Nation is always defined on gendered terms. This has been especially evident during the British colonization of India and other colonies. Imperialist Britain, as a Western nation and as the aggressor in colonial intrigue, forged a masculine identity in its literary and political discourse while India portrayed its post-colonial nationalism using feminine symbolism in order to create an identity which mobilised Indians to resist imperialist and colonising forces. The Hindu nationalists co-opting the polarity of the gender binary to represent the opposing forces in the process of colonization and coining the symbol of 'Bharat Mata', a mother in distress who supplicates her sons to safeguard her honour during colonization, firmly popularized India's position as the victim of a violent and 'impure' attack. Modern, Gandhian India is comprised of various remnants of the colonial hetero-normativity imposed on Indian culture and nation during the reign of the British. One such example of these remnants, which can be directly and historically traced back to British rule is the continuing presence on Indian statutes of Section

377 of the Indian Penal Code, which affirms the colonial 'hangover' with which the Indian nation continues to grapple. The issue has demonstrated irony of post-colonial India, where, proponents of the law show a tendency to argue that the law protects Indian culture despite its clear link to colonialism. The paper will engage with the grotesque paradoxes and incongruities pertaining to the notions of gender, sexuality and queerness in contemporary politics of religion in India. It will also examine their dubiousness in the face of misinterpretations and the appropriation of Hinduism into a hetero-normative framework, hetero-normativity itself being a western import. It also problematizes the disjunction between the contemporary right wing Hindu radicalization and the ancient myths, legends and sects of the Indian subcontinent that had polymorphosity and queerness of gender and sexuality as its inherent constituents. The contemporary stalwarts of right wing Hindu nationalism, the spiritual leaders - Baba Ramdev being the most controversial figure - contribute to the naturalization of right wing ideologies under the guise of conclusively representing Indian culture. Ramdev, through his representation of Indian Hindu morality, otherizes and alienates alternate sexualities and sexual practices as anomalies to the 'natural order' and a Western 'disease'. The entire array of political ideologies that coalesce with this hetero-normative manipulation and misrepresentation of Hindu spirituality are all juxtaposed with and subverted by a recuperation and re-analysis of the pre-colonial history of the Indian subcontinent. The fluidity of sexuality and gender during this period, in addition to the recognition and celebration of sexualities and sexual practices external to the hetero-normative gender binary in the absence of consolidated, unified and Eurocentric ideas of nationalism and of the 'nation', stands in stark contrast with modern

nationalist Hindu ideologies. By delving into the time prior to the consolidation of South Asian sects, beliefs and myths into a homogenized category now referred to as Hinduism, the paper will pose an antithetical and subversive interpretation of gender and sexuality against the contemporary criminalization and alienation of the queer community. This indological analysis and queering of pre-colonial history and mythology will be a strong derision of contemporary, right wing, and anti-queer Hindu ideologies.

**Keywords:** queer, nationalism, post-colonial, hetero-normativity, polymorphosity, indological.