

MAPPING OF GENDER AND (QUEER) SEXUALITY OF THE CARIBBEAN THROUGH THE SELECTED WRITINGS OF SHANI MOOTOO AND OONYA KEMPADOO

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By

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DECLARATION

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I, **Tripada Bharati**, hereby declare that the research embodied in the present dissertation entitled “**Mapping of Gender and (Queer) Sexuality of the Caribbean Through the Selected Writings of Shani Mootoo and Oonya Kempadoo**” is carried out under the supervision of **Dr. Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora**, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy in Indian Diaspora**, is an original work of mine and to the best of my knowledge, no part of this dissertation has been submitted for the award of any research degree or diploma at any University. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my thesis can be uploaded in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. Additional academic activities of this thesis have been mentioned below:

A. Research Papers published in the following publications:

1. “**Diaspora, Long Distance Nationalism and Globalization**” in The Indo-American Review. Vol. 23, pp 46-55. ISSN: 0974-0481.

B. Presented papers at the following conferences:

1. “**The Dialogue between Indian feminism and Indo-Caribbean feminism**” at the two-day international conference on “Kalapani Crossings #2 Diaspora and Gender across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans” organised by Pondicherry University and Emma and University Paul-Valery, Montpellier, France, at Pondicherry university on 26th-27th February 2020.
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Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfillment of coursework requirement for Ph.D./was exempted from doing coursework (Recommended by Doctoral Committee) on the basis of the following courses passed during her M.Phil. program and the M.Phil. Degree was awarded.

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Dedicated to my beloved mother.

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Introduction

The Beginnings of a Study

The sprawling presence of the Indian diaspora across continents bears testimony to its resilience and perseverance of spirit. Time and again, the Indian diaspora has proved its mettle across areas of expertise, such as art, literature, music, films and other un(conventional) spaces. Our particular area of interest has been women of the Indian diaspora. Their stories of survival against numerous odds have been nothing short of spectacular. Their tales of oppression, resistance, agency-albeit, in small measure- and survival in the face of difficult circumstances make them worthy subjects for academic and creative writing. In the particular context of Indo- Caribbean women, there are massive gaps and huge silences regarding their stories of existence and survival in the Caribbean. Their stories need to be dug out from the dusty folds of primaeval archival documents. A quarter-century ago, there was barely anything about Indo-Caribbean women in the academic domain in terms of writing. In the Indo-Caribbean literature, women have either been portrayed as demure Hindu women or they didn't exist at all. Their stories were not told as they should have been. Since the 1990s, Indo-Caribbean women have taken it upon themselves to address this issue of their misrepresentation/ no representation. With eminent writers like Lakshmi Persaud, Ramabai Espinet, Shani Mootoo, Oonya Kempadoo etc., academic and creative writings dealing with the core subject of Indo-Caribbean women started pouring in. The issues of gender, women's sexuality, and queer sexuality, until now marginalised, got pivotal treatment in the writings of Indo-Caribbean women.

Through this research project, we have tried to understand the dynamics of gender/sex and sexuality in the Caribbean. In the predominantly heterosexual society of the Caribbean,

the twin issues of women's sexuality and other alternative sexualities have hardly been broached. In a society where informal heterosexual polygyny gets an accepting nod, homosexuality is downright condemned (Herskovits and Herskovits 1947). It is quite ironic, then, that countries like Suriname are popular destinations for sex tourism. More specifically, our concern is to understand Indo-Caribbean women's experiences and how they have been negotiating their sexual/ gender identity vis a vis their racial identities in the multi-ethnic Caribbean. Indo-Caribbean women constitute the lowest rung in Caribbean society. Apart from Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname, Indo-Caribbeans are a minority in countries like Jamaica, Barbados, St. Lucia, Martinique and Guadalupe. The post-colonial nation-building discourse was predominantly Afro-centric which was based on identity politics of race.

The Research Study

We have taken up two important Indo-Caribbean writers, namely, Shani Mootoo and Oonya Kempadoo, for our investigations pertaining to gender and sexuality in the Caribbean. A visual artist before becoming a published author, Mootoo's writings abound in graphic visual descriptions. She has explored the intersections of public and private space along the axes of gender, queer (sexuality) and shifting locations in terms of diasporic displacement. For our study purpose, we have taken three novels by Shani Mootoo, namely, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), and *He Drown She in the Sea* (2005).

Oonya Kempadoo is another promising name of mixed Indian descent. She already became a literary star with the publishing of her first novel *Buxton Spice* in 1998. The dominant theme explored in *Buxton Spice* is pubescent sexuality narrated from a child's point of view. Her writing is at once poignant and full of Caribbean creole. Her writing is noticeable for its veritable and multifaceted treatment of gender, sexuality and language vis a vis Caribbean landscape and society. Three novels of hers we have analysed for this study are, namely, *Buxton Spice* (1998), *Tide Running* (2001), and *All Decent Animals* (2013).

Research Objectives

- To understand the nuances and implications of the migration of Indian women into the Caribbean.
- To contextualise Indo-Caribbean diasporic women's experiences into the historicity of the period.
- To understand the issue of identity politics and its significance vis a vis the Caribbean society.
- To explore how Indo-Caribbean women's writings have dealt with the issues of gender, patriarchy, and (queer) sexuality.
- To understand how these writings are advancing the cause of women and giving rise to a separate wave of Indo-Caribbean feminism.

Research Questions

- What are the dynamics of gender and sexuality in the Caribbean?
- How are gender and sexuality intertwined?
- What elements constitute the Indo-Caribbean women's experience in the Caribbean?
- What were the historical circumstances which shaped the psyche of 'coolie' women in the Caribbean?
- How far has Caribbean literature conveyed the collective subjectivity of Indo-Caribbean women?
- What are the contours of the gendered diasporic landscape of the Caribbean?
- How have Indo-Caribbean women negotiated their identity in the multi-racial Caribbean society?
- How have Indo-Caribbean women's writings engaged with the issues of identity with gender and sexuality?

Background and Rationale

As much as it is true that Caribbean literature has grown into a distinctive corpus over the last fifty years, it must be admitted that it doesn't reflect adequately and unbiasedly the varied cultural diversity of the Caribbean. In terms of ethnicity, Afro-Caribbean literature is predominant. Indo-Caribbean literature with celebrity writers such as V.S. Naipaul could not go beyond the portrayal of women as stereotypes: the quintessential, demure, caregiving, family-oriented Hindu women (Mehta 2004). To see Indo-Caribbean women with a single lens is to deny their stories of survival and agency notwithstanding adverse circumstances. Their tale is not only about oppression and exploitation but also about their survival and discreet sanguinity. Just like Indian men, Indian women also developed a camaraderie amongst themselves as ship sisters or *Jahaji Bhain* (Mahabir and Pirbhai 2013). They showed exceptional resilience and grit in the face of exploitation and violence of plantation officers as well as Indian men. Not only were they paid fewer wages but also suffered extreme physical violence, many times getting murdered "by cutlass" (Reddock 1985). Nevertheless, they showed exceptional courage and agency. In the early days of indentureship, they could choose their partners on the basis of concerns they had. Mostly, these concerns were economic security and physical safety. The sexual agency they exercised during the indentureship is in sharp contrast to the lives Indian women had back home. Yet, their stories of survival and triumph have barely come out in the academic/ public domain. At most, the discussions around Indo-Caribbean Women's sexuality pivoted around the physical/ sexual violence they endured. Our study aims at discussing the multifaceted lives of Indo-Caribbean women. The discussion needs to move beyond women's stereotypes so as to do justice to the intricacies of Indian women's lives in the Caribbean. Their stories need to be excavated and told. Through the novels we have chosen for our study, it is our humble attempt to

comprehend and analyse their lives, to understand them through the modern paradigms of gender and sexuality.

Delimitations and Definitions

In this study, we situate Indo-Caribbean women's experience within the historicity of indentureship. As we know, Indo-Caribbean women's writings have their origins in indenture historiography or what Brinda Mehta (2004) calls the "Kala Pani" discourse. There are many worthy Indo-Caribbean women writers; however, we have taken only two of them for our present purpose whose works have extensively portrayed the complexities of gender and sexuality. We have deployed the terms gender and sexuality concerning the new theoretical development around them. Towards the end of the 20th century, there has been a huge academic surge in the production of scholarship about gender and sexuality. Various scholars and theorists have brought in disparate approaches and insights about gender and sexuality, which were traditionally viewed as essential and natural. Of course, these theories have led to positive developments such as strengthening the feminist and queer movements. It is interesting to note how the notions about sex and gender evolved: from a 'natural' and 'essential' category to a social construct. Modern theories argue that gender is performative and hence fluid and artificial (Butler 1990). Also, the 'essential' correlation between sex and gender, i.e., one's sex decides one's gender, has also been deconstructed. Many gender and sex theorists contend that sex and gender should be treated separately in their own right. Sex cannot stand in for gender and vice-versa or cannot be used interchangeably as was done earlier. Although, this is not to deny the interrelatedness of sex and gender. This proved a breakthrough in the development of queer theory.

As we know, Caribbean society is not only multi-ethnic and multiracial but also predominantly heterosexual (Kempadoo 2003). While informal heterosexual polygyny is considered a norm among Afro-Caribbeans, Indo-Caribbean upholds heterosexual monogamy

as their ideal. The common ground between both cultures is their belief in heterosexuality as normative sexuality, hence the only legitimate form of sexuality. While Afro-Caribbean society is mostly female-centric yet heterosexual masculinity is upheld, and male homosexuality is badly frowned upon. Female homosexuality is, however, dealt with less severity since it's considered powerless. The Indian counterpart to Afro-Caribbean masculine heterosexuality is patriarchal heterosexuality only. As the Indian population grew and expanded in the Caribbean, the stranglehold of patriarchy strengthened as well. In the heterosexual world of Indo-Caribbeans, women's sexuality has hardly been a topic adequately discussed. It is widely believed in the Caribbean that women are most respectful when they achieve motherhood. Child rearing and other caregiving duties of women towards their families are largely upheld. The patriarchal prescription of gender roles, in general, in terms of men-women relationships is adhered to. The portrayal of women in literature has been, more or less, along the same lines.

Nonetheless, Indo-Caribbean women's literature has been gaining momentum for the past two decades now. Indian women stereotypes have been challenged and deconstructed. Other aspects of women with a particular focus on gender and sexuality have started pouring in, opening up new spaces for polyphonic women's voices that were hitherto silenced.

Significance and Scope of the Study

The historical silencing of women across cultures is not a new phenomenon. The general marginality of women and their inability to express themselves adequately is a recurrent theme in Gender Studies and feminist movements. The Caribbean landscape is characterised by multi-racial/ ethnic people living side by side for over 150 years. Indo-Caribbean women occupy the last step of the social/societal hierarchy in this variegated society. Their marginalisation is threefold: firstly, as an immigrant; secondly, as a minority community (except for some countries like Trinidad and Tobago where Indians are the majority

community) and thirdly, as women what can be called ‘second’ gender or ‘other’ gender. Besides, their marginality speaks out loud in the literature through their invisibility or what may be called token visibility. However, Indo-Caribbean women are gaining ground with their slow but solid intervention in the literary space. Their academic and creative writings deserve to be read, analysed and commented upon.

Besides, the discussion about women's sexuality especially Indian women's sexuality is considered taboo and hence discarded as a piece of dirty clothing. They would either be talked about as demure women carrying the burden of their culture on their shoulders or simply as victims of patriarchal violence. Whilst we admit that gender-based violence against women must be condemned, punished and addressed; however, to talk only about that in the context of women is rather questionable. Their stories of resistance, survival and agency are as important and as deserving of notice, writing and commentary. The indentured Indian women of the Caribbean showed excellent strength and fortitude during their time at the plantations. The new breed of Indo-Caribbean women writers is chronicling the stories of their great-grandmothers and while doing so, they are also raising bitter but pertinent questions. The questions of their stereotypical representation, lack of multiple women voices, the non-discussion of their sexuality or veiled discussion under the category gender and so on. As opposed to their misrepresentation in literature and otherwise, Indo-Caribbean women writers have gallantly come forward to claim their space and voice.

In this regard, we see our work as significant and relevant. We hope and wish that Indo-Caribbean women's literature gets much more critical attention in the coming years.

Methodology

Literary research aims at acquiring and advancing knowledge through the intensive study of select literary texts. It is predominantly qualitative research that uses relevant critical/ literary theory as benchmarks for the analysis of literary texts. Research methodology in literature

means a thorough analysis of literary texts (textual analysis) in order to form a proper understanding of the research questions and to draw conclusions on the basis of that. The methodology in the literature concerns itself with both: the chosen texts as well the writers which include biographical information and the perspectives and opinions of the writers expressed through interviews, essays or any such resources.

The present study has chiefly employed qualitative methodology for the analysis of chosen literary texts. Critical theoretical texts, books, numerous articles, research papers and interviews alongside close readings of the selected texts (novels) have been studied and analysed for the purposes of this study. In this study, we have tried to look critically at the selected texts employing the process of ‘Close reading’ in order to understand how various parts of the novel contribute to the overall understanding of gender and sexuality in the Caribbean. The process of Close reading includes the deep analysis of various components of the novel. The various aspects of the story such as plot, context, setting and characters and literary devices contribute to our understanding of the aforementioned themes.

The select fictions are examples of social realism, i.e., how the society of the Caribbean is in contemporary times. All the novels we have selected are remarkable for the depiction of realistic intercourse of life between various characters mostly set in the fictional Caribbean. Also, the writers’ background is considered in order to understand their motivations and biases. The major characters are analysed, and how they unfold in the story pertaining to our study of gender and sexuality in Caribbean society. Also, the important themes are studied in this light and how they are intertwined and what insights they bring to our understanding. The modern theories equip the researchers to see the people from various background with a humanising concern.

Critical theories around gender and sexuality (that have been discussed in Chapter 2) have been very essential in our understanding of how these terms are deployed and their

changing meanings with regard to our changing times. Critical theories have deconstructed the notion of gender and sexuality as normative fixed categories. Their greatest contribution has been to show how gender, sex and sexuality are not fixed categories but rather deeply influenced by societal conditioning. This led to the understanding of these terms as ‘social constructs’ and therefore subject to change and analysis. These theories in a way humanised a section of people who have been marginalised hitherto owing to their gender or queer sexual identity. In earlier times, queer sexuality was understood as a pathological condition. This changed due to the production of new knowledge in the field. Because of the development of scholarship in this particular area, the movement of queer activism gained momentum urging on people to understand queer people as normal people and not sexually deviant or pathological people.

In our study of the select writings of Shani Mootoo and Oonya Kempadoo, we have tried to understand how these writers have foregrounded the issues of sexuality and gender through their writings. The Caribbean, largely a heterosexual society, has had laws against people of queer sexuality. These writers have exposed the condition of Caribbean society by portraying how different characters suffer in a homophobic society; what prices they pay and how they navigate their identity through trying circumstances around them. Of course, the theoretical development around these topics contributed to a better humane understanding of people who had earlier been discriminated against due to their gender and sexual identity. It is not until 2018 that Trinidad and Tobago repealed the buggery law, which penalised same-sex people with 25 years’ imprisonment. Some of the Caribbean countries, such as Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica etc. are yet to modify their anti-LGBTQ laws in favour of the rights of LGBTQ people. So, we see that only recently some Caribbean countries have repealed their discriminating laws against people with different sexual/gender identities. The

broadening of scholarship (critical theories) in this area provided the necessary support needed to criticise these draconian laws and change them for the better.

Both writers, Shani Mootoo and Oonya Kempadoo have helped through their writings the social responsibility we owe the people who have been marginalised particularly on the grounds of their gender and sexual identities. Their works have portrayed Caribbean society with intense realism: how Caribbean society is multiracial and what its biases and prejudices are. We get to know how queer characters are frequently met with homophobia and are constantly marginalised. This portrayal is certainly a criticism of Caribbean society asking deep probing questions in order to make society more accountable. Our analysis in this study has been to see how different characters have been treated as well as what their motivations are with regard to their gender and sexual identity. To what degree do these characters suffer their predicament owing to their gender and sexual identity? What means are there for such people to navigate their lives in an intensely homophobic society such as the Caribbean? What is a writer's responsibility in this scenario where we see the marginalisation of people on the basis of their gender/ sexual identities? These are the few questions in our mind which have a strong bearing on our analysis of the text.

Overview of Chapters

The “Introduction” presents the introduction to the research work. It provides the rationale behind the research project as well as the objectives, research methodology, scope and limitations of the proposed research work.

Chapter 1 presents the historical context of the Indian diaspora and the presence of Indian women in the Caribbean. Understanding the historicity of Indian arrival in the Caribbean will help contextualise the experience of Indo-Caribbean women in a better perspective. How did the plantation power structure work that empowered and disempowered women? Also, we will situate Indo-Caribbean women's experiences in the Caribbean literary

and theoretical discourses in order to understand their multi-layered experiences and how they have been represented in the dominant discourses.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of modern developments in sex and gender theories. We present a review of major gender and sex theories that helps in the understanding of these concepts. Modern intellectuals/ scholars/ writers champion the causes of gender/sexual equality and queer sexuality. Modern developments in theories deconstruct the notion of gender and sexuality as fixed essential categories, thereby humanising people irrespective of their sexual/ gender identities. We will attempt close readings of the novels in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 on the basis of this understanding of sexual/ gender equality and how Caribbean society, mostly homophobic, has a long way to go to achieve that.

Chapter 3 discusses various studies and research on the topic of gender and sexuality in the Caribbean. In this chapter, we discuss the social structure of the Caribbean with regard to the responsibilities shared by both genders, their mating system, marriage etc. We have also discussed the topic of Caribbean feminism and queer sexuality in the Caribbean briefly.

Chapter 4 critically discusses the three aforementioned novels of Shani Mootoo around the purview of gender and sexuality.

Chapter 5 critically discusses the selected novels of Oonya Kempadoo focusing on the theme of gender and sexuality.

The “Conclusion” presents the conclusion of this research study.

Chapter 1

Indian Diaspora in the Caribbean: The Historical Overview

This chapter attempts to present a historical overview of the Caribbean with regard to diasporic settlements of Indian indentured labourers, including Indian women indentured labourers in the Caribbean. We aim to understand the arrival and the subsequent settlements of Indians as indentured labourers in the Caribbean in order to contextualise their experiences in the historicity of the period. We will explore the questions of Indian women and their situatedness in the plantation economy. How did the plantation power structure work that empowered and disempowered women? How Indian women navigated their life and identity in post indentured period?

The Definitions of Diaspora

Before diving into the arrival of Indian indentured labourers in the Caribbean and its implications, it is imperative for us to look briefly at the concept of diaspora, its various definitions, connotations and meanings in order to form a nuanced understanding of it. The word 'diaspora' has primarily been associated only with Jewish dispersion across the continents. Over time, it has come to be associated with any displaced community that left their homelands and settled in foreign lands for some reason or the other. So, the displacement of a community, by and large, became the standard against which diaspora has been defined. There are various definitions of diaspora given by anthropologists, sociologists, historians and so on. According to Steven Vertovec diaspora is "practically any population that is considered 'deterritorialized' or 'transnational' -that is, which has originated in a land

other than that in which it currently resides, and whose social, economic and political networks cross the border of nation-states or, indeed, span the globe” (as cited in Deshmukh 2021, 107). Scholars such as William Safran (1991) and Robin Cohen (1997) enumerate essential conditions for a displaced community to be called a diaspora. The displaced community must have a collective consciousness of their homeland and commitment towards the maintenance and restoration of the homeland. Another scholar, Stuart Hall, thinks of the diaspora in terms of diasporic identity and positionality. He says:

The diaspora experience..., is defined not by essence or purity but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diasporic identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (Hall 1990, 235).

Paul Gilroy in his book, *The Black Atlantic* (1993), aims at the deconstruction of the Black race in terms of African essence; to present the fluid black identity which has been emerging in their diaspora experiences of intercultural and transnational spaces. Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall see difference and hybridity, alongside sameness, as the necessary conditions for the diaspora.

The Indian diaspora is one of the largest diasporas in the world with 20 million people from the country living outside their homeland. Understanding the Indian diaspora and its formation cannot be studied in a linear fashion. A series of migrations across different historical trajectories is responsible for its presence overseas. It is indeed surprising and even ironic the vast spread of the Indian diaspora given the conventional dread of Indians against crossing seas for religious reasons. Going overseas meant losing one's identity and the caste one is born into. It was a strong belief in the 19th century among Indians that only the deserted, desperate and most unfortunate would undertake such perilous journeys across ‘Kalapani.’ This is, however, true to some extent regarding migrations of Indians under the system of indentureship in the 19th century.

Indian diaspora is constituted by several historical crossings; some even predate colonialism. In the pre-colonial period, there was a long history of traders and merchants settling along the coasts of Zanzibar. “The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea” makes the first reference to Indian trade” (Srinivasan 2000, 1142). Nevertheless, it goes to Britain's credit, which is responsible for the large influx of Indians across the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans. After the abolition of slavery in 1833, Britain introduced the system of indentureship for Indians to facilitate cheap labour, which was essential to fuel their gigantic plantation economy. The indentureship system meant a legal contract (girmit) between the labourers and the employer for five years to work in the plantation estates of the British imperial empire and a return passage to India after the expiry of the contract. This system resulted in the formation of the Indian diaspora across the Caribbean, South Africa, East Africa, Mauritius, Malaysia, Fiji and Sri Lanka.

The Caribbean

Geographically, the Caribbean is a group of islands with varied physical landscapes and environments. Some of its areas are rugged and mountainous, while others are lowland plains and hills. Previously known as the West Indies, the Caribbean wears diversity on its sleeve owing to different colonial occupations at different points in time. Its indigenous population consisted of various tribes; important ones were called Caribs, Arawak and Tanyo. The colonial powers of Europe were mainly driven towards it for purely mercantile reasons. Spain was the first to claim the Caribbean after Christopher Columbus landed there in 1492. The countries of Britain, France and the Dutch followed close on their heels. This brought in the conflict between the natives of the Caribbean and the colonial European powers, causing almost decimation of the native population over centuries. Sugarcane and tobacco were introduced at the cost of native crops of the Caribbean. The transatlantic route facilitated the connections between Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. Caribbean islands were the place

where African slaves got transported to work in the sugarcane plantations of the coloniser nations. By the 1700s, Britain claimed dominance over the islands of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana (also called British Guiana); and sugarcane plantations became the most lucrative economic enterprise. The sugarcane economy provided the major boost required for the industrial revolution in Britain and France.

The sugar plantation required a cheap and steady supply of labour which was fulfilled by the importation of large numbers of Africans into the Caribbean. The slave trade got a real boost in the wake of the colonisation of the Caribbean. However, with the Emancipation Bill of 1833, slavery was abolished, and the supply of slave labour came to a sudden halt. Solutions were sought, and a remedy was soon found. A rather veiled form of ‘slavery’ started in the name of the indentureship system in the year 1834. That is how Indians got to the Caribbean as indentured labourers and became known as ‘coolies’, pejoratively. The demography of the Caribbean changed dramatically after the arrival of millions of Africans as slaves in the Caribbean. It further changed with the arrival of millions of indentured labourers, largely sourced from India and China. “Between 1835 and 1917, almost 700,000 workers arrived from British India and another 150000 came from China, primarily into Trinidad and British Guiana, while approximately 50000 from the Dutch East Indies (mainly Java) settled in Suriname” (Scarano and Palmie 2013, 34).

Several reasons are cited for what drove Indians to undertake the perilous journey across ‘Kalapani’ to serve as indentured labourers in the Caribbean. Sea voyages for Indians were considered an act of defilement, leading to consequences of severe social ostracism. Nevertheless, Indians undertook the hazardous journey for several reasons, chiefly for economic reasons. Desperate, famished Indians found it lucrative, as they thought they could leave their miserable life behind and start a new life afresh in distant lands. The indentured came from all strata of the society, “a slice of rural north India that was transported to the

colonies” (Lal 1998, 221). Fanciful stories of recruiters selling them false promises of a better lifestyle also played their part in enticing them to migrate to the Caribbean. Besides, India's conditions of famine and civil wars further bolstered their will to leave the homeland behind for a better life. Frank Birbalsingh (2000) notes that almost three-quarters of the total four hundred thousand Indian indentured labourers settled in Trinidad and Guiana. Their settlement in large numbers in Trinidad and Guiana allowed them to grow or even outnumber free Africans (2000, ix).

However, the fact remains that Afro-centric concerns dominated the Caribbean and Indians were marginalised and relegated to footnotes if and whenever they were cited. With the freedom of Trinidad and Tobago (1962) and Guiana (1966), a creole cultural hegemony was established. For Indians, to be creolised was to be more African and less Indian. The political domination of Africans wasn't challenged until the end of the twentieth century. The Indo-Caribbean started gaining political dominance. A major breakthrough came in 1995 when Basdeo Panday became the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Life Conditions of the Indentured Labourers in the Caribbean

Most of the indentured labourers were drawn from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, which constitute the Bhojpuri belt of North India. Mostly, the labour class they were under the age group of 20-30 years. There has been a lot of debate about the working conditions of indentured labourers in the Caribbean. Initially, the journey to the Caribbean took about three months but became subsequently shorter with the inauguration of Suez Canal in the year 1869. There were reports (Brereton 1985) of depressing conditions on board the ship with frequent outbreaks of diseases such as typhoid, cholera, measles etc. Life on the plantation estates for these labourers were circumscribed by the terms and conditions set in their indenture contracts. They could not demand higher wages, refuse to work or leave the estate without permission. In addition, living conditions were miserable. They were assigned

barrack-type quarters, usually, those vacated by former African slaves. Privacy, proper ventilation and clean water facilities were scarcely available to them. In those trying circumstances, diseases were common and mortality rates were high. One British administrator has categorically stated the sufferings of indentured labourers in these words:

Indenture labour really stinks in my nostrils as a form of slavery that we ought really to be ashamed of; there is no doubt that in a very large number of cases, there is a good deal of suffering entailed by it. Of course, in Fiji, the number of suicides is the most striking evidence of the viciousness of the system and nothing could explain this away. (as cited in Dabydeen and Samaroo 1987, 38).

Tinker (1993) argues that indentureship was “a new system of slavery” since Indians were scarcely in a better position in the Caribbean than African slaves before. The only difference between indentureship and slavery, according to Tinker, was slavery was lifelong bondage while indentureship was for a limited time period which was five years.

The Arrival of Indo-Caribbean Women in the Caribbean

Indian indentured women suffered as much hardship or even more than their men counterparts. Initially, women were not counted as fit for indentured work but afterward as problems grew regarding the stability of indentured labourers on the plantation and maintaining the required labour force, more Indian women were brought in alongside men. However, the indenture historiography gives little to no place to the chronicling of indentured women's lives. Lommarsh Roopnarine (2014) points out how the indentureship history is mainly written from a colonial perspective and those which are written keeping indentured labourers in mind ironically draw upon archival sources which are in fact “records of the colonizers” (2014, 390). Initially, indenture historiography was merely dates and numbers gleaned from colonial archival sources. Roopnarine suggests a revisionist approach to the historiography of indentured labourers to address the flaws of the previous studies.

Rhoda Reddock (1994) asserts that most of the women who came to the Caribbean were independent women. They were either from lower-class/ castes or Brahmin widows or

prostitutes comprising the marginalised section of society. There are also charges of kidnapping and selling of beautiful dreams by ‘arkatiyas’ (recruiters), as they were called, to lure men and women into embarking on the journey across the Atlantic. This has been beautifully encapsulated in these lines by Mahadai Das.

they came in ships. / From across the seas they came/ Some came with dreams of milk-and-honey riches, /fleeing famine and death:/ dancing girls/ Rajput soldiers, determined, tall/ escaping penalty of pride. / Stolen wives, afraid and despondent/ Crossing black waters/ Brahmin, Chamaar alike/hearts brimful of hope (as cited in Kannabiran 1998, WS53)

The first lot of women came to the Caribbean in the capacity of wage earners or workers. Rhoda Reddock (1985) was one of the first to debunk the myth that Indian indentured women were docile and meek and depended on their male relatives abundantly. The plain representation of Indian women as economically dependent housewives and men as breadwinners, regardless of the context, rendered women’s contribution to the labour force non-existent. Scholars argued variously regarding whether or not women should go as indentured. Rhoda Reddock (1985) cites Grierson who contends that Indian women had the right to go as indentured labourers. If an estranged wife willingly wanted to go, no officers could have stopped her. Colonial Planters as well as Indian men, both wanted women who could work diligently in the fields besides providing stability to homes and accepting her subordinate position to men.

Indian women who went to the Caribbean as indentured labourers sought a better life, a life relatively free of marital, societal and economic constraints. It’s also true that high-paid plantation jobs like digging trenches and weeding were mainly given to men as they required much muscular strength. However, it is also of consideration that women were never given high-paying professional jobs, that of artisans or overseers, which didn’t require much physical labour. P.C. Emmer (1987) says in the context of Suriname indentured women that plantation employment wasn’t the only source of income for them. They did other work,

besides, such as household work, cultivating the garden plots and huckstering which enabled them to afford a better standard of living (1987, 117). Emmer reiterates that conditions of living were far better in Suriname than in India, which is why more women than men stayed back in Suriname after the expiration of their indenture term. Some of them owned small plots too. Emmer also disagrees with Tinker, who compares the indentureship system to a new system of slavery. Analysing the quantitative growth in the Indian demography in the Caribbean, Emmer asserts that Indians were better off in the Caribbean than they were in their own home country (1987, 118).

Indo-Caribbean Women: Their Social Life and the Questions of Morality

It is interesting to look into the lives of Indian indentured women as they went about their lives through the rigours of plantation vis-a-vis their personal and family lives. Contrary to what is believed that indentured women were submissive and weak, what is striking here is that indentured women still had agency as they navigated through their lives. Early arranged marriage was a common aspect of the social system of indentured labourers. It meant that girls were married off even before their attainment of puberty. This practice of marrying off virgin girls was called 'kanyadaan' (the gift of the virgin). Besides, girls were also taught by their parents that their home is their husbands' place and they belonged there. Clearly, early marriage was an attempt to control female sexuality as they were married as child brides, in the case of Hindu marriages, before they could even understand the concept of marriage and sexuality. So, whatever they learned about sexual knowledge and their own sexuality was learned within the confinement of marriage. Every young girl was taught to aspire to get married because "on becoming a wife, Indian women had come into her own." And that gave

her not only a status within her group but also a freedom she wouldn't have enjoyed at her parent's home (Hosein 2002, 68).

Shaheeda Hosein (2002) analyses that those Indian women were not so much bound by the laws of marriage and commitments. Early marriages happened and they did go to their husbands' families and tried to fulfil their duties as wives and daughter in law. Yet, even in those confinements, they managed to have their say once they became mothers, as it was considered one of the most important aspects of women's lives. It is important to understand that Hindu marriage was an act of life long-commitment ordained by divinity through the performance of sacrosanct wedding rituals. Yet indentured women sought divorces and had extramarital affairs as well. Shaheeda Hosein considers geographic mobility as one of the major factors contributing to women's freedom. Marriage allowed them to migrate and thus, they felt far removed from the moral boundaries of their father's household. Men they married were alcoholics in general, and they would beat their wives. Quite often, women had to fend for themselves and their children. Divorces and extramarital affairs were commonplace affairs in the indentured society of the Caribbean.

Sexual exploitation of women in the Caribbean has a long history. Europeans sexually exploited non-European native Armendian women and girls in the 15th century (William 2020). These women had no autonomy over their bodies and were used to please white European men and their families. When African natives got transported as slaves to the Caribbean, they suffered the same fate. Rape, molestation and violence were routinely incurred on African slave women without any consequence for the colonisers, the white men (Burnard 2004). Afterwards, when slavery was abolished, indentured labourers (a huge majority of them were Indian women) were also sexually exploited and oppressed. Many indentured women died and many survived the sexual assault on board the ship during their sea voyages to the Caribbean. Indian indentured women were also sexually exploited during

their plantation stays at the hands of their employers and other men in general. They also suffered partner violence, sometimes resulting in 'wife-murders' as they got no protection from harassment from the colonial government. 'Wife-murder' became a huge problem with the colonial administration at the plantation. The case of 'wife murders' predominated the list of murders in terms of violence against women. According to Mohapatra:

In Trinidad for instance, between 1872 and 1879, of 102 total murders seventy-six were of women, of which fifty-nine were of wives. But between 1898 and 1913, of the 102 total murders, thirty-nine were of women and only eighteen of these were wife murders (Mohapatra 1995, 232).

Various explanations were offered to understand the nature of violence against Indian women in the Caribbean. The scarcity of women in the Caribbean compared to men was cited as the reason for the widespread crime against women. Another reason cited is the patriarchal belief of Indian men, who believed men had complete jurisdiction over their wives. Colonial discourse also considered Indian women as lacking morals, 'loose women' and their infidelity towards their partners is the main cause behind this violence against them.

It is noticeable that women were drawn to other men forced by their circumstances. Wife- beating and alcoholism were common problems with Indian indentured labourers. Although, driven by circumstances most of the time, women left their husbands and didn't really practice monogamy (patriarchal constraint). They challenged hegemonic patriarchal norms and defined their sexual identity individualistically rather than conventionally. They dared social ostracism, public censure and stigma to have their agency in matters related to them. It can be arguably established that indentured women were indeed brave and believed in forging their own destiny, circumstances notwithstanding. One *raison d'etre* for them being so independent and strong can be that they came in ships as individuals and always earned their living. So, they knew the taste of economic independence and thus didn't allow themselves to be subjugated by their husbands or partners.

Sometime...the man wrong. He do some wrong thing and the woman can't stand so she left. My first husband use to drink and get on. He use to beat me and he wouldn't stop the drinking, so he wouldn't keep heself good... I had me children with he, but through that I left him. Everybody tell me I wrong, I is the wrong one, like is I who make he drink and cuss. But I gone on me own. I rent room in the barracks for me three children and then I work. My parents didn't want me so I fend for meself (Hosein 2002, 71).

Rhoda Reddock also remarks on how women were always judged in terms of their moral character. So, when Indian nationalists started protesting against indentureship, the rationale given was servitude of men and immorality of Indian women. Contrary to men, Indian women who went to the Caribbean as wage earners were denied their economic identity. Rather they were seen in terms of their sexuality which seemed to be foremost on the minds of Indian reformists/ nationalists. So, in order to maintain a steady flow of labourers for plantation and to assuage men on account of women's promiscuity, family migration was eventually allowed. Women's immorality constituted one of the biggest problems and this was highlighted by every institution in the Caribbean. The Presbyterian representative Sarah Morton was shocked to immoral practices of matrimony in women indentured labourers. The colonial government viewed them as a "corrupting influence" on reputable indentured women. The indentured men, represented by Mohammed Orfy, a most disgraceful concern was women's immorality.

They are enticed, seduced and frightened into becoming concubines and paramours to satisfy the greed and lust of the male section of quite a different race to theirs...they have absolutely no knowledge of whatever of the value of being in virginhood and become a most shameless and perfect menace to Indian gentry" (Reddock 1985, WS 84).

For women, migration meant economic mobility upward and, if possible, their 'caste status.' Much of the class/ caste boundaries didn't last on the depot and further onboard the ship. There were 'depot marriages' where prospective indentured men and women sometimes chose their partners. These marriages mostly ended on arrival and women went to more prospective men. Indian women and men hardly cared to get their marriage registered. As

they believed in the legitimacy of marriage which was executed with the performance of due rites and rituals. It was easier for women to move on to another husband in case of non-registered marriage. Besides, it also helped many fathers in fetching the “bride’s price” again and again. Tinker analyses that due to lack of women indentured labourers, bride’s parents would demand “bride-price” instead of offering “dowry” to the groom. (as cited in Reddock 1985, WS85). In a nut shell, women enjoyed greater freedom sexually and otherwise during the initial days of indentureship.

Despite a noticeable streak of independence and agency Indo-Caribbean women experienced, they soon lost their freedom to the “androcentric ideal of Indianness” which was congruent to subjugation as Indians started consolidating in villages towards the end of indentureship. Scholars have provided various explanations for this shift which led to the revival of the patriarchal system in the Caribbean. There is hardly any doubt about how the Indenture system was demeaning and dispossessing for Indian men. So, as they grew in strength and started developing a sense of community, they sought to identify with their own ethnic identity and masculine pride. In this bid, the Indian model of patriarchy was revived. Consequently, it resulted in the moral policing of women concerning their sexuality and general behaviour. Caribbean Indian women being of independent nature, indeed resisted it, which was met with violence subsequently. Nesha Haniff comments on the silencing and invisibility of Indo-Caribbean women; how they went on to become just housewives from being wage earners.

Now, in the domestic sphere, her work had essentially not changed but it was her husband that was seen as the head of the family, and even if she worked equally with him her work had now become invisible. In part, it was what real accomplished women were: housewives. It was a mark of success for a wife not to work... the perception that Indian women, particularly in Guyana were “only housewives” still prevails (as cited in Mehta 2004, 6).

After the system of indentureship was abolished in 1917, most of Indians were illiterate and barely skilled. At best, they could mainly do agricultural work. Indians

constitute a major section of the demography in Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. Scholars have observed that due to their cultural tenacity, missionaries' efforts were less successful among Indians. Indians holding on to their culture of homeland showed self-assertion, their distinctive identity bearing a shield against the forces of acculturation. They still managed to emerge as a formidable middle class in countries such as Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. With community support and thriftiness (which they are known for), over time, they managed to become a well-doing community. Apart from rice plantation and other agricultural jobs, they become successful at shopkeeping too. As more and more Caribbean countries claimed independence, the migration pattern also shifted. Not only was their migration from rural to urban areas in different islands of the Caribbean, but the second wave of migration was also noticeable among Indo-Caribbeans to America, the United Kingdom and Canada. This pattern of migration from relatively less devolved countries to major developed economies of the world has been termed by Lommarsh Narine (2003) as "periphery to the core" migration. The pro-immigration laws from these countries also facilitated Caribbean migration. What is remarkable in this second migration of Indo -Caribbeans is that a sizable number of women also migrated to the developed countries of the world.

Post indentureship, the patriarchal control of Indian women even became stronger. Women were confined to domestic duties; child-rearing, household chores, culinary activities and taking care of family members were considered the primary duty and aspects of a woman's life. The image of Indian women as subservient wives doing the bidding of their husbands, the patriarch of the family became re-established. One striking or rather unfortunate feature of this patriarchal arrangement was violence and alcoholism. Even today, violence against women is one of the most aggravating problems in Caribbean society. However, education became the tool for upward social mobility for women. In contemporary times, Indo-Caribbean women have achieved several milestones in different professions and

careers they have chosen. However, the first and second generations of Indo Caribbean sacrificed a lot to get their children educated. That's why we see the celebration of ancestors and indentureship historiography forms the core of Indo-Caribbean writing.

However, today one of the greater challenges of Indo-Caribbean women is to balance their dual aspect of life, their professional life and their duties as wives and mothers in their families. Valerie Youssef remarks that the new generation of Indo-Caribbean women are going through "transition" making difficult choices so that they can "reconcile" their cultural legacy with their evolution in thinking as modern day "thinkers" (Youssef 2011, 139).

Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (2013) is remarkably important to understand and analyse the experiences of indentured women of the Caribbean. Bahadur has tried to uncover the voices of those indentured women, how their lives were, and whether they came to the Caribbean of their own volition or were entrapped. While recreating and restructuring the story of her great-grandmother called Sujariya, who boarded the ship the Clydes as a four-month pregnant woman, Bahadur also uncovered the voices of thousands of other coolie-women. It's a tremendous tale of suffering but also a story of triumph as Bahadur sees it. Those women indeed survived hardships and could still make something worthy out of those trying circumstances. Indo-Caribbean women's writings, on the whole, are grounded and rooted in the historiography of indentureship. The contemporary writings though depicting modern times and realistically so, find the source, inspiration and expression in the lives and journeys of their ancestors. The current generation of Indo-Caribbean women realises the struggles and resistance of their foremothers which is at once a source of strength as well as a way forward in terms of the lesson discovered and learnt in the trials and tribulations of their indentured ancestors.

Summary: In this chapter, we have tried to understand how Indians reached the Caribbean during the 19th century as indentured labourers. A significant percentage of them settled in

there post-indentureship, making the Caribbean their home. Indian women indentured labourers have their own stories of suffering and survival, of fortitude, resistance and eventual triumph that definitely command our scholarly attention at any rate. They migrated to the Caribbean mostly in the capacity of independent labourers. The condition of Indian indentured labourers in the Caribbean was deplorable on the whole. Women labourers faced even more problems than their male counterparts. Wage discrimination and sexual exploitation contributed to their miserable life. However, to a certain degree, they exercised their agency too in choosing their partners and often changing them at will as per the changing circumstances. Nevertheless, the Indian population in the Caribbean saw the consolidation of the patriarchal structure post-indentureship. Women's freedom was curtailed and they were confined to domestic boundaries as homemakers. Despite all this, Indo-Caribbean women valued education which became instrumental in their upward social mobility.

Coming from, as they were, in utter poverty, working as indentured labourers, then gradually rising with the aid of education, Indo-Caribbean women are faring particularly well in contemporary times. Not only that, Indo-Caribbean writers have been claiming the literary space giving women their own voices, thus also countering the stereotypical representation of them which had been a template of Caribbean literature in general. In the next chapter, we will discuss the developments in the scholarship (in theories) with regard to the concept of gender/sex and sexuality. We will discuss these questions in the light of scholarly contributions made by post-modern scholars such as Simon de Beauvoir, Foucault, Judith Butler etc. and how their works have contributed immensely to the understanding of these concepts for the better.

Chapter 2

Theories of Gender and Sexuality

Theoretical paradigms are crucial to our understanding of various concepts, particularly abstract concepts. This chapter attempts to outline major theories and ideas about gender/sex and sexuality. As the main objective of this Research Study is to understand the dynamics of gender and sexuality and their various implications in the Caribbean, the conceptual understanding (in theories) of these topics constitutes the core of it. In the next chapter, we will see the dynamics of gender and sexuality in Caribbean society as a whole. Their social structure, marriage, mating arrangements, queer sexuality, and Caribbean feminism will be discussed in light of studies done in these areas by various scholars. Also, a close reading of the selected works of Shani Mootoo and Oonya Kempadoo which we purport to undertake in Chapter four and chapter five would be aided by our clarity on the concept of gender and sexuality. These theories have helped in our understanding of peoples' choices with regard to their gender and sexual identities. The writers we have undertaken champion these causes of gender and sexual equality and their writings are testimonies to their commitment to social responsibility they bear as intellectuals.

The Caribbean is predominantly a heterosexual society and most of the countries had anti-LGBTQ laws, until recently, which penalised people of alternative sexuality. Because of the development of scholarship in these areas, we can finally see human rights extended to all people irrespective of their sexual identity and otherwise. Also, discrimination based on gender has been quite a norm across all cultures and societies. Only due to studies and research in these areas are we finally getting on the path of legitimising all voices regardless of gender and sexuality. Therefore, we, in this chapter, undertake the survey of how the

scholarship on gender and sexuality has evolved in modern times, particularly in the 20th century, which gave rise to the feminist movement and queer movements. The dominance of androcentric assumptions about sex/gender and sexuality has led to a rather skewed and lopsided understanding of it. These assumptions singularly express themselves in the institution of patriarchy- a system where men hold power and women are considered subordinate. The subset of patriarchy is the gendered division of roles/ gender roles which incidentally leads to women's oppression. In this chapter, we have tried to understand how and in what ways the concept of gender, sex and sexuality evolved; how are the conceptual understandings of gender, sex and sexuality related to each other? In what ways has the scholarship on gender and sexuality impacted any change in society?

From a layman's perspective, gender and sex mean the same thing and are used interchangeably. It is not their fault; however, the primitive understanding of gender and sex was that one meant the same as the other. Nevertheless, there have been various interjections and valuable insights about gender, sex and sexuality from different fields of knowledge, such as psychology, medicine, sociology, anthropology, and literary theory, to name a few. This knowledge has led to many significant changes in society, incidentally spurring the movement of feminism and queer activism. Interestingly, both reinforced each other- knowledge powered the social movements; movements powered more knowledge on the subject. There is no denying the fact that men and women are anatomically different. These differences incidentally become the basis for discrimination. Earlier, it was assumed there was only one sex, the male sex and the female sex was understood as another variant of the male sex only. Thomas Lacquer, in his book, *Making Sex* (1992), explores sexuality from ancient Greeks through the renaissance up until the 19th century. He illustrates that before the mid-eighteenth century, it was believed there was only one sex with the clitoris and uterus but were reduced or lesser versions of the penis and scrotum. Lacquer calls this “a one-sex

model” and argues the biological physiological differences between men and women were not intelligible and clear, and both were considered parts of larger cosmological order. Lacquer argues that not just gender but sex was also historically determined. He also says that their one-sex model was not because of their stupidity but because of their different perception of sexuality. Lacquer argues that the labelling of women’s sexual parts with male names does not testify to the ignorance or “inattention” or confusion of “Renaissance anatomists” but it was due to the fact that they lacked the urgent need to construct the distinctive categories of “male and female” sexual bodies in terms of biology (Lacquer, 1992, 96). Thus, language delimited the perception of the female body and thus “male body” continued to be the mainstream orthodox “human form” (Lacquer 1992, 96).

The later part of the twentieth century, particularly the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, witnessed an atmosphere of agitation and activism globally: The Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Rights Movement, Anti-War Movements, and Gay Rights Movement, to name some of them. These movements played a vital role in the emancipation of people who existed on the fringes and were discriminated against on the basis of their race, class, gender, sexuality and so on. It also opened doors for the production of new knowledge which not only strengthened these movements but also gave voice to a cross-section of the population who were oppressed. The introduction of Women’s Studies in the mid-1960s at San Diego State College, United States, was a consolidated attempt in this direction.

Women's studies, then, challenged its practitioners to think beyond the boundaries of traditional sex roles, of traditional disciplines, and of established institutions. By breaking down the divisions that limit perceptions and deny opportunities, by revising pedagogical processes as well as courses and curricula, this educational reform has itself become a social movement (Marilyn 1982, 662).

Arguably, women became interested in exploring new knowledge which could not only relate to but also be produced from their experiences of discrimination and oppression. Feminism became an essential part of their interdisciplinary curricula. Feminism, by and

large, is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of sexes. One of the major preoccupations of feminism has been to understand gender. Gender is typically understood as dividing people based on their sexed identities. Gender division becomes the base for creating hierarchies. In most cultures, gender has been divided into two: Male and female, conveniently overlooking people who don't fall on either side of the gender spectrum. And the two genders are presumed as opposite of each other; the use of the phrase "opposite sex" is a case in point. So, the two categories are not simply different but they are also seen as positive and negative. The categories of bachelor and spinster give an idea of how one gender is cast positively while the other is deemed negative. The basic idea is being a man is not being a woman and vice versa. The above understanding of gender is a conventional one that feminism challenges and contends to date.

Under the umbrella of feminism, various perspectives exist that led to the development of particular feminism in its own right. Each feminism has worked towards the common goal of ending women's oppression and bringing about gender equality in civilised society, so to speak. These branches have their limitations too. Nevertheless, they have broadened the scholarship on women (as an identity category), gender and sexuality, making significant contributions to society to change for the better. The deep probing into the matters of gender inequality has led to complex theories on gender, sex and sexuality. Feminists contested the idea of gender and sex as natural categories by bringing in the crucial interplay of socialising in their construction. Sexuality is also understood as socially constructed as well as biologically based. Feminists argue that gender inequality is not a matter to be considered separately because it is deeply entrenched in the way we have our family organised and the socialisation we give to our children based on gender roles. The institutions of family, marriage, politics, religion, economy and various modes of economic and cultural production including language help in perpetuating gender roles and thereby gender

inequality. The central argument was that the patriarchal nature of our society and the gendered division of labour not only prove disadvantageous to women but also results in their oppression.

Biological Determinism versus Social Constructivism

Biological determinism asserts that all human behaviour is innately determined by biological characteristics such as genes, brain size etc. It dismisses the part social and cultural factors play in the making of human behaviour. It defines the essential masculine and feminine behavioural traits of men and women without any consideration for social and cultural influences. Biological determinism refers to the understanding of mankind in general and not specifically about men and women. Nevertheless, it has been used to justify gender relations and gender roles and the subordination of women to men. Biological determinists view sex and gender as coextensive: the male sex is considered masculine and the female sex is considered feminine in nature. Another downside of the biological determinism of gender is that it gives justification to phrases like “men will be men.” These phrases express toxic masculinity in men which may help to bolster crimes against women such as rape and domestic violence. These arguments were later countered by feminists who argued that one’s behavioral and psychological traits (that constitute gender) are largely determined by social and cultural factors rather than biological causes. Robert Stoller, a noted psychologist, has tried to understand transsexuality: although sex and gender generally correspond, why do they not match in the case of transsexuals? Contrary to biological determinism, he argues that more than “biological”, the term “gender” has to do with “psychological” and “cultural” realms. He further says that if “sex” as in male-female correspond with “masculine and Feminine”, it is quite possible that the genders “masculine” and “feminine” are “quite independent of (“biological”) sex (Stoller 1968, 19).

Gender: A Social Construct

Second wave feminism (which emerged in the 1960s) has focused on the broader issues of women as a social category and what constitutes them by understanding the makings of gender. Also, gender, in turn, affirms the category of women as a whole thereby helping with identity politics. By the late 1970s gender had become the preoccupation of western feminists. Feminists with a social constructivist approach view the biological (sex) difference and gender differences not as an inherent essence but created by relations of power. The Radical feminists believed women's oppression was a result of the male domination system guided by the institution of patriarchy. Gender-roles is important for patriarchy to remain functioning. Radical feminists raised issues of rape and other violence against women and challenged gender roles. They also argue that the basis of male domination in patriarchy is the appropriation of women's bodies (sexuality). Social practices related to sexuality are governed by men's desires and not vice versa. Also, the norm of heterosexuality is socially institutionalised and is instrumental in regulating gender relations. Male violence is an aspect of controlling women and is not an isolated instance caused by psychological problems in a few men.

Gayle Rubin (1975), in "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex", uses the phrase "sex/gender system" and defines as "a set of arrangements" where sexual needs and the need for procreation are satisfied by social intervention in a conventional manner (1975, 165). She argues that scholars like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' view the sexual and gender relations in terms of the economics of capitalism fail to explain women's oppression adequately. She says that, though, Marxism acknowledges the oppression of women and locates its causes in the capitalist structure of society. If this were the case, she argues, a socialist revolution would have ended women's oppression. Rubin

rather pitches for a feminist revolution as she contends that women's oppression at the hands of capitalism is only a product of exploitation of women as a whole and not the origin of it.

Along the lines of Rubin, a new slogan arrived and caught the fancy of many “gender is the social interpretation of sex.” Nicholson has called this “the coat rack” view of gender. She argues that our bodies are similar to “coat racks” that act as a site upon which gender is constructed (Nicholson 1994, 81). The basic idea is that gender (that is masculinity and femininity) is a superimposition on our sexed bodies of the societal cultural codes and mores. It can be safely assumed, according to this interpretation, that human bodies are biologically either male or female, i.e., their sex is predetermined and fixed. But culture gives the gendered interpretation to these sexed bodies making them either masculine or feminine. That is how the theory of biological determinism was countered by feminists who argued that gender difference results from cultural practices and social expectations. Fundamentally, such studies gave rise to the view that gender is socially constructed and one’s biological characteristics do not determine one’s gender. Now the question arises that how gender is socially constructed; what social practices construct gender and to what degree are some of the major aspects of feminist studies.

Simon de Beauvoir, a noted French philosopher and theorist set off what is known as Second wave of feminism in the decade of 1960s with her book, *The Second Sex* (1953). *The Second Sex* is arguably one of the earliest attempts to raise questions on human history from a feminist standpoint. The major contention of Beauvoir is that men have essentially oppressed women by constantly defining them as ‘other’ and in direct opposition to men. Beauvoir attempts to locate the source of the profoundly imbalanced gender roles in which men are always privileged. She attempts to uncover how women came to occupy a subordinate position in society historically. Perhaps the much-quoted and much analysed is where she says, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (1953, 273). Beauvoir rejects the

theory of biological determinism; she rather believes that women's secondary status in society is not due to their biology but because of the gendered way in which we bring up a man and a woman. One way to understand Beauvoir's claim is gender socialization. Males and females simply become men and women i.e., acquire masculinity and femininity through a socio-cultural process. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1971) has been quite path-breaking and considered a crucial text for the Second Wave of the feminist movement. Heavily influenced by Simon de Beauvoir, the book is distinctive as it connects women's experiences to the political realm. It should, however, be noted that modern feminist theory has become more nuanced in recent years. Kate Millet has analysed the ubiquitous nature of patriarchy and how it permeates every aspect of a social setting. Millet also contends that psychoanalysis is a tool through which society tries to perpetuate patriarchy. Millet, in her analysis of several twentieth-century literary works, finds that male writers' descriptions of sexuality often portrayed masculinity associated with dominance and femininity with passivity. She moves on from her critique of sexuality as depicted in literature to an examination of general ideological bias in modern western society. Her key emphasis, however, is the distinction between anatomical sex and gender: the latter, she argues, is an ideological construct. Analysing how gender has evolved through time and is not something pre-given, it is possible to move beyond society determined gender assigned roles. According to Millet gender is "the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notion of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture and expression" (Millet 1971, 31). The problem with gender roles is it is not balancing; the socially learned gendered behavior conveniently fits within the dominant narrative of patriarchy and reinforces women's subordination in it. Millet argues that since this gendered behavior is socially learned, it is possible to structure a more egalitarian society

by simply ‘unlearning’ gender-based roles. That is to say that feminists should spread awareness about creating a more gender-neutral society.

Social-constructivist theorists do realise the problem confronting conventional-gendered socialisation as it is done through myriads of overt and subtle ways over a period of time. From the moment a child is born she/he is exposed to gendered behaviour in terms of how they are dressed, and what toys they get to play with. How are they differently trained in various areas as they grow up and so on? Nevertheless, a lot has changed positively since the Second Wave of the feminist movement in terms of gender equality, yet a lot remains still to be done. Many gender theorists, however, have found social learning behavioural theory to be too superficial to explain gender differences. Psychoanalyst feminist Nancy Chodorow (1978), argues that gender is about having masculine and feminine personalities that start to develop in early infancy due to conventional practices of parents. She considers the role of the mother essential to children’s development of gender identity. Both male and female children first identify with the mother. And that is why, she argues, being around mothers mostly, it’s a complicated process for boys to develop masculine gender roles. Chodorow contends that the boy needs to learn his masculine role more consciously through interaction with the mother. Chodorow holds that a mother is more likely to identify with the girl child while a boy child learns easily to identify with the father, and develops a separate personality. The mother’s strong bonding with her daughter inhibits the daughter from forming her own identity. Childhood gender socialisation further reinforces and produces masculine and feminine persons. The gender theory of Chodorow has its roots in the psychoanalytic theory of Freud. Chodorow, however, believes that gendered behaviour plays a significant role in women's exploitation and oppression since they make women overly mindful and attentive to the requirements of others while men remain emotionally inadequate. To counter stereotypical gendered behaviour, she believes both parents should equally share the

responsibilities of parenting as it will ensure the proper development of individual selves in both male and female children.

For Catharine Mackinnon, gender is the social meaning of biological sex which is the result sexual objectification of women. That is to say that women's desirability for men's sexual needs makes them a suitable feminine gender. Masculinity and femininity are largely defined as sexual dominance and sexual submissiveness, respectively, thereby creating genders "through the eroticization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other. This is the social meaning of sex" (Mikkola 2022). Genders, therefore, by definition are hierarchical, constituting the core of sexualized power relations. Thus, the concept of gender equality doesn't make any appeal to Mackinnon. She argues, if sexuality discontinues to be defined as dominance and submission, hierarchical categorization of genders would cease to exist. According to her, the gender difference is not because of socialisation or psychological orientation; it is rather the manifestation of the hierarchical nature of sexuality.

That however does not mean that men are naturally inclined to treat women as sexual objects; neither are women submissive by nature. However, men's and women's sexuality are socially conditioned. And this conditioning always operates from the male point of view, argues Mackinnon. Mackinnon's approach seems to be reductionist and simplistic as she fails to consider other aspects of social conditioning governed by race, class, social structure and historical circumstances.

Sex/Gender Distinction and Complications

The positions described above concerning sex/ gender distinction constitute the problem of what is called gender realism. It means women as a social group is supposed to share some usual common criterion, common conditions or experiences that define them as women, (and hence, different from men). For instance, Catherine MacKinnon considers sexual

objectification a regular, common experience for all women which is also constitutive of their gender. So, the question emerges, a woman who has no experience of sexual objectification would not count as a woman then? The critique of sex/ gender distinction basically rests on two arguments. Firstly, it fails to consider other axes of differences between women on the basis of race, culture class etc.; secondly, it posits a normative ideal of womanhood. Elizabeth Spelman has famously argued against gender realism and considers white solipsism responsible for such mistaken assumptions. Spelman (1988) critiques the assumption that women as a universal category shared some common criteria regardless of the particular cultures they belong to. By resorting to such gender realism, she argues, White well-off feminists presented their idea of gender as some 'metaphysical truth' which facilitates some women while disparaging and side-lining others. Their narrow view of women's condition sans race and the cultural distinction seems deeply problematic to Spelman.

Betty Friedan's well-known work *The Feminist Mystique* (1972) has been criticised for White solipsism. She considers women's household domestic acts as the dominant reason behind gender oppression. Hence, to fight oppression, she argues, women must look for jobs outside the domains of home. The problem with this argument, however, is that non-White poor women are already working (outside the home) to provide support to their families. So, Friedan's argument is applicable only to a specific class of women, i.e., White middle-class housewives. To see domesticity as the cause of oppression for entire womankind is myopic as well as inconsiderate. Critiquing the notion of universal womanhood, Spelman contends that femininity, as it is socially conditioned, varies from culture to culture. She argues that 'women' is not a universal category per se, but they are rather "particular kinds of women" (Spelman 1988, 113). This line of thought enriched feminist philosophy leading to the emergence of Standpoint Feminism.

One of the most influential feminist/queer critics of the 21st century who critiques the sex-gender distinction is Judith Butler. She criticises gender/sex distinction on two basic arguments. Her critique is not so much centred at the metaphysical aspect of gender realism but at the political implications of it, that is to say, identity politics. Identity politics is based on political mobilisation where members are grouped on the basis of some shared characteristic, experience or common condition. So, feminist Identity Politics, Butler (1990) argues, presupposes some common experiences/conditions as women that constitute their gender. Butler here makes two claims: some unitary concept of common characteristics, common conditions or experiences of womankind, in general, fails to recognise the array of social, cultural and political conditioning that constitute or rather construct women. The point is, in their attempt to counter bio-deterministic arguments of gender, feminists unwittingly created new models of shared femininity. Secondly, Butler further argues that this “shared femininity”, in turn, becomes normative implying there is some accurate and precise way to be a gendered woman. On the whole, Butler criticises that feminism legitimises certain ways to be women and delegitimises other ways. Butler contends that “identity categories” such as “women” are not simply “descriptive” but are also “normative” and “exclusionary” (Butler 1991, 160). One can discern what Butler meant is categorical distinctions are embedded in normative commitments by default. So, it is not possible to use the category of ‘women’ in a non-ideological way. She aims at the construction of a theoretical praxis that avoids exclusionary gender norms and fixed identities in preference for a more dynamic fluid identity of varying subjectivity and desires. Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) is remarkable for its ground breaking ideas surrounding gender identity, the relation between gender and sex and its theory of gender performativity. She argued that gender, instead of following from biological sex or an inherent category, a given entity, constitutes and is constituted by societal norms and creates the illusion of binary sex. She has evidently collapsed the idea between

gender and sex and argues that there is no sex that is already not gender. A body is only intelligible in the social matrix, and there is not a body that exists out of sociability. Therefore, it follows that all bodies are gendered from their very existence. She further argues that gender is performative, i.e., constituting the identity it is purported to be. This performative aspect makes gender an act of doing rather than being. Gender is an act of doing which she further explains: “Gender is 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” (1990, 43-44). Gender being the discursive act of performativity in the “regulatory frame” assimilates heterosexuality insofar as heterosexuality seems the valid consequence of normative connection between sex, gender and sexual desire.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler has connected the endless discursiveness of language with gender performativity. It is the language that constitutes gender, so it follows that no gender identity predates language. However, she repeatedly denies the existence of the subject or core or essence preceding language. It is rather gender performativity that constitutes the subject. Butler says, “That the gendered body is performative” which means “that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (1990, 173). She argues that claiming heterosexuality as essential and natural must be an act of vested interest as “a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies” (174); gender can neither be true nor be false (174). Butler reiterates the fact that gendered body is “performative” and is constituted by “acts” and there is no gender identity that exists prior to language for that matter. Judith Butler cites drag parody as an important way to challenge and eventually subvert ‘stable’ gender identities. The drag identity essentially subverts the accepted, normalised gender norms pointing to the fact that there is actually social coercion at the base of gendered identity. Actually, Butler is suggesting that gender identity can be undermined, broken, twisted, subverted and may actually cause some ‘gender trouble’. Butler

clearly states her aim of *Gender Trouble* towards the end of the book: “The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself” (189).

Inarguably, *Gender Trouble* generated a lot of critique as to Butler's notion of ‘doing gender’ without a doer. Butler's next book, *Bodies That Matter* (1993) further complicates the issue of gender while talking about the “materiality of the body, sex and sexuality.” She addresses the criticism of the performative aspect of gender to the critique that if there is anything but constructions. In *Bodies That Matter*, she clarifies the effect of construction on the body. She states,

And if certain constructions appear constitutive, that is, have this character of being that “without which” we could not think at all, we might suggest that bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas (1993, x).

While making a point about the materiality of the body, she goes along with the idea that gender is culturally produced or constructed while sex biologically based; she, however, claims that sexual difference is also culturally produced.

In the beginning, sex/gender distinction provided the basic framework for a feminist theory. In the 21st century, this distinction became highly contentious resulting in one or the other critique of the distinction, much to the dismay of the feminists. Queer theory, French feminism and psychoanalysis began to question its utility and value. Judith Butler and Donna Haraway have put this sex/ gender distinction to relentless critique. To consider gender as social construction incidentally implies sex as an essence, fixed, coherent and stable, possibly prediscursive and ahistorical category. Toril Moi, however, gives credit to sex/ gender distinction for countering quite effectively theories of biological determinism. Nevertheless, Moi's (1999) objection to sex/gender distinction is because of the fact that it failed to provide a “concrete and historical understanding” of what a woman may be, nor did it offer any theory of subjectivity. Mikkola (2011) also views the distinction as politically not helpful.

Claiming gender as a social construct implies that doing away with gender will sort out the situation of women's oppression for the better. However, it must be noted that many social agents view their gender as an important aspect of their identity and a source of positive value. This will make social agents unwilling to take part in the feminist agenda of gender justice.

The unending critique of sex/gender distinction has made the category of 'women' deeply problematic. Gender realists argued for an essential 'womanness' constituted by gender. The critique of it is that there is no such essential womanness as there are various categories of women shaped by their culture, society, race, ethnicity and other variables. Arguing for essential womanness is discriminating and exclusionary. So, it is an untenable position as it couldn't stand for all women per se. Whereas the theory of gender nominalism denies universals and seeks out various particularities of women. Gender nominalism, though inclusive, is fraught with its contradictions nonetheless. Denying the universality of 'women's essence' undoes women as a category and makes it impossible for feminists to further their agenda of identity politics to end the oppression of women. Mikkola (2016) insists that feminist theorists should give up this "gender controversy" as the question of defining women as a group has come to an impasse and seems insurmountable. In her opinion, giving up this quest does not pose any serious political questions.

Sexuality: Theories and Discussions

Before discussing the scholarly contributions to the concept of sexuality, it is important to discuss the general assumptions on sexuality that dominated mainstream consciousness.

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological,

social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors (WHO Report 2002, 5).

Needless to say, sexuality is a complicated concept and deserves scholarly attention as much as any other concept in social sciences and humanities. While feminism focussed on the issues of women and made scholarly contributions to the issues of sex and gender, sometimes in tandem with sexuality, sexuality remained an exclusive domain of the queer theory. Queer theory critically examines how mainstream institutions of power work in tandem with 'other' and marginalise alternative forms of sexualities and sexual expressions. Queer theory builds upon feminist theory and seeks to contest the essentialist descriptions of gender/sex identities. The study of sexuality is important with regard to the marginalisation of people of alternative sexuality or non-heterosexuals. Modern developments in medicine, psychology and critical theories have also led to a sympathetic view towards people with alternative sexual orientations.

The scholarship on sexuality has been championed by the twin theories of feminism and queer theory. The Second Wave feminists, particularly Radical feminists, have tried to understand sexuality in order to understand the connection between sexuality, gender discrimination and violence against women. Radical feminists believed that there is an essential connection between sexuality and patriarchy. The mainstream essential view of sexuality is that sexuality is a natural phenomenon that is directed towards the opposite sex, which is, precisely, heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is also contingent on the view that there is an essential connection between sexuality and reproduction. Feminists have critiqued this essential concept of sexuality. Feminists see sexuality as socially constructed, i.e., how we express our sexuality is the result of social and historical conditioning. Adrienne Rich, in her path-breaking essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian existence" (1980), contends that heterosexuality is not an intrinsic phenomenon but a compulsory one imposed by society and, therefore, should be seen as a political institution. She argues that heterosexuality is a

power relation that gives men physical and emotional access to women. While at the same time barring women from having lesbian relationships by ‘othering’ them and labelling them as deviant and pathological. As a remedy to “compulsory heterosexuality”, Rich proposes the idea of a “lesbian continuum” that will allow for bonding with women and act as a resistance to patriarchy. By “lesbian continuum”, Rich means an encompassing concept that will include not only the sexual relationship between women but also a range of experiences that women gather throughout their lives.

Queer Movements, Queer Theory and the Debates About Sexuality

One of the first queer movements of the 20th century is the Homophile movement in the 1950s. The movement aimed at legitimising homosexuality and sought general acceptance of homosexuals in the community. They demanded human, social and legal rights for sexual minorities. The homophile movement contributed significantly toward the creation of group identity for homosexuals. It was not until 17th June 2011 U.N Human Rights Council endorsed the rights of homosexuals for the first time which was originally demanded by the homophile movement in the 1950s (Rupp 2011, 1014). The gay liberation movement of the 1960s further gave momentum to the rights of sexual minorities, particularly gay men. Dennis Altman’s *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (1971) is one of the first books on gay scholarship which solidified the movement and strengthened it. Altman focuses on the issue of identity for homosexuals. He underlines the difficulty of being a homosexual is to carry the burden of stigma forever. He accepts that society stigmatises certain groups, such as non-whites, women, old people, the crippled and the ugly. Yet the stigma borne by gay people is unique. Altman states that being queer has its whole lot of issues which is quite different than other “differences” people have such as “skin colour” or old age. Queerness is discovered through a long process and after “having discovered” that a conflict ensues as to

how far this stigma should be revealed and how it is to be negotiated. (Altman 1971, 21). There are of course other types of discrimination which happens on the basis of certain factors but they are easily “apparent” to people who bear that and to others. With homosexuality, it is a constant battle for a queer person to understand it and then come to terms with it and also to embrace it publicly as it is stigmatised so much.

Altman’s book was the first full-scale book that provided the framework for gay experiences and gave it a theoretical structure and a sense of history in the 1960s and 1970s during the Gay Liberation movement. However, one delimiting factor of Altman’s book is the marginalisation of lesbian experiences because of the overwhelming focus on positive gay identities. In a nutshell, strengthened by these movements, the scholarship on the issues of rights of homosexuals as well as the concept of sexuality also increased ultimately leading to the emergence of queer theory in the 1990s.

The theorists who played a foundational role in the emergence of queer theory are Michael Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler. Michel Foucault, a French poststructuralist critic and theorist, immensely influenced the feminist and queer movements of the late 20th century. Critics believed that Foucault’s theory of the discursive construction of sexuality acted as a catalyst for the rise of queer theory in academia. Foucault’s chief belief was that a subject (individual) is formed by the discourse of knowledge which in turn is regulated by power. Foucault, in his book, *The History of Sexuality* (1978), dismisses the “repressive hypothesis” and argues instead that sexuality has proliferated in the last two centuries in the West. He is concerned not only with arguing the prevalence of sexuality in western discourse, but he also goes deeper “to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said” (1978, 11). Foucault thus emphasises not only on what is

being spoke about, he rather turns the lens on the speaker and not the ‘speech’ and from what standpoint the ‘speech’ is being delivered. He also takes the periphery into account to understand the source of knowledge as in what “institute” is enabling that knowledge and also how and through what channels and system that knowledge is being disseminated. Foucault, through his analysis of the interplay of knowledge, power and sexuality, contends that new sexual categories are being created through recent developments in medicine and psychiatry in the West. He talks about the creation of homosexuals as a sexual category of human identity.

Foucault analyses how sexuality in western society is “*Scientia Sexualis*” as opposed to “*ars erotica*” which means sexuality as a subject matter of science and not as something concerning with pleasure (1978, 58). The science of sexuality was helmed by the disciplines of biology, psychology and medicine. Foucault argued that the medical science of the nineteenth century “created an entire organic, functional, or mental pathology arising out of “incomplete” sexual practices” (1978, 41). Anything that lay outside the conjugal bonds of marriage (and hence not for procreation) constituted these ‘incomplete’ sexual practices. “Science of sexuality” controlled sexuality in a way that whatever could not fulfil the biological purpose of sex (i.e., procreation) was stigmatised. Medicine dubbed these ‘incomplete’ sexual practices as pathological and brought about a new category of people—the sexually deviant. Foucault says:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life-form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality... the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (1978, 43).

Thus, Foucault describes how the practice of sexuality has been in existence for centuries but was brought sharply into the focus in the nineteenth century through the discourse of medicine and psychiatry when they got their distinctive categorical names (such

as homosexuals) as a part of their identity. When the category is established, Foucault argues, an alternative discourse, “reverse discourse” also emerged produced by the people who were labelled. Thus, in the 20th century, homosexuality asserted itself and demanded its legitimacy to be recognised and validated “often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (1978, 101). In the ‘reverse’ discourse of queer identity politics, homosexuals asserted themselves through the discursive power of the rhetoric of “coming out”. Needless to say, the post-structuralist thought of Foucault about the discursive construction of sexuality in general effectively countered the essential notions about sexuality as pre-given or natural as it was widely believed.

Rubin (2002) views sex as a political agent which creates dominance by victimising people of different sexual identities. Drawing on Foucault, she talks about the institutionalisation of sex which polices sexuality and considers some sexual behaviour natural and legitimate while others abnormal, deviant and illegitimate. Rubin strongly counters the belief what she calls “sexual essentialism”, which, she says, “the idea that sex is a natural force that exists prior to social life and shapes institutions” (2002, 149). She gives five ways in which sexual behaviour is policed in the West. The first is “Sexual Negativity” informed by religious diktats which view sex as sinful and bad. The “fallacy of misplaced scale” is the second way in which deviant sexual behaviour is considered dangerous like theft and assault. The third is “Sex as a hierarchal system” where some sexual behaviour is considered “‘good’, ‘normal’, and ‘natural’” while others are seen as “‘bad’, ‘abnormal’, or ‘unnatural’” (152). According to Rubin, religion, patriarchy and popular culture all work in tandem to maintain the sexual hierarchy. The fourth strand, “domino theory of sexual peril” which is the idea that if something is bad if once allowed, it will create chaos in the society and society will crumble. She also describes how people don't believe in other sexual behaviours which they don't identify with, which she calls the “lack of benign sexual

variation.” She asserts that sexuality is, like any capitalist organisation, a power system. It encourages and rewards some (who conform to normative heterosexuality) while suppressing others. Sexual conflicts have evolved since their emergence; however, they do not become explicit like the conflicts between labour and capital; they are rather kept under wraps.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) is pathbreaking work with regard to queer theory. Sedgwick argues that sexuality is at the centre of modern Western culture, and an understanding of it could not be complete without incorporating “a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (1990, 1). She proposes two angles to look at the issue of sexuality: Minoritizing view and Universalising view. She argues that to see sexuality in terms of binary oppositions is too simplistic which produces only an incoherent understanding of it. Under Minoritizing View comes a distinctive category of people who really have gay sexual identity. While Universalizing View contains heterosexual people who “are strongly marked by same-sex influences and desires” and whose sexuality is fluid and unpredictable. Sedgwick does not validate either of the views. Rather, she points toward how these two views compete and collude towards the production of an “irreducible incoherence” (1990, 85). Minoritizing view states that some people or certain individuals are truly born gay. The Universalising view emphasises that homosexuality covers a wide range of sexualities. To Sedgwick, “queer” is “the open mess of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality, aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (as cited in Whittington 2012, 157). By insisting on incoherent definitions of sexuality, Sedgwick calls for broadening the discourse of sexuality in order to explore sexual variations within and beyond the boundaries. She also underscores that the markers of cultural differentiation, such as race, class and sex, could not subsume the discourse of sexuality. She says that the nature of non-normative sexuality is varied and heterogeneous

and calls for a nuanced analysis on the basis of what lies between the boundaries of the homo/hetero divide.

In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler starts by considering the “materiality of the body.” As critics have decried that the body is a matter of its own sexual needs. Butler argues that the materiality of the body can't be achieved beyond cultural construction. For Butler, ““sex” is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices” (1993, xii). We do see sex as a natural aspect of the body (as matter), but the fact is, Butler argues, the materialisation of sex is achieved through the reiteration of prescribed norms. However, the materialisation of the body is never complete. There are bodies that do not comply with norms (regulatory norms per se) that govern the bodies. These non-conforming bodies open up to rematerialization and re-articulation of a variety of other possibilities of bodies which challenges the normative aspect of body/sex. Thus, certain bodies which materialise in accordance with the norms are called viable bodies, while others (non-conforming) are not, such as black bodies, lesbian bodies etc. Butler says that the materialisation of the body is the “power’s most productive effect”. Since ‘sex’ is materialised, Butler argues, by the reiteration of normative performances, sexual difference is also materialised in accordance with the societal imperative on heterosexuality. Butler also critiques the idea that gender is the social significance of sex. This means sex is a pre-given, natural thing. Butler argues that if we assume that gender is the social meaning of sex, then gender does not exist alongside sex but rather, gender displaces sex. Butler asserts:

If gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this “sex” except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that “sex” becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access (1993, xv).

Butler says that in that assumption, if sex is “a fiction, then gender does not presume a sex which it acts upon, but rather, gender produces the misnomer of a prediscursive “sex”” (1993, xv) which will be mired in the idea of “linguistic monism.”

In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler expresses her concern for the people who do not fall under normative gender/sexual categories, i.e., people with alternative sexualities. In light of the general censor of queer bodies, Butler asks, “will the ‘human’ expand to include me in its reach?” (2004, 2). Butler talks about people such as drag queens/kings and transgenders who don't conform to gender norms. These people, while enacting gender, choose to transition from one gender to another, which is important, according to Butler, for the undoing of gender. They question binaries of gender and sexuality and espouse gender plurality which is not fixed in some ‘essence’ but rather a fluid system. Butler also talks about intersex people who are harassed in the name of sex reassignment and corrective surgeries. She gives the example of David Rhymer (Butler 2004, 59) who became a victim of one such sex reassignment surgery. What Butler means is that these medical interventions are done keeping in mind the norms of gender and sex; to achieve the goal of normal sex/gender identity. This points to the fact that these norms are not natural. While cisgender people are not pressured to be ultra-feminine or ultra-masculine, intersex people are forced to fit into the normative categories of sex/ gender even at the cost of their body mutilation through medical-surgical intervention. Butler proposes that discrimination against non-normative sexual/gender identities can only be overcome by ‘undoing gender. Butler espouses a liberal outlook on choosing one's sexuality when she says that since we are the possessor of sexuality, why not exercise freedom in how we want to embody our sexuality without being considered less real for it?

Summary: Scholarly work regarding the conceptual understanding of sex/gender and sexuality paved the path for the acceptance of all types of people irrespective of their gender

and sexual orientation/ identities. Sex/ gender has been traditionally understood as natural and biologically determined. Therefore, across cultures, it was understood that one's biological sex must correspond to one's gender. A biological male should be masculine and a biological female should be feminine. Also, heterosexuality was the only accepted form of sexual orientation. Non-conformity to these normative principles could result in social ostracization and even penalties and punishments imposed by law. The academic development in this area led to the deconstruction of sex and gender as naturally given categories. Scholars such as Simon de Beauvoir, Gayle Rubin, Kate Millet, and Judith Butler contributed to the deconstruction of these concepts as natural or biologically determined. Their works showed that sex/gender and sexuality are social constructs. The post-modern developments in sex and gender theories have shown these concepts to be fluid and therefore can be reconfigured. These developments contributed to women's movements and queer activism leading to societal changes with regard to gender equality and rights of LGBTQ people. The modern understanding of these concepts is indeed humanising and also ensures the right to equality irrespective of gender and sexual identities. The two writers we have selected for our research study champion the cause of gender and sexual equality. Their writings are a strident criticism of Caribbean society where homophobia is still rampant. It is very important for us to understand first the scholarship in this academic area of gender and sexuality so that we can understand and analyse the selected writings of Shani Mootoo and Oonya Kempadoo in the proper light. In the next chapter, we have discussed the practical aspects of sex/ gender and sexuality in the Caribbean. We have discussed the social structure with regard to men-women arrangement, marriage, mating system and so on. We have also discussed the queerness in Caribbean and Caribbean feminism briefly so that we could understand how Caribbean society is progressing with regard to women and LGBTQ rights.

Chapter 3

Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean

This chapter attempts to outline gender and sexuality in Caribbean society. It presents studies and research about the discussion and explanations of the structuring of Caribbean society in terms of men and women relationships, their coordination, marriage, mating arrangements, sexual identity and so on. It will also discuss Caribbean feminism and queer sexuality briefly. In the next chapter, we will discuss and analyse the three selected novels of Shani Mootoo to understand the dynamics of gender, sexuality and its various other aspects in Caribbean society.

The discourse on gender and sexual identity was compounded in the late 20th century. Gender, however, is an integral aspect of identity formation and has always played a role in the production of ethnicity and difference, whether acknowledged or not. Ethnicity and culture are built on the foundations of cooperation and exchange between men and women in economic, social and sexual relationships. It's rather complicated to grasp the matrix of gender and sexuality in Caribbean society as it is multiracial, multi-ethnic, and multilingual, owing to its history of colonial occupation for several centuries, by different European forces at different points of time. The socio-cultural life of the Caribbean is not a homogeneous one. However, with various nuances, the construction of gender follows the gender system of patriarchal hierarchy in terms of dynamics between men and women. Sex/gender roles is still prominent in terms of the socialization of children. Besides, the historical experiences of slavery and indentureship partly informs their experiences as men and women in Caribbean society.

Gender is typically understood as masculine and feminine traits of men and women, respectively, in a society. The society is patriarchally organised on a sex/gender system of

gender roles in which men are considered dominant, and women are presumed subservient to men. The gender system neatly divides men's and women's roles- men for the public and women for the private/ domestic domain. On the surface, this division may not look problematic as it represents, in some ways, a lived reality. But the division becomes problematic when the public sphere activities of men are regarded as superior to the domestic activities of women. Another problem arises when we see the overlapping of gender roles in a progressive society. The present-day discourse on gender is about critiquing gender roles as it goes against the libertarian ideals of equality. Undeniably, both women and men carry the burden of culture and economy, yet women's contributions are often undervalued and underappreciated. One of the prime agendas of Second-Wave feminism has been critiquing gender roles so that women could achieve the goals of social, political and economic equality at par with men.

The Caribbean was the site of Europe's first major colonial venture outside of their continent. It has been noted that there was virtually little to no cultural impact on present-day Caribbean society from the indigenous Amerindian population that was nearly wiped out in their confrontation with European powers very early on in the fourteenth century. As a result of the increased need for immigrant workers, a diverse and global society emerged with people hailing from all over the world. The migration of millions of people with various racial and ethnic backgrounds over centuries had essentially changed the demography of the Caribbean and hence also affected gender balance and gender relations per se.

Caribbean Women and Gender

African slave trade and the Indentured migration of Asian labourers gave women a break, in some sense, from the patriarchal rule of their own male partners in their families, allowing them greater freedom. Working as labourers in colonial plantation estates also facilitated their economic independence to some degree. However, they were under another kind of

subordination; they were expected to perform sexual services upon request. Also, after the abolition of Slavery in the early nineteenth century, their functioning in reproducing the workforce grew more essential. The measure of independence that women enjoyed post-emancipation was later curtailed by the ideals of marriage and monogamous relationships preached by the Church and education system (which was also Christianity based). Soon after the abolition of slavery, women were getting preached about the sanctity of marriage. However, many Caribbean women resisted marriage on account of its patriarchal ideology which, they knew, could inflict many ills on women such as domestic violence, loss of parenting rights over children and curtailing of sexual freedom. Caribbean women have often chosen economic autonomy and freedom over marriage. Their participation in labour struggles of the early 20th century is indicative of their personal freedom (Reddock 1984).

Despite the imposition of ‘Victorian ideology’ about the sanctity of marriage and women’s roles as housewives in the emulation of western standards of womanhood, Caribbean women’s participation in the labour force remained very high. In fact, females were more frequently hired by planters because they perceived women labourers as being more dependable. Momsen (1993) points out that a gender-differentiated wage scale was introduced in which women got paid less, despite their high participation in the labour force post-emancipation. Safa (1995) cites that the growth of female households could be linked to the growth of female employment post-1970s. She argues that, for black women, there was no tradition of dependence like there was for privileged White ladies in their society. To ensure their children have the best chance of achieving economic success, Caribbean women place great emphasis on education. In Cuba, both Afro-Caribbean and White women, since 1919, have had higher literacy rates than men (Safa 1995). It is through migration that men seek opportunities, whereas women attain them through education.

The primary roles of Caribbean women stretch up to conjugal, maternal and domestic dimensions. In terms of conjugal relationships, there are three patterns observed: Marriage, Common Law Unions and Visiting Unions. The most common mating pattern is when women start with unstable unions in visiting relationships to Common-Law Unions to formal marriage. A rather curious feature of Caribbean family structure is women-headed households and correspondingly “patriarchy in absentia” in Matrifocal households resulting from gender-specific behaviour patterns and the high rates of migration in men than women. Also, women-headed households or matrifocal families are highly visible in lower-class African populations and least visible in Indo-Caribbean communities. Early twentieth-century European anthropologists described chaotic family formations that were frequently matrifocal in nature. During his research on working-class African families in British Guiana in the 1960s, anthropologist Raymond T. Smith (1956) came up with the term “matrifocality”. Smith defines matrifocality in women and men-headed households in which women become the focus of kinship relationships and not necessarily the head of the household. Smith also observed the centrality of mothers, grandmothers and other women, even in nuclear Caribbean families. Barrow (1996) rejects the perspective of viewing Caribbean families as ‘dysfunctional’. She argues that the Eurocentric understanding of matrifocal families is predicated on the idea of absentee men. She says that Caribbean matrifocal families do not necessarily mean single-parent households where the mother is head and the father is absent. She argues that there are many men present in a Caribbean matrifocal family, such as brothers, uncles, and grandfathers. Focussing on absentee men within a matrifocal family normalises the understanding of men as the provider, limiting the role of men as well as women in a matrifocal family.

Despite the diversity of race, language, and ethnicity, Caribbean society broadly has a patriarchal structure even within the matrix of ‘matrifocal’ families. Differentiating between

matrifocal and matriarchal, Michelle Rowley argues that matrifocality in the Caribbean implies the “centrality of women within the kinship group”. Matriarchy, however, extends beyond familial kinship “to the ideological and institutional ordering of social organisation” (as cited in Mohammed 2002). As a matter of fact, Caribbean families do not necessarily imply a matriarchal structure with its own political implications. Pulsipher (1993) writes about the traditional matrifocal structure of a Caribbean family which is several centuries old. It has been generally seen that the head woman has the title to the land. Usually, the head woman and grandmothers are in charge of the children. Young girls are not permitted to leave the ‘yard’ (which is on the land) while boys are allowed to wander outside. It is common for young women to have their first child in their mother’s ‘yard’. The ‘yard’ is also the centre of socio-economic activities. The female space of the ‘yard’ provides women with facilities for reproduction and other production activities.

Indo-Caribbean Women and Gender

Colonialism had a tendency to silence the voices of exploited people, and women were much more invisible as subalterns, making it difficult to uncover Indian women’s historical experiences. Under the system of indentureship, in the beginning, the planters sought only male indentured labourers. The colonial government, however, later on, allowed for a small percentage of women as indentured labourers. As part of an agreement with pro-Indian immigration groups, the colonial British government included the recruitment of women. The female-to-male ratio never dipped below 25: 100, despite the fact that quotas altered from time to time (Reddock 1985). The *Fatal Rozack* in 1845 transported “the first 227 Indian immigrant labourers to Trinidad on May 30, 206 were men and 21 women” (Reddock 1985). A large number of Indian women who went to the Caribbean under Indentureship were single, independent women (Reddock 1985). Because of the scarcity of Indian women,

during indentureship, women were able to resist marriages and enjoy sexual autonomy to some degree. Social and sexual behaviour was not fixed nor enshrined in stringent, fixed rituals, customs or legal principles. Men and Women had a variety of relationships and women frequently exercised their sexuality outside the legality and sanctity of marriage. Women's relative advantage in terms of exercising and controlling their private lives and sexuality was neither optimal, complete nor unaffected by violence. Concerns were raised about the contested sexualities of Indian women and the general infusion of new patriarchy into the immigrant women's social life so as to control their sexuality. In 1880, Hindu and Muslim Indian men petitioned the colonial administration in Trinidad, with the support of Presbyterian preachers, to limit women's movement and force them to return to their spouses. In this way, the church and the government collaborated to rebuild the Indian patriarchal family.

Even though women slaves had a greater survival rate in the Caribbean than men, the planters adopted the assumption that women were unproductive and developed laws around it, notwithstanding the historical circumstances of slavery in the Caribbean. It is important to note, however, that planters' initial reluctance to recruit more women stemmed from their unwillingness to pay for reproducing the second generation of indentured labourers. Over the course of the indentureship era, the approach to recruiting of women changed depending on the goal of the colonial plantocracy and recruiting situation's demands, as mediated by colonial policy. Existing challenges included the relative necessity of reproducing a local labour force, stabilising the men's labour force, and obtaining the "right type of woman." While the planters were curious to transport in immigrants from India as indentured labourers, they however, reluctant to allow women for the same in the beginning of the indentureship in the Caribbean. Women were not allowed for they were considered liabilities and financial hazards due to the cost of child bearing and child rearing. Women's alleged

‘natural frailty’ was also seen as a deterrent, and as a result, only a small number of ‘able-bodied’ women workers were sought after. By the mid-nineteenth century, there was widespread concern about the ‘types of women’ being recruited. With this in mind, many changes to the official recruitment ratios were implemented. Contradictions between the colonial planters’ demand for adult male labourers and their requirement of a self-reproducing, stable labour force persisted throughout the time. The need for docile and controllable women among male Indian labourers as befitting their goals for higher caste-rank clashed with the planters’ requirement for women as hard-working labourers and the general scarcity of the ‘right kind’ of women needed for plantation estates in the Caribbean. Contrary to popular opinion, the bulk of Indian women who arrived in the Caribbean were single women and not as part of the family as wives or daughters.

The women who came out consist as to one-third of married women who accompany their husbands, the remainder being mostly widows and women who have run away from their husbands or been put away by them. A small percentage are ordinary prostitutes. Of the women who emigrate otherwise than with their husbands and parents, the great majority are not, as they are frequently represented to be shamelessly immoral. (Reddock 1985, 45)

To put it another way, most Indian women who immigrated to the Caribbean were not passive, submissive wives. Though many women were abducted, enticed, or given false information, it is apparent that many of them chose to leave their homes and start new lives abroad. The Indian women who immigrated to the Caribbean were not submissive and weak women as the conventional Caribbean history tells us, for a variety of reasons. Despite the numerous examples of abduction, inducement and persuasion through incorrect information, it is obvious that a significant number of women made a choice to relocate to seek their fortune somewhere else.

For the planters and Indian men alike, the independent nature displayed by the first women indentured labourers was problematic. They were looking for women who could provide stability and balance in plantation estate life, work at a lower position, and toil hard

in the cane fields, which was important to both groups. Women's recruitment became a major issue in the early twentieth century when complaints started to make way to the Indian government and growing resistance to what was deemed as servitude of indentured men and immodesty and immorality of Indian women indentured labourers (Reddock 1985, WS86). It is curious, however, to observe that women's exploitation was defined not in terms of their skill they possessed as labourers, but with regard to their moral conduct and behaviour. Whereas men's exploitation was measured in their working capacity as labourers.

While indentured labourers as a whole earned low wages, women, in particular, received significantly lower pay. It was reported that women, boys and frail men were paid "less than 25 cents per task" in general because it was already determined that they could not complete a full job. (Reddock 1985, 52). The women were a much smaller number in comparison with the number of men; it was virtually not possible for every indentured labourer to have a partner/wife even when he wanted to. One of the main reasons which led to the abolition of the indenture system was "the immorality of women" as was believed in the homeland, India. Much of the post-1914 anti-migration rhetoric concentrated on the suffering of indentured women, claiming that Indian women were being forced into prostitution in the colonies. Abolitionist resolutions were voted at meetings across India, mostly among middle and upper-class 'women'. Even distinct women groups approached the then governors-general to abolish indentureship citing that the indentureship conditions were forcing women to lead an immoral life. They were also concerned about children born in such degradation, which could only hamper Indian culture at best.

Numerous Indian women gained control over their social and sexual lives for the first time as they emigrated to the Caribbean as indentured labourers. Education became pivotal to the emancipation of these indentured women labourers. Access to education played a significant role in the development of Indo-Caribbean feminist consciousness, politicisation

and social activism, beginning with the basic preliminary education of women encouraged by Presbyterian efforts and continuing into advanced education in the 20th century. The right to education was a major issue for Indo-Caribbean women given the legacy of plantation labour and internal challenges thrown at them by Indian patriarchy. For the most part, early Indo-Caribbean female education was delivered through presbyterian schools and other Christian units, despite efforts by Hindus and Muslims starting in the 1940s to set up primary and, later, secondary schools for females.

Gender theories and behaviours in households, towns and communities where they have congregated were still influenced by Hinduism and Islam's essential doctrines even as they assimilated liberal western Christian concepts. Access to schooling, occupations and interaction with different groups helped them negotiate within their families and communities because of their education and employment opportunities. As higher education expanded in the 1990s, so did job opportunities for women in teaching, medicine, commerce, etc. New well-educated Caribbean women also realised their sexual freedom with education. Commenting on how education has been crucial in the advancement of indentured labourer women and the generations of women, Mahabir says that education was a revolutionary praxis for indentured women. It was their method of reshaping labour relations and forging a new social and political imaginary in the process. Education paved the way for equality for them. Many Indo-Caribbean traditions can be found from Jamaica to Guyana. One thing that can be found in all of these stories is a strong desire for knowledge and respect for intellectual growth among indentured women's daughters. (Mahabir 2015, 2)

Structurally, Indo-Caribbean families are more or less similar to their Indian counterparts. In the conventional Indo-Caribbean family, each member has an assigned role conforming to the gendered division of roles in a patriarchal society. Most of the household have a patriarch in the family, an authority in all decision matters. He is also the chief earning

member of the family. Mothers are generally assigned with domestic responsibilities ranging from child rearing, household chores to taking care of the in-law's family. Women are trained from the childhood that they must marry and support their husband. After marriage, a woman becomes a member of the husband's family as she moves in to her husband's house. Men are in general more valued than women in an Indo-Caribbean household. Women are expected to be obedient and attentive towards the requirements and needs of family members of her husband's family. Marriage in its own ethnic community and the attainment of motherhood is highly valued for women (Hosein 2002). Miscegenation is highly feared and discouraged in Indian community as a whole. An Indian household is more rooted in its own ethnicity thereby keeping the forces of acculturation at bay. In the present time, however, there have been some notable alterations. More women are attending higher education and working in high-rank positions. In addition, marriages are becoming more egalitarian. When compared to African-Caribbean families, these households have fewer female heads, and when they do, they are frequently headed by widows rather than single moms.

Sex and (Queer) Sexuality in the Caribbean

For so long, the topic of sexuality has remained subsumed under gender. Though there have been studies on some aspects of sexual behaviour such as prostitution, fertility etc., study on sexuality per se has remained relatively insufficient. Bariteau notes how gender has somehow replaced, rather "erroneously as a trendier synonym for 'sex'" (Kempadoo 2003, 60). The essential idea behind the interrelatedness of gender and sexuality is that sex is a biological, natural and passive state upon which gender is assembled/ constructed as masculine and feminine corresponding to the two sexes, male and female respectively, wherein natural sexuality is understood as heterosexuality which makes reproduction possible thus validating heterosexuality as a natural form of sexual orientation.

Although very few studies have been conducted on the subject, the picture which emerges gives the idea of how complex and tangled it is to understand Caribbean sexuality. For instance, Gloria Wekker's (2006) "mati work" on Suriname challenges the conventional understanding of Western ideas of marriage, identity and sexual desire. Gloria Wekker (2006) examines "mati work", a quite old tradition among Afro-Surinamese working-class women in which marriage is avoided in preference for male and female sexual partners. A rather intriguing look at women's sexuality that goes beyond heterosexuality and same-sex relationship is provided by Wekker's depiction of the lives of these women who want to build alternate households of relatives, lovers and children. The mati tradition of Afro-Surinamese questions standard Western concepts of gender, identity, sexuality and marriage.

M. Jacqui Alexander points out how the state creates "new political constituencies" by criminalising certain sexual behaviour. Trinidad and Bahama treated, until recently, lesbians and prostitutes as engaging in illegal activities for their sexual acts and so considered them punishable by law. (Kempadoo 2003, 62). Many Caribbean countries still discriminate and punish on the basis of sexuality by means of anti-sodomy laws, anti-lesbian laws, anti-prostitution laws etc. Disciplined sexuality was a prime element of civil behaviour as M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) argues:

Erotic autonomy signals danger to the heterosexual family and to the nation. And because loyalty to the nation as citizen is perennially colonized within reproduction and heterosexuality, erotic autonomy brings with it the potential of undoing the nation entirely, a possible charge of irresponsible citizenship, or no responsibility at all" (as cited in Hosein, Gabrielle and Lisa 2016, 56).

In the stereotypical understanding of Afro-Caribbeans in general by Europe and America, they were considered to be hypersexual, 'loose' and immoral in their sexual behaviour. The non-monogamous mating arrangement, and the fluid-structure of the family, often women-headed, aided to their image of hypersexual and immorality. These dominant stereotypical beliefs were challenged by Herskovitses' who created a range of work affirming

the distinctiveness and singularity of Afro-Caribbean culture, which was thought to come from West African culture and heritages (Kempadoo 2003). As a result of Herskovitses' efforts, a variety of family structures, including nuclear, two-parent co-residential unions, extended women's only families and relationships in which the sexual partners resided in separate households, were developed. Polygyny was also recognised informally. The Herskovitses' investigations provided a positive assessment of the Afro-Caribbean family and sexual life, leading to a view that informal polygyny is culturally valid and thus acceptable relationship paradigm in African-Caribbean culture. However, their work could not address the issue of masculine entitlement in such relationships.

Many scholars have described Caribbean sexuality as being dominated by masculine needs and interests and entrenched in heterosexual desire and procreative drives. Regarding 'mating' systems, it was critical to shift away from traditional European ideas of what constitutes 'appropriate' family and sexual relationships. This included marriage, common-law relationships, and visiting unions. Polygyny, as in having 'outside' relationships with married women, was accepted as the norm. It was commonly believed that perceptions of male marginality and female dominance in the familial environment justified male promiscuity. As Henrique (1953) points out, the family and sexual customs of African-descent working-class people were more fluid, allowing both men and women more sexual freedom. According to R.T. Smith's (1956) theory of matrifocality, the social priority afforded to mother-child bonds and the household's female-centred character diminishes and marginalises male dominance. His work portrayed the inevitable response to such marginalisation was the reassertion of power and authority through sexual alliances with many women.

Studies from the mid-twentieth century supported the idea of female sexuality as a service to masculine authority and sexual desires by continuing the pattern of subdued

celebration of polygyny and a presumed 'male right' to sexual access to women. The issue of women's sexuality, however, remained bound by their social and biological needs to reproduce and give birth. Even though visiting unions, extramarital affairs, and common-law relationships used to be regarded as aberrations of the pathological nature of 'negro Folk' in the 1960s, they came to be accepted as standard Caribbean practices of sexuality and family in the 1970s. They were deemed acceptable and legitimate as they were considered singular to the region's own historical and cultural circumstances.

There was a substantial collaboration of Caribbean men in general with the imperial rulers to replicate colonial hierarchies in the English-speaking Caribbean throughout the period of the nationalist movement. While embracing the idea that the newly independent Anglophone Caribbean was uniquely hybrid in its social and cultural structures, the new post-colonial native elite preferred heterosexuality and masculine supremacy. It valued the European monogamy in marriage system as the predominant norm while continuing to judge Afro-Caribbean women's sexuality as 'loose' and subservient to Caribbean men's sexual needs. However, it should be noted that the African familial system was in direct contrast with the European idea of the family, which was, in general, patrilineal, monogamous, heterosexual and co-residential. It caused huge debates among social scientists. Various explanations were given. Edith Clarke (1999) developed a vision of a female sexual agency that went across the stereotypes of black working-class women as embodiments of either sexual liberation or puppets. She finds that the sexuality of Jamaican women of African descent who lived on their own property or worked in the sugar business, was primarily heterosexual and that they operated independently of male power.

Sex as violence against women is an important topic of discussion in the literature, particularly in relation to the lives of mature women. Innumerable studies and discussions concerning domestic violence and gender violence reflect this reality. However, the concept

of sexual violence, particularly in the context of domestic violence, remains hazy and ambiguous and is rarely defined by ethnicity/race or socioeconomic status. Women's violence is frequently addressed as a strategy for Caribbean men to preserve patriarchal dominance, and sex becomes the main instrument for Caribbean men to assert control and cause physical injury on women, both Indian and African. Men's violent sexual acts overwhelmingly position women as victims in the research scholarship. In this approach, sexuality is explored as a source of conflict and pain, strongly linked to abusive power relations between two genders. With regard to masculine sexuality and identity, violence is accepted as a normal aspect of the experience. The literature, on the other hand, ignores the fact that sexual violence is deeply ingrained in the male culture and that it is often linked to other forms of violence, such as domestic abuse or political oppression.

Another aspect of sexual praxis is the transaction of sexual favours and services for monetary and material benefits and social security. Kamala Kempadoo (2009) categorises this into three broad categories: a) prostitution or commercial sex work b) "romance" with tourists and c) transactional sex (2009, 4). Prostitution means the sale of sexual services from bars, clubs, brothels etc.; "romance" with tourists mostly from America and Europe includes sexual favours in exchange for sex for material benefits. Transactional sex means the exchange of sex for material benefits. It is commonly seen as prostitution by people. The scope of these sexual-economic exchanges in the Caribbean is difficult to determine since it involves a wide range of activities and exchanges and are not publicly recognised due to their unlawful and stigmatised nature. Despite the fact that these sexual arrangements are not hyper-visible, they are very often classified as heterosexual, however, these are also identified in researches of same-sex relationships. There is a strong link between sexual-economic activities and the need for comfort and security, such as the need for basic necessities such as food and clothing, and more long-term demands such as housing, power

and clothing. gender disparities in both social and economic benefits mean the majority of women and girls negotiate from a position of disadvantage.

It is important to note that in hegemonic discourses, terms like “prostitution”, “transactional sex” and “sexual-economic interactions” contain a stigmatising connotation, especially for young women, because they are often linked to conceptions such as “promiscuity” or lack of sexual restraint.

The queer Caribbean

Caribbean people’s sexual lives ran counter to the European ideal of White women’s racial and sexual purity in numerous ways. The sexuality of African and Indo-Caribbean women has always been seen as “queer”, weird, and deviant by elite White colonizers who had ruled the Caribbean in the previous century. Their sexuality has also been persecuted by the Caribbean people who succeeded in power after the dismissal of White Europeans.

One of the first mentions of homosexuality in scholarly discourse about the Caribbean appears in Herskovits and Herskovits (1947). In the homophobic Caribbean, “Homosexuality is considered a disgrace. The homosexual is an object of ridicule and abuse ... among women, it is termed ‘making Zanmi’ and there is much talk and ‘plenty song’ about such persons” (as cited in Gill Lyndon. K 2018, 3). Female homosexuality is explicitly mentioned by the Herskovits. Studies like “Trinidad Village” (1947) validates the presence of homosexual relationships in pre-independence anglophone Caribbean areas like Trinidad, as feminist sociologist Kamala Kempadoo (2003) has pointed out. In many studies, gay relationships are not, in the first instant, claimed as an identity but as an activity. Studies find that people reveal information about their sexual practices without identifying themselves as homosexual, queer, transgender etc. This fact points towards the general intolerance for the queer subjects of the Caribbean. The studies have also pointed out bisexual behaviour in most

people. Wekker says that “Mati” women frequently indulge in heterosexual relationships via marriage, for offspring, in order to avoid stigma.

The available literature in the Caribbean on same sex relationships emphasize on beliefs in heterosexism and homophobia as well as ill treatment and violence towards people who deviate from normative sexual practices. Due to the stigmatization and prejudice against people with alternative sexual behaviours, Caribbean men and women do not embrace their queer sexual identity publicly. Dan (1987) observed in his study that “homosexuality” is perceived in a very negative light in Barbados. This form of sexuality amounts to a blot on civil, social nature of morality. It is considered “an abomination,” evil, or sin, and “transgressions of natural law” (Kempadoo 2004, 45). In fact, it was sometimes recognised as a sort of crazy or a natural defect or an ill-habit. Chevannes (1993) in his study has found that homosexuality is mostly found in wealthy sections of society. However, given his small sample size, he affirms that that cannot mean homosexuality is “mainly a middle-class phenomenon.” It is also notable that male homosexuality is more frowned upon than female homosexuality (Chevannes 1993). Chevannes also finds that homophobia is more intense in the anglophone Caribbean with Jamaica leading at the top. Legislations and laws against homosexuals and queer populace in the Caribbean, in general, promote stigma and prejudices against them. Government Efforts to decriminalise queer sexual relationships are more often than not are met with fierce hostility. The stigmatisation of queer sexuality poses a far greater question in the Caribbean. Despite the presence of queer sexuality in and around Caribbean, it is legally and socially discouraged. The stigma attached to it even causes reprehensible consequences such as violence against queer people in the Caribbean.

There has been an upsurge in the incidence of HIV and AIDS in the 15-45-year-old age group during the 1980s, mostly due to heterosexual transmission. A new area of public scrutiny has been opened because of public interest in the sexual health of adolescents,

youths and even children. Apart from HIV and AIDS research, teenage sexual expressions are also investigated in studies of prostitution or transactional sex among young people under the age of 18, with a particular focus on girls. Research into sex tourism in the Caribbean has shed light on visitors' sexual practices. The interaction between race and sexuality is also examined in the context of sex tourism. It is common for tourists to imagine Caribbean men and women as racialized-sexual objects, such as the "hot" mulatto or black woman. Their primary function is to serve to please the visitor. The imagination of the Caribbean as a sexual paradise is fed by global and local tourism companies and governments who see the region as a sexual paradise in the pursuit of profit. Despite the widespread belief that sex tourism corrupts and debases indigenous people, particularly Caribbean women, the dependency of the Caribbean on tourism for its economy can't be ignored. Legal and international efforts to combat human trafficking and laws against "commercial sex" in the Caribbean perpetuate the stigmas and moral disapproval towards those who engage in sex work or other sexual-economic exchange, particularly women, in most Caribbean countries, and they are constantly under scrutiny.

Contrary to popular belief, same-sex relationships have been documented in anthropological research in the Caribbean since the 1930s. In studies of family, masculinity and HIV and AIDS, informal polygamy and multiple partnerships are frequently mentioned. When it comes to social norms in the (African) Caribbean, these kinds of agreements are generally regarded as a component of male social life. It is common perception that becoming an African Caribbean man means one is hyper heterosexual, capable of engaging in all forms of sexual relations, from promiscuous and casual to multiple partnerships. "A man is not a real man unless he is sexually active" (as cited in Kempadoo 2004, 21). It is more likely to be characterised as abnormal behaviour when multiple partnering spills over into same-sex relationships and appears to be bisexual. In this hyper heterosexuality, alternative sexual

behaviour or queer sexuality is not encouraged though. Since multiple partnering has become commonplace, it has also drawn attention to the “bad” behaviour of “certain” men (and women) and removed the focus from the more socially accepted norm amongst the general population. As a result, in HIV and AIDS discourses, it is homosexuals, prostitutes, migrant workers and “promiscuous” youth who are blamed for spreading the disease to the broader population through sexual networks and multiple sexual partners.

It is not uncommon for people who do not fit neatly into the categories of sex and gender to be left out of the conversation when these concepts are discussed in ordinary and scholarly discourse. The sexuality of Caribbean people is often portrayed as being firmly heterosexual and intolerant of sexual diversity for no reason. Sex and gender are intertwined and they are seen as complementary aspects of one another: two halves of a whole. Besides, heterosexual gender identities have rigid definitions. For example, in Caribbean literature and fiction, men are frequently depicted as powerful, extremely promiscuous, negligent in their parenting obligations, frequently absent from the household, and if there, unwilling to shoulder their share of domestic tasks. Promiscuity with numerous women is frequently promoted, and associations between sex and male virility are frequently presented. The ability to get pleasure, power and independence from sexual performance appears to be important to Caribbean masculinity, and it is sometimes said to be physiologically determined. It has also been emphasised that Indo-Caribbean men are not only constantly gendered but also always sexualised for “Indian Caribbean masculine subject is indeed heterosexual” (Lokaisingh-Meghoo 2000, 86). This shows the preference and orthodoxy belief in heterosexuality in the Indian diasporic community of the Caribbean.

Many scholars have argued for the separation of sexuality from gender discourse despite the fact that the two are deeply intertwined. Because female sexuality does not always conform to the dominant pattern of femininity, it cannot be subsumed or explained by gender.

Women who express their desire and passion through a sexual connection with another woman defy current gendered classifications, requiring their own space and position within Caribbean feminist discourse. The studies provide a comprehensive description of male sexual and gendered practices, reinforcing the notion of a certain sort of Caribbean sexuality that has emerged from family and mating studies since the 1930s. Men's heterosexual, polygynous behaviour is foregrounded and normalised, while female sexuality and sexual agency are pathologized, simplified, or ignored.

Edith Clarke was one of the first anglophone Caribbean sociologists to articulate a vision of a female sexual agency that transcended stereotypes of black working-class women as the personification of pure and unfettered sexuality or as men's pawns or male adapters. She described black women's sexuality in Jamaica as completely heterosexual in orientation and as acting autonomously from male dominance and masculine desires, notably for women living freely on family land and for independent women who worked and resided around the sugar business. Clarke (1999) argued that black rural women might have a long succession of lovers and may have borne children by those men (lovers). The fact is if she owns the house, she has autonomy over her relationship which she could terminate at will. In her study, she found that women's sexual agency and desires were deeply linked to reproduction through heterosexual intercourse. She writes, "a woman is only considered 'really' a woman after she has borne a child" (Clarke 1999, 66). Women's sexual preferences were centred on childbearing and childrearing, which were exclusively heterosexual, and were seen as upholding the prevailing monogamous marital norm. The Caribbean society is such that marriage becomes an utmost necessity for Caribbean women in order to achieve "respectability" in the society. The western value of monogamous marriage, nuclear families and "legitimate" progeny are admired and they condemn what they see as "promiscuity and immorality" of family life in lower class Caribbean society. However, the problem arises

when they see the male members of their families firmly rooted in Caribbean values of multiple relationships, societal popularity, ultra-masculine behaviour, “concubinage” etc. young middle class Caribbean women are struggling with their western ideas of a healthy marital relationship and what they see as the values of Afro-Caribbean society. (Barrow, 1996, 181) It is a difficult proposition to arrive at a reconciliation in this clash of differences in Caribbean and western cultural values.

Dancehall and Chutney are popular Caribbean art forms that are based on men's and women's sexuality and desires. Because of its cosmopolitan nature, Dancehall music disturbs and confronts the Judeo-Christian morality, sexuality and gender relations of the Caribbean middle-class families. However, this does not mean that Dancehall does not embrace patriarchal beliefs, which are evident in the promotion of male sexual violence and the denigration of women in song lyrics. Moreover, women's own declarations of sexual autonomy and evolving gender relations are reflected in the music as well as in the dancehall's physical space. Dancehall's definition of masculinity is primarily heterosexual. However, it has been challenged by the presence of female DJs and female dancehall consumers. Their presence indeed contests hegemonic masculinity. Various religious leaders and journalists, as well as in other popular culture venues, reflect this intense public animosity toward gay males and echo it in government and state institutions. According to Hope's analysis of dancehall lyrics, male homosexuality is seen as corrupting masculinity and anything deemed feminine damages the 'Real man' character of working-class, Afro-Jamaican men. (Hope 2001). Male homosexuality has long been demonised in Jamaican society. Dancehall music is a powerful vehicle for reviving the strong masculine heterosexuality that involves raping women, 'nailing' or 'stabbing' them, as well as 'battery' (gangrape) and incest as acceptable sexual behaviours. (Kempadoo 2003).

In the mainstream discourse, female homosexuality is considered to be a divergence from the natural, ideal heterosexual choice, where a woman stands to be disciplined and punished by “real women” for being “gender traitors” (Atluri 2001). These studies show that lesbianism is less of a threat to hetero-patriarchy in the anglophone Caribbean than male homosexuality since it is perceived as a perversion of femininity, powerlessness and non-threat to men. Another space that contests hegemonic masculinity is what Kanhai has described as “Matikor”. Matikor is the space for women’s resistance. Kanhai (1999) writes that Matikor offers a rare opportunity to women that they can claim a space of celebration and sexual expression. They exchanged rumours and jokes, sang traditional music, and danced joyous and sexually suggestive dances. Matikor is a place of healing where women could express their protest against the ruling class’s degradation and depersonalisation of them. As a grassroots Hindu celebration, communal religious ceremonies were incorporated into Matikor events, bringing the sacred and profane, the carnal and spiritual, and the political and social together (1999, xi). Kanhai writes that until the 1960s, Indo-Caribbeans kept their distance from Calypso; therefore, Indo-Caribbean women defying this tradition in the 1980s was ground-breaking. She describes how these acts demonstrate the courage of a Bhowjee who uses the calypso stage to make a public act of gender and ethnic liberation by claiming her bodily freedom through the expression of creative art. The utilisation of the erotic in Indo-Caribbean women’s lives, and in this case, scholarship is exemplified by this explicit and purposeful inclusion of one’s physical existence within a creative and political statement. It also emphasises that eroticism encompasses much more than sexual behaviours and that it can provide a more complete understanding of one’s emotional and sensory experiences. (Kanhai 1999, 220-221). Lauren Pragg (2012) wonders about the potential of Matikor ceremonies (as these ceremonies show intimate bonding between Indo-Caribbean women) for queer encounters. Baksh Sooden argues that Matikor has become the space for women to

express their sexuality freely without being controlled by men (1999: 195). The sexual expression of women in Matikor is powerful and can't be reduced to wining of Caribbean carnival as Matikor traditions draw from specific elements of Indian history and movements which spread across to the people through chutney music (Baksh-Sooden 1999). "At the chutney festivals, [the women] (sic) state emphatically that 'my body and sexuality belong to me, and nobody (not my man, father, brother, son or the larger community) has the power to prevent my expression through dance'" (Baksh Sooden 1999, 197). The poetics of "chutney" and "Matikor" gives a centrality to women's polyphonous voices and their wish to express their sexual desire and otherwise. It also registers as a protest to the dominant narrative of patriarchy and hegemony in diasporic Indian community.

As discussed above, in the early indenture days, Indian women enjoyed a certain degree of sexual freedom in the Caribbean. This prompted colonial authorities to label them as prostitutes. Even Indians believed that it was 'prostitution' Indian women were doing in the Caribbean which became a major basis for decrying indentureship and demanding its abolition. Soon after indentureship was abolished, the patriarchal system from the homelands took over. Indo-Caribbean women who primarily worked in fields got confined to the realms of domesticity. It was through education only that the next generation Indo-Caribbean women was able to rise.

The art form 'Chutney' brought about a relaxation in social inhibitions. Conventionally, if a man danced with a woman in the past, he would have been seen as effeminate, and if a woman danced with men, she would have been seen as a promiscuous woman. Many Indo-Caribbean private weddings in Trinidad and Guyana began to incorporate lively Chutney-style dancing done by women and a few men- not necessarily in couples, but in the same space- in gleeful disregard of earlier taboos in the 1960s and 1970s. Women dancing with males in the company of men is no doubt influenced by creole culture,

but this effect may have happened more by assimilation than direct interaction since Indians have traditionally engaged only moderately in fundamental Creole events such as Carnival, Calypso, and Soca dances. While some critics have equated the vulgar ‘wining’ of Creole women at Carnival with lesbianism, others argue that the celebration of female sexuality should be regarded as a celebration of auto-sexuality or female sexuality without the presence of men. With its lewd expressions and lusty ‘wining’ (wining is a Caribbean word which means the movement of hips and waist in a “winding motion”), the ‘Chutney’ dancing style is well-suited for the representation of sensuality in a way that is not strictly gendered.

Caribbean Feminism

Caribbean feminists have been reconceptualising and deconstructing historical masculine narratives thereby bringing women’s cultural, political and economic contributions to the makings of the Caribbean to the fore. In the Caribbean, African and Indian women have a long history of geographical and cultural displacement, bonded labour, commercial enterprise, struggle and familial dispersion in common. Political partisanship has frequently skewed the acknowledgement of this commonality of experience toward oppositional representation of Indian and African women as rivals in the fight for credibility and autonomy, even though both section of women suffered the same ill fate in the Caribbean as plantation and estate labourers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Before taking on domestic duties, these forebears of Caribbean labour worked in the fields, putting their work in the public eye. Coming from different ethnic backgrounds, both African and Indian women could not bond together in a solid way despite the common legacy of colonial servitude. Instead, they were alienated, engaged in “rivalry”, regarded each other with “mutual disregard” and “suspicion” and thus could not really engage in meaningful “reciprocal engagement” (Mehta 2004, 64).

White and Black women's colonial, patriarchal and authoritarian feminist narratives (both of which exploited and overstated the racial divide) hampered the development of a more analytical theory of Caribbean women's agency that encompassed the contributions of women from diverse races, including Indian women in particular. The pioneering work of Trinidadian Afro-Caribbean feminist academic Rhoda Reddock has largely addressed this disparity in representation through her research on the experiences of Indian women under indentureship. To better understand Caribbean feminisms, Reddock focuses on the similarities and differences between the African-Indian and Indian-African experiences in terms of female self-reliance, rebellion and hard work, as well as the disjunctions generated by various cultures and their varying levels of patriarchal control of women. However, the fact remains that the experiences of women of Indian descent and other ethnic communities are still seen as secondary to the prominent afro-centred experience in terms of "Caribbean authenticity" despite Reddock's best efforts to place Indian and African women on an equal platform of representation through meticulous research in academic discourse. Afro-Caribbean feminisms pushed specific themes, ambitions and discursive spaces on Indian women that they deemed restrictive, oppressive and culturally insensitive. Uneven representation and normative Afro-centredness continue to fracture the lives of Indian and Afro-Caribbean women throughout history, but the emergence of a hybridised consciousness in literary and cultural production has subverted the authority of binary oppositions by creating common ground for more positive relations between women of Indian and African ethnicity. In her writings, Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean writers such as Narmala Shewcharan and Ramabai Espinet have developed new discursive frameworks for reading Caribbeanness as a site for interracial partnerships, gender negotiations and the validation of negated identities.

Several Afro-Caribbean feminists such as Rhoda Reddock, Verne Shepherd and many others honour the pioneering work of enslaved African women who actively participated in agricultural production on the plantations to secure their independence via their contributions to Afro-Caribbean feminism. Many of these women had feelings of self-worth despite the dehumanising characteristics of slavery, which allowed them to organise and engage in a variety of slave revolts as well as labour disputes and strikes. For a time, their protests and acts of revolt helped to humanise them and dispel misconceptions about their passiveness and subjection to male and colonial control of women on the estates. To keep up with their heritage of self-sufficiency, many women left the plantations after liberation to become small-scale farmers and traders. Even while these activities required cultivating small family plots, they did not indicate a return to domesticity inside the boundaries of the home. Their homes were seen as an extension of their work environments for Afro-Caribbean women. Brereton says, “the peasant woman was an integral part of the household economy and combining production (crops and livestock) and marketing with child care and housework” (as cited in Mehta 2004, 66).

Prior to independence, the main impetus for change was the nationalist movement. Still, since then, race and class inequalities, state intervention to alleviate them and the colonial and economic and political forces that actively promote these social hierarchies have been the most important issues in the post-independence era. There’s been a lot of talk about recovering Caribbean identity since independence. There has been a strong African influence on the recovered identity. The literary works of post-independence writers, including Derek Walcott, V.S Naipaul, George Lamming and Samuel Selvon feature images of shipwrecks and exile. To date, the only well-known literary presence addressing indentureship and exile among Indian and Caribbean immigrants has been V.S. Naipaul.

Caribbean feminists, particularly Indo-Caribbean scholars have been critiquing Caribbean feminism as Afro-centric as opposed to a multicultural paradigm. In this context, it is important to note that not only were African Caribbean women workers, Indo-Caribbean women too came from indentureship and hence were primarily workers. Afro-centric Caribbean feminism meant the focus exclusively on Afro-Caribbean women and coloured people from the creole union. So Caribbean feminism exclusively focussed on female-headed families. While Indian women came from all types of families, from three generational extended joint families to nuclear families to the female household. Feminist organisations are often seen as the realm of African women rather than as a place where women of all racial/cultural backgrounds and experiences can come together. Indigenous, Indian, Chinese and other ethnicities like the Indonesians have been kept out of this process, which has resulted in the one-sided agenda of Caribbean feminism. As a result, the White woman's experience has been purposely excluded from the feminist discourse, as she came from the oppressor's white race which has brutally enslaved Afro-Caribbeans in the past. Nevertheless, a few White women have been active in the Caribbean feminist movement.

Caribbean feminists face racial differences that are dissimilar from those in the United States and Europe. The post-colonial Caribbean has a predominantly African population that is politically if not economically in power, to begin with, which may be argued. Afro-American European feminists' resentment does not manifest itself in the Caribbean. While African and Indian women have separate cultural identities and oppressive experiences, both have the same experience of plantation slavery and indentureship, allowing for the possibility of a multicultural feminist framework. The first few women who identified as feminists in the 1970s did so largely as a result of their participation in nationalist movements, left wing-political groups, labour unions and the black power movements, among other things, regardless of the fact that these feminists largely arose as a reaction to the prevalent sexism of

the men in these organisations, their feminism did not become quite radical as their counterparts in America and Britain.

In cultures still rebounding from a colonial authority, where race and class were closely intertwined in the political, economic and social hierarchies, this can only be attributed to the fact that black men were clearly a part of the oppressed group. These women were, however, often members of an emergent Black and Indian-educated urban middle class. According to critics, the majority of the women in the Caribbean feminist movement are well-educated, middle class and urban. A European idea of class as a status conferred at birth and hence which regulates and governs and allows (or prevents) certain possibilities and experiences.

Class is a major issue in terms of participation in the feminist movement. Babb, a lower-class woman from Barbados once stated in a CAFRA meeting that it's the question of 'survival'. Since women like Babb are primary breadwinners, it's difficult for them to "engage in theoretical debate, mobilization, lobbying and group demonstration" (Baksh-Sooden 1998, 81) for the core issue of women. Collaboration building is required for Caribbean feminism to succeed. There is an urgent need for collaboration and networking between different women organisations of different races and ethnicity, political parties, government, NGOs and civil society at large. Despite the fact that feminism, in theory, promotes inclusivity, local feminist politics have failed to do so. Afro-Caribbean women have historically made up the majority of CAFRA with Indo-Caribbean women in the minority. They had no link or proper connections with impoverished indigenous women. Another minority includes working-class women from all races/ethnicities. The modes and spaces of organisation available to Indian and Afro-Caribbean women differ due to geography and other reasons related to variances in patriarchal authority patterns; cultural expectations of these women differ despite several parallels and affinities between them. Additionally, there

are several inconsistencies and contradictions in both groups of women. The colonial and post-colonial histories of the Caribbean divide the construction of identity and citizenship, and the ways in which they were constructed must be understood to analyse women's movements' involvement in this context.

The Red Thread Women's Organisation was founded in Guyana in 1986 to promote inter-ethnic cooperation by emphasising that race is not a deterrent to discussion and cooperation. Because of cultural variations and differences in home organisation, African women were better able to benefit from Red Thread's chances. Indo-Guyanese members were less likely to take part in activities that required them to spend lengthy periods of time away from villages overnight. Because of their lack of education, they cited security concerns, the necessity to oversee female children and their residences, and the fact that these tasks took up valuable time that could be used to generate money (Reddock 2007, 20). Women's organisations, on the other hand, are rarely recognised or praised for their efforts in this area. The anti-racist initiatives of women's organisations do not reach the general populace because of financial and human resource limits.

For example, CAFRA has been chastised for failing to appropriately represent Indo-Caribbean women. After attending the third general meeting in Guyana in 1993, Rosanne Kanhai, an Indo-Trinidadian member, published a letter to CAFRA news criticising the organisation for "not reacting to the needs of Indian women" and "not enticing them to its membership". She mentioned that there were only a few Indo-Caribbean ladies at the gathering and "there were no expressions of Indian culture at the Cultural Evening" (as cited in Mehta 2004, 96). During the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Caribbean feminism resurfaced, issues of race and ethnicity were also prominent. The appeal for Black Power and Black consciousness reverberated throughout the Caribbean at this time. This period was also characterized by social unrest on different fronts such as Marxist, socialist and other left

movements, African National liberation efforts; and few other Asian and Latin American social movements. Not surprisingly, many of the women who later emerged as leaders and representatives of the new women's movement would arise out of the socialist and left movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

One of the key elements that resulted in the formation of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) was the tension between the supremacy of 'class' or 'sex'. Many of the group's original members were dissatisfied with their experiences in leftist political parties and organisations. While these organizations claimed to support women's equality, they were actually patriarchal structures with strong hierarchies and few women in positions of leadership. Feminist ideas were regarded as 'bourgeois', foreign and so 'irrelevant' and possibly divisive in these areas. At the turn of the twentieth century, the growth of Pan-African movements in the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora provided one framework for such women to become involved in social and political organisations. However, it goes to credit the recent work of Patricia Mohammed and Rawwida Baksh Sooden for bringing the issue of Indo-Caribbean women to the fore.

Summary: Discrimination based on gender is illegal and a breach of civil and human rights in most nations, but discrimination based on sexual behaviours and identities are still conceivable in many jurisdictions due to legal injunctions that criminalises homosexuality, prostitution and other sexual activities. As a result, sexual difference is deeply engraved as semiautonomous and different from gender in Caribbean society. The representation of female sexual desire and agency is not a central subject matter in the literature; the research is predominantly male-centred in this regard. Because of the significant cultural and moral stigmas around sexuality in Caribbean nations and communities, it may be difficult to discuss the issue openly, especially for and by women. Young women aren't given the tools they need to engage in sexual activity in a safe and healthy way. Only in religious and moral terms

of criticism or, at towards the extreme, with obscene insinuations, do they hear about sex and sexuality from others. The studies cited and discussed above illustrate the importance of women's sexual agency in the matters of economic concerns, which supports the premise that women's sexual autonomy is linked to their economic well-being.

In recent years, however, notions of heterosexuality as the normative sexuality in Caribbean countries have been extensively questioned and criticised. Such critiques emphasise the intricacies of masculinity and femininity that challenge hegemonic sex and gender constructs. Moreover, research and studies on Indian women's cultural activities in the 'Matikor' tradition and Chutney music add to the debate, despite the fact that much of the literature focuses on African Caribbean people. In these studies, femininity and womanhood is linked to sexual liberty and agency, as well as to women's resistance to heteropatriarchy. It is imperative to question the normative heterosexuality in the Caribbean, not just for admitting same-sex relationships but also for comprehending the nature of sexuality itself. The majority of attention in studies of Indian-Caribbean communities was on history when indentureship provided unprecedented sexual liberties for women. At the same time, colonialism and patriarchy worked to restrict and delimit their sexual desires. Analysis of music, dance and performances is dominated by debates of Indian and African -Caribbean female sexual autonomy and desire.

Chapter 4

The study of Shani Mootoo's Novels: *Cereus Blooms at Night, Valmiki's Daughter* and *He Drown She in the Sea*.

In this chapter, we have tried to analyse Shani Mootoo's three critically acclaimed novels: *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008) and *He Drown She in the Sea* (2005). Our investigation of her works pertains to understanding gender and sexuality through her novels in the larger context of the Caribbean. The Caribbean is a highly conservative society despite being home to many ethnicities and races of the world. Shani Mootoo's writings have centred around the concepts of gender and sexuality including queer sexuality which forms the cornerstone of her writings. Not only that, race, ethnicity, diasporic consciousness and the question of identity and belonging are the factors that make her works an overwhelming force in the understanding of the present-day Caribbean. We have chosen these three aforementioned novels of Shani Mootoo for these novels pivot around the issues of queer sexuality, gender and identity and what implications they have in the Caribbean society. *Cereus Blooms at Night* is a powerful indictment of Caribbean society for the dreadful nature of sexual violence that has been on the rise in the Caribbean since many decades. Also, the novel raises the questions of queer identity and their marginalisation in a Caribbean society. *Valmiki's Daughter* deals with the issue of closeted queer identity and their acceptance in the community they belong to. *He Drown She in the Sea* centres around a heterosexual affair. The novel also explores the dynamic of gender and class operating in a patriarchal society that forecloses the possibility of even a heterosexual union.

Shani Mootoo was born in Dublin (Ireland) in the year 1957 to Trinidadian parents. At a very young age, she relocated to Vancouver (Canada). She presently resides in Toronto, Canada. Mootoo showed a knack for drawing, painting and writing at a very young age. Her parents encouraged and supported her. She is a graduate in Fine Arts, from the University of Western Ontario in the year 1980. She completed her M.A. in English from the University of Guelph in 2010. She is an acclaimed writer and visual artist. The thematic preoccupations of Mootoo have chiefly been gender, sexuality, identity, and race in her writings and in her visual art. Her works have been informed by her own experiences as a queer person in Trinidad and later in Canada. She published her first work, *Out in the Main Street* which is a collection of short stories, in 1993. Her first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, was published in 1996 by Press Gang. *Cereus Blooms at Night* was critically acclaimed and also got longlisted for Booker Prize in 1997. In 2002, she published a collection of her poetry, *The Predicament of Or*. Her novel, *He drown She in the Sea*, published in 2005, also got longlisted for International Dublin Literary Award in 2007. *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), another novel, was longlisted for the 2009 Scotia Bank Giller Prize. Her other novel, *Moving Sideways like a Crab* was published in 2014. Her latest novel *Polar Vortex* got published in 2020. The extensive oeuvre of Mootoo in quite a short period shows she is no stranger to literary fame and accolades. Her beautiful prose style lends the Caribbean the magical charm that it deserves.

There are very few writers who have written about the issue of sexuality in the Caribbean. Shani Mootoo, among them, champions the literary representation of sexuality in her works. Evelyn O' Callaghan remarks that female sexuality is either buried in secret or shame in the works of West Indian prose writers. It has a negative impact on women's economic, social and psychological well-being in the majority of cases (as cited in Mehta 2004, 192). Shani Mootoo, Lelawattie Manoo-Rahming, and Ramabai Espinet are the few

names who have contested Indian sexuality in more dynamic ways. They have explored the dynamics of female sexuality not only as sexual repression and control but also as sexual agency, recovery and repossession (Mehta 2004, 193).

The collusion between ‘Brahmanic’ prescriptions for Hindu women and the ideals of Victorian morality led to the erosion of the sexual agency of Indian women. They became the victims of the patriarchal structures in their families and colonial mandates of sexual control. The journey across the Caribbean, poetically dubbed as “kalapani” by Brinda Mehta, afforded them some sense of economic and sexual mobility, free from the conscription of ideal womanhood of Hindu Indian women. Sex-ratio imbalance at the plantation as well as their financial independence (however small) enabled them to be their own decision-makers during the beginning of the indenture system. Consequently, Indian women in the Caribbean openly flouted “Brahmanic monogamy”; chose their sexual partners independently and even changed them at will. Patricia Mohammed says Indian men were at the lowest rung of the social ladder, with white masculinist patriarchy at the top, creole patriarchy in the middle and Indian patriarchy at the bottom (Mehta 2004, 193-194). No wonder Indian men felt emasculated and weak during the indentureship period. There were protests in the homeland, India, criticizing Indian indentureship and how Indian women were losing their ideals at the start of the 20th century encouraged Indian men in the Caribbean to reconsolidate the patriarchal system. The reconsolidation of patriarchy not only gave them sexual and social control over women but also helped them assert their distinctive ethnicity- a cultural signifier in Trinidad and other Caribbean regions with a significant Indian presence.

Violence became the means to control women's sexual and otherwise transgressions and justified in the name of preserving cultural distinctiveness. Espinet states that Indo-Caribbean women have really come forward and not bearing with the “abuses” and “violence” they used to in the past. That may have aggravated violence against them because

they are refusing to abide by the traditional gender roles, making their free choices (in Mehta 2004, 198).

Cereus Blooms at Night (1996)

Cereus Blooms at Night is the first novel by Shani Mootoo published in 1996. The book is remarkable for its treatment of the themes of queer identity, incest and violence. The story of the novel is hugely traumatizing as evidenced in the character of Mala and deeply humanizing as witnessed in the nature of Tyler. An admixture of anti-realism and historical fiction with its somewhat gothic protagonist Mala at the centre, the novel touches the raw nerves of the readers and asks the questions which we deliberately choose to ignore.

Cereus Blooms at Night is remarkably rich in the texture of woven words through which it tells quite an unusual story of an eccentric Mala Ramchandin. It tells the story of the cane fields of Lantanacamara where East Indians lived and their only hope for the future (so that their generations may escape the predicament of labouring in the cane fields) was their conversion to Christianity, thereby affording their children's education and aspire for their better lives. Against this backdrop, the ordinary yet unordinary story unfolds of Mala who suffers incestual rapes by her father after her mother and aunt elope from the island in order to be together as lovers. We also get to see the rumour-milling populace of Lantanacamara who seem to be interested in Mala's conviction which sadly for them, could not happen. However, what conspicuously emerges is their apathy and heartlessness toward the suffering of Mala. The island abounds in queerness yet homophobia writ large on the face of Lantanacamara. The transgender Tyler and Otoh, the gay Sarah and Lavinia, the queer Mala in the life she led as a recluse in her wild yard which teemed with insects, reptiles and abundant wild creepers, shrubs and plants. The struggles of Tyler with his identity, and his reception at the hands of people are in contrast with Otoh who is blissfully transgender and is remarkably accepted by his family. All these story-threads ultimately tell the story of love,

suffering, violence and trauma and the eventual metaphorical redemption towards the end signalled by “The cereus will surely bloom within days” (Mootoo 1996, 249) and Tyler’s hope that his words catch the eyes of Asha Ramchandin and she pays Mala Ramchandin, her sister, a visit.

Mala Ramchandin arrives at the Paradise Alms House after she is acquitted by judge Walter Bissey since he could not see any evidence to prosecute her for murder as charged by the police. Tyler, one of the nurses at the Alms House, finally gets Mala under his care as no other nurses wanted to tend to Mala given the seriousness of the circumstances around her. The story unfolds through the narration of Tyler which he happens to collect from Mala herself, Ambrose, Otoh, his cigarette-smoking Nana and a few others. Mr and Mrs Thoroughly are a missionary couple in Paradise working towards the conversion of East Indians to Christianity. They take the well-being of Chandin into their hands. Chandin also proves to be a model convert as hoped by Thoroughlys. However, one of the major twists that come in the story is when Chandin starts developing romantic feelings for Thoroughly’s daughter, Lavinia. Mr Thoroughly, realizing the situation, makes it clear to Chandin that he must never think about Lavinia in any romantic sense as they are brother and sister to each other. After this, Chandin outwardly suppresses his feelings for Lavinia but nourishes his desire for her in his heart. The story progresses when Lavinia finally returns to Paradise from Shivering Wetlands and Chandin is already married to Sarah with two daughters, Mala and Asha. Lavinia starts frequenting Chandin’s home to meet with Sarah, her lover. Ironically, Chandin finally learns of it on his outing with family and Lavinia to the beach. The next day, Lavinia and Sarah elope leaving Mala and Asha behind. Things take a turn for worse from here as Chandin starts raping her daughters, Mala and Asha. Mala takes care of Asha and goes in when Chandin calls for Asha. Eventually, Asha runs away. Years pass away like this and one day Mala’s childhood friend Boyie/Ambrose gets back to Paradise after completing

his education as a trained entomologist on scholarship from Shivering Wetlands. It is revealed that Mala and Ambrose are deeply in love, and Chandin soon finds out about it. In his rage, he brutally rapes Mala afterwards. The very next morning, Chandin again catches Ambrose meeting with Mala, and a scuffle breaks out. Ambrose runs away from the situation in fear and shame, while Mala, in her brutal rage, slams the door repeatedly on Chandin's head, leaving him lifeless. Later, she drags him and locks him in the basement. It can be inferred from the story that Chandin dies slowly there and is left to rot and decay. Towards the end, it is learned that Asha has written to Mala several times urging her to escape Chandin but none of her letters has actually reached Mala. By telling the story, Tyler hopes that the words will eventually reach Asha, and she will reach out to her sister Mala.

Cereus Blooms at Night is a severe indictment and interrogation of systemic violence against women/women's bodies within the confines of a household. The recurring rape of Mala in Chandin's family by her own father exposes the hypocrisy of the 'respectability' of a Hindu family. It has serious repercussions in the form of mental and psychological damage it incurs on Mala, the protagonist of the novel. The society of Paradise, Lantanacamara, in which the novel is set, takes vicarious pleasures in the miseries of Mala. When Mala gets shifted to Paradise Alms, people feel cheated of the opportunity to have her punished. The people of Paradise become a typical example of the mindset of people that sees a woman as a criminal even when she is a victim of sexual violence. Most people of Lantanacamara were "disgruntled" about the release of Mala. "They felt cheated of the rare opportunity to have a woman criminal in their midst" (Mootoo 1996, 8). Even without enough evidence and having knowledge of mala's victimhood, they believed "that a crime was committed and that she was its perpetrator" (8). The people of Lantanacamara knew of the goings-on in Chandin's household. Yet, it never intervened to protect the victim. It lacked empathy for what all Mala had gone through, it still wanted to see Mala punished by the law. The incestual violence

against Mala may not have the explicit sanctioning by society but by not doing anything to prevent it, the community became almost an accomplice in the act. The secrecy and silence of Chandin's household consolidate patriarchal/incestual violence at the cost of gross injury to Mala's physical and mental health. The novel also questions the accepted definition, if there is any, of 'normal' sexuality. Tyler, a transgender, while coming to terms with his own queer self, wonders about "what was natural and what perverse" (48) and believed that the story of Chandin Ramchandin made him even more confused about understanding his own identity. The reconciliation between the society sanctioned gender-roles and the unmitigated queer self is a hard thing to achieve in the scenario where homophobia is rampant while patriarchal-incestual violence on women's bodies is talked under the breath and nobody does nothing, as a society, to address this gross violation of human rights, and women's right in particular.

The novel also depicts instances of sexual repression and how one's race becomes a major deterrent in seeking interracial partners. Chandin's desire for Lavinia got thwarted by Reverend Thoroughly, Lavinia's father. Reverend who was also Chandin's foster father, and educated Chandin as one of his own, rebukes Chandin for having desires for Lavinia. Mootoo describes how Reverend firmly asks Chandin in clear terms that he can never think about Lavinia as his partner. We see that racial superiority is foremost in his mind despite all the hypocrisy of social service and equality of Reverend. "The Reverend walked to his desk... You cannot, you must not have desire for your sister, Lavinia... Otherwise..." (37). This leads to Chandin's bitter humiliation, "He stayed outside holding his stomach... it cramped unbearably" (37). For all the pretensions of Chandin as the Reverend's adopted son, the hypocrisy of it gets untangled. Chandin could never be a racial equal in the Reverend's eyes, however educated and cultured he might be. Chandin realized his racial inferiority and his disadvantageous economic condition; he lacked the actual conditions of gentility that were required to gain full access to the Reverend's household. In his frustration, he married Sarah,

a woman from his own ethnic background. We see Sarah and Chandin slipping into their respective gender roles as defined by patriarchy. The patriarchal system by laying down social obligations for both men and women in marriage also delimits them in narrow confinements. Tyler as he constantly strives to understand his queer self often wonders about “gender and sex roles” (47) as prescribed by the patriarchal heterosexual society. These roles baffled him and confuses him about his own sexuality even more.

Chandin seeks to revenge on his wife Sara for her betrayal through his daughters, Pohpoh and Asha for the satisfaction of his sexual appetite, within the secrecy of home, away from the prying eyes of the public. The patriarchal society though poses as protector of women but more often than not, it reduces itself into predator even within the confines of household preying upon children, sometimes its own. This is further reinforced by the culture of silence that enables domestic crimes. In a patriarchal system, women become silent victims. Pohpoh is characterized by fear of her father who repeatedly rapes her for years. While his sexual and physical crimes against his daughter were deemed to be the natural result of the humiliation he felt after his wife left him with her lesbian partner. This attitude of the public in some way justifies violence against women as a way to protect oneself and cope with one’s own humiliation. The society of Lantanacamara, despite having the knowledge of Chandin’s wrong-doings either reserved itself and contributed to rumours (which were true in this case) or “took pity” (195) for Chandin. He was once the revered “teacher of the gospel... to his own child... suffered some madness... to everyone, Chandin was Sir (195).” We see that patriarchy shields men from harsh punishments, or any penalty, for that matter, even when they commit the grossest of crimes. As Chandin’s crime is made akin to “some madness”, it is clear how patriarchy renders women disempowered, victimised and completely invisible.

The novel is remarkable for how queerness is negotiated in the otherwise conservative space of Lantanacamara. The novel abounds in queer characters affording us a glimpse to see their daily struggles as they go on with their lives adjusting and negotiating their queer selves. Tyler is biologically a man, but he is effeminate and not very 'strong' as may be expected of him as a man. He is the only male nurse in the whole of Lantanacamara, as nursing is a profession generally considered more suitable for women. Because of his effeminate nature and queer dressing sense, he is mocked and jeered at the Paradise Alms House where he works. Tyler wants to be treated like "nothing more than ordinary" (22). Because of his queerness, he is confused about gender-sex roles which he had tried to shake off in his younger days. He leaves Lantanacamara to study abroad so that his queerness "might be either invisible or of no consequence" (47). Tyler wonders if his Nana would accept and love him despite his queer personality, "who was neither properly man nor woman but some in-between, unnamed thing" (71). He shares a rare camaraderie with Mala, who has also been rejected by the world. The other queer character in the novel is Otoh /Ambrosia. Born a girl, Ambrosia transforms into Otoh at a very young age. By sheer hard work and exercise, Ambrosia turns into "an angular, hard-boiled creature." We see total acceptance of Otoh by his parents. Otoh is generally regarded as a boy in his neighbourhood. He is even dating a girl, Mavis. But his queer identity keeps him alert and cautious. At one point, he thinks that as long as he kept his "belted trousers" on, he has nothing to worry about.

Mala provides Tyler with a sense of belonging when he is asked to take care of her. Mala arrives at the Alms House after a lifetime of abuse and neglect. Like Tyler, she longs for a place to call home. Tyler instinctively bonded with Mala because he felt a 'shared queerness' with her which doesn't make them acceptable in society. Although a lot of queer people do live in Lantanacamara, they are not openly accepted. Otoh's mother reflects on the state of Caribbean society when she says that it's not only her daughter who is the only queer

person in the entire Lantanacamara. Almost everyone here desire to become “somebody or something else” (237-238). Mala and Tyler shared a deep bonding; Mala’s total acceptance of Tyler’s queer personality is clear when she steals a nurse’s dress for Tyler and wants him to wear it. Tyler understands, then, that she knows his “nature” (76). Tyler feels so “extremely ordinary” (78) in that dress because Mala even failed to notice him. Tyler wanted people to understand him, not notice him and mock him for his ‘difference’.

Through *Cereus*, Mootoo has depicted what can be said as ‘queer-potentiality’ (Wallace 2018). It involves understanding the ways queer bodies integrate geographical, psychological and emotional aspects, is among the most intriguing findings to emerge from this particular use of queer potentiality (Wallace 2018, 62). The question of gender and sexuality elide and intertwine in the novel, bringing about the moment of queer realisation. Queerness is the basis that gives rise to the central conflict in the novel. Sarah and Lavinia had to elope from Lantanacamara so that they could be with each other. Their attempt to take Sarah’s children with them is thwarted resulting in decades-long sexual-incestual violence against Mala, the central character of the novel. Mala, though not queer sexually is ‘queer’ in her own ways. Years of sexual abuse at the hands of her father made her a recluse. She lost all her connections with the outside world the day Ambrose left her after their open confrontation with her father. She took refuge in nature and confined herself to her wild yard. She never spent a single night in her house after that fateful day. She even showed a hint of schizophrenia as she believed she has ‘Pohpoh’ (her own childhood self) to take care of whom she would protect at every cost.

The multi-layered narrative of *Cereus Blooms at Night* portrays how broken selves are reassembled. It's a metaphor for the sometimes-complicated, sometimes-confusing process of returning home. As a literary accomplishment, Mootoo's stories are more than that because of the profound conflicts surrounding sexuality in Caribbean societies. The intricate narrative of

Cereus Blooms at Night poses many questions about gender-sexual politics and how society and institutions act hand in glove with the mainstream against people who are at the margins. While interrogating the nature of sexuality and sexual violence, Mootoo asks her readers to understand how the line between public and private blurs making them a mutual accomplice “in the sexualized disciplining of women and the gendered politics of diaspora” (Wesling 2011, 663).

Valmiki's Daughter, 2008

Shani Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter* pivots around a family of Krishnu who is wealthy upper-class residents of San Fernando. Much of the crisis of the novel centres around the character of Valmiki and his elder daughter, Viveka (to whom the title alludes) as they try to grapple with their queer identity. Valmiki had had a son too, who died young, at the age of five. Viveka seems to be especially affected by the loss of her young brother; actually, at one point, she attempts to take his place by dressing like him in his childhood clothes. Viveka is approaching the end of her high school education and the beginning of her adulthood. Viveka berates her parents for not allowing her more latitude in her attire and extracurricular activities, despite the fact that she is already regarded as "mannish" by her mother.

Meanwhile, as the story progresses, we get to know that Valmiki has started an affair with a man, called, Saul, an African man. Devika, Valmiki's wife is aware of the relationship, yet, except for sly innuendos during fights with her husband, she keeps silent about it for the sake of her reputation and her family's. There are other sexual relationships, queer and otherwise, which Valmiki maintains. The novel propels forward on what turn Viveka's life will take given the fact that she resembles her father in terms of her sexual orientation. Viveka starts exploring her sexuality by having a sexual dalliance with her classmate Elliot. However, her true sexual identity is put to a severe test when Viveka starts her relationship with a French woman, Anick, wife of Nayan, son of a wealthy Trinidadian and a neighbour to

Valmiki's. Mootoo has portrayed the dilemma, confusion and predicament of being a queer person in a conservative society. All major characters have been shown struggling with their queer identity because of the society they are placed in. The society of San Fernando is overall a conservatively heterosexual society where homosexuality is considered a disgrace. The queer dilemma which we witness majorly in the character of Valmiki and Viveka ends in the suppression of their queerness, settling for partners against their natural orientation and leading a double life.

Valmiki is a reputable doctor who lives with his family in the affluent neighbourhood of Luminada Heights with his wife and two children. He is a closeted homosexual who is trapped in a situation of his own making. Valmiki has an ongoing affair with Saul, an African man, on the sly. For outward appearance, he frequently maintains affairs with white women in order to maintain the ruse of his 'normal' heterosexual orientation. During his medical study in Scotland, he loved a man, Tony Almiraz, but could not dare to pursue his love openly. He left Tony heartbroken and got married to Devika, a woman from a similar background. Ever since his marriage, he has been living a double life. Throughout the novel, Mootoo has depicted the situation of Valmiki who decides to live a double life because reputation and respectability meant a great deal to him. This was the thing he felt, if nothing else, he had in common with his wife Devika. He feels rather 'incompetent' in his role of husband and father. As a child, his father saw him as a "soft person" which made him ponder about fixing it. His hunting and his tinkering with the household repair were an effort to change himself so that he "was no longer the boss's too soft, mamsy-pamsy son" (Mootoo 2008, 39). He had affairs with many white women in order to show that he was a heterosexual man and not a man of homosexual orientation. But this facade kept gnawing at his heart. He desperately wished that his philandering should leak and result into such a scandal that his family throw him out so that he could be free. But then he would revise his

thought. He knew he always wanted to be likeable; he is deeply concerned with “appearances” and doing the “praiseworthy-thing” that he could never be free of it (42). His philandering had been a cover-up for hiding his true sexual identity and Valmiki was afraid of that.

Valmiki liked his eldest daughter, Viveka, for being bold, standing up to her mother for herself; for her desire to play volleyball. But, at the same time, he also dreaded Viveka playing sports for he had a concern that sports might confuse Viveka about her sexual orientation as it did to him (50). In his younger days, in order to hide his queer inclination, he went the extra mile to show his “manhood”. “He developed the affectation of spitting, velocity and distance becoming markers of his manhood. He launched, ... at school and in front of his parents, of noticing girls, commenting almost to the point of excess, sometimes with a lewdness that did not suit him” (55). For the sake of respectability in his Trinidadian society, he split up with Tony and came back home and got married to the first woman his parents bring to him. Before getting married, he made sure that he had had sex with Devika so that his courage might not drop in “his determination to marry her” (69). Valmiki never fell in love with Devika. Rather, he felt a certain sense of responsibility towards his wife, the mother of his children. Valmiki’s eldest daughter, Viveka, had her own struggles grappling with her sense of self and identity. When we first met her, we saw a tense atmosphere in her household because of her desire to play volleyball. Her mother Devika didn’t want Viveka to play volleyball for she thought sports would make Viveka more ‘mannish’ as Viveka was already lacking in feminine graces which her mother so beheld high. Devika always accused Valmiki of Viveka’s odd behaviour saying that Viveka took after him. Viveka felt exasperated that her mother thought she was “mannish”. She considered herself strong and dependable, unlike her mother, who had a servant at her disposal for everything, even holding

a small bag of groceries. She didn't believe that women should be dependent on their men.

She says to Vashti:

Do you see those women walking on the side of the highway with bundles on their heads and heavy bags on their either hand? They can't pay others to do it for them, but they are women and have no choice but to be strong. Tell me they are mannish! All this dependence we are taught is not natural. It is class-related. I don't know why it's admirable in our little claustrophobic world to be pretty, weak and so dependent (2008, 89-90).

The fate of Merle Bedi scared her. Merle Bedi was shunned by her family after, what appears, her sexual orientation became public knowledge. At one time, they had been friends. Merle Bedi was talented at piano playing. Merle likes Miss Seukeran. She feared when Merle confided her feelings for Miss Seukeran to her. Partly, because, she understood what that feeling was and that scared her. At school, she too liked a teacher, Miss Russell. She chided Merle for her feelings for Miss Seukeran. She felt her own feelings were odd and not in accordance with the norms of society. That feeling made her dread coming out in her true self. Devika wanted Viveka to be properly groomed as a lady. She didn't like Viveka's ambitiousness in terms of her career. High-career women lacked social graces in her opinion. She wanted a girl to be groomed for marriage purposes. But the fact was marriage never interested Viveka (Mootoo 2008, 101). In her confused state with her sexuality, she tried going out with Elliot. At the slightest opportunity, Elliot would want to make out with Viveka. In the beginning, she felt certain sexual arousal with Elliot but later felt like "a bulldozer" had damaged and crushed a part of herself. With Elliot, she tried to 'do better' but she felt no connection to Elliot. "She wished it were different. But it simply wasn't" (106). She also had a different 'self' to her. At times, she would imagine she was a boy called 'Vince'. In her imagination, Vince was a small "blonde-haired boy" (110) who was capable and strong. She had a strong memory of Vince walking in on her father when he had been with Pia Moretti in an, apparently, sexual position. She knew the memory was powerful but

as she grew older, she wasn't quite sure if the memory was all true and not her imagination. For her queer self, volleyball meant more than volleyball (115).

With all altercations happening at Valmiki's home involving, Devika, Viveka and himself, Mootoo introduces another queer character in the novel, Anick. Anick, the wife of Nayan, was the son of a wealthy businessman Mr Ram, owner of Rimpty's chocolates. Anick is a French woman who came to live with Nayan in Trinidad after her marriage. She is a superb beauty and the entire San Fernando talks about it. As it turns out Anick and Viveka started liking each other. There were already a lot of altercations happening between Nayan and Anick. Anick in a new place felt lost. She wasn't used to a closed claustrophobic life. One thing which drew her to Nayan was his cocoa plantation. She wanted to explore new landscapes, nature, art and books. But she wasn't getting the freedom to roam around as she liked. Anick confides in Valmiki, "...I say I want to learn to drive. He say, no, is not safe, and I say, but your mother she drive. He say is not safe for foreign Frenchwoman who do not speak properly. Everything I hear is about pretty. I wish to take a knife and cut my face" (181).

The fights between Nayan and Anick became more frequent. He started referring to her queer personality and how she was lucky to have a man like Nayan. He also cared about what other people would think if they got to know of the queer personality of Anick. While answering Nayan in a fight, we get to see Anick's dilemma as a queer person: "...I cannot help it who I love. I do not love a man or a woman. I love this person or that one. And when I love that person nobody else exist" (231). The final act that forecloses any possibility for Viveka to express her true self was Viveka agreeing to a heterosexual marriage with Trevor. In the conservative society of San Fernando, she knew she would never be allowed to be her true self. She didn't want to be either Merle Bedi or Anick. And for that, if she were to get into a heterosexual marriage, she would. But having agreed to get into a heterosexual

marriage, she knew a disaster awaited her. She could feel her queerness even more strongly. Her true queer self was bigger than anything she had known in her life. “It was Merle Bedi’s hunger” (376). Going against her own true identity would only result in “doom for her. But due to the homophobic society of Sand Fernando, she knew she had but no choice but to crush her true self. “She was determined not to become Merle Bedi” (376).

The ending of the novel with Valmiki’s musings is somewhat philosophical. Whatever our identity is, we can’t expect the world to come up with solutions to our problems just like that. A queer identity indeed had more struggles in society than a heterosexual person. But it is always for an individual to find the way out. Valmiki mused that the times had changed now. Viveka could have come out and done the thing that was right for her. He thought, “In his day he had had no choice, but she had choices...” (392). Throughout the novel, we see that Valmiki wanted that he could let Viveka, however, she wanted to be. He didn’t want Viveka to end up in his position: trapped. But as it turns out, Viveka chose the way her father had chosen over twenty years ago. The novel ends on a sombre note: “He had no advice and his glass was empty” (392). In the Anglophone Caribbean, the issue of same-sex relationships is highly controversial. When it comes to accounts of sexual dissent, discovery, and disguise, only the “Boom Bye Bye” dancehall’ controversy and its aggravation of the already intense homophobia portrayed in the songs of some singers can equal the dramatic and frequent harsh social soundscapes. Activist groups, health professionals, and members of the general public often challenge viewpoints taken in church and state congregations on the morality and legality of sexual activity. These debates mainly focus on queer individuals rather than the subject of queer/multiple desires. Instead of contesting heteronormativity, they challenge homophobia. They don’t aim at the transformation of society as a whole; they aim at social inclusion. Mootoo has described how it is to live in the Caribbean and how challenging it could be to find love for its queer subjects

in the intricate and almost confusing lives of the Caribbean. Mootoo pushes against the margins of 'normal' and what is generally in sight and knowable in the Caribbean landscape and its diverse populace. The queerness presented here in *Valmiki's Daughter* threadbare the issue of being queer; the inner turbulence in the characters marked by a non-resolving of the issues poses questions that are difficult to answer.

The novel interferes with our ideas about sexual interactions and lust. Although heterosexual and homosexual identities appear to be defining, they are shown to be unsuitable for describing the true nature of human want, desire, and socio-sexual attachments. It turns the queer Trinidad even more so and complicates our definitions and understanding of sexual identities. There is an undoing of the widely accepted perception that the nuclear family with a man at the helm in a heteronormative marriage is the most gratifying and firm arrangement of habitation and that homosexuality threatens social cohesiveness. The novel stands out for portraying the queer dilemma for their right to love whoever they want and how difficult it is for them to embrace their choice openly and without shame in a society which is not accepting of queer sexuality. In spite of Viveka's acceptance of a marriage that, she understands, will not satisfy her sexually, we do not regard this heteronormative resolution as normative closure. For readers, this has led to the questioning of the binaries such as normal/perverse, hetero/homo, inside/ outside and so on and whether these categories can adequately describe the enmeshed socio/sexual psyche of ours. It is essential, however, to note that *Valmiki's Daughter* revels in the aesthetics of erotic, even while acknowledging the influence of social systems on the development of affected lives. Rather than directly challenging heteronormative social institutions, queer desire has the possibility to transcend them. The novel realistically depicts the incompleteness of love between same-sex and how prohibitory social structures aggravate queer difficulties.

Shani Mootoo's previous novels are set in fictional locations: *Cereus Blooms at Night* is set in the imaginary island of Paradise, Lantanacamara, and *He Drown She in the Sea* is set in an imaginary place in the Caribbean called Guanagaspar. *Valmiki's Daughter*, however, is set in a real place, San Fernando, Trinidad. The realistic description which starts at the outset of the book continues to many pages and is rich in visual, audio and olfactory descriptions that enable the novel to anchor itself in the reality of present times. The opening of *Valmiki's Daughter* gives a vividness to the landscape Mootoo portrays; Mootoo writes: "IF YOU STAND ON ONE OF THE TRIANGULAR TRAFFIC ISLANDS AT THE top of Chancery Lane just in front of the San Fernando General Hospital ... you would get the best, most all-encompassing views of the town" (Mootoo 2008, 7). Graham Huagan states that this textual mapping of the geography may bring to light the "flaws or discrepancies" that is inherent "in the process of mimetic representation" (as cited in Helff and Dalal 2012, 56).

In the realistic setting of San Fernando, we come face to face with the fictional reality of its people. For all its (Caribbeans') claim to heterogeneity in terms of various, races, cultures and languages, a lot of Caribbean countries still have strict laws against the LGBTQ community. *Valmiki's Daughter* presents a vivid picture of that claustrophobic reality of the Caribbean as people go about their daily life in the dreamy landscape of Trinidad, their sense of true self/ identity remains suppressed, closeted, and even shattered.

He Drown She in the Sea (2005)

He Drown She in the Sea is a tale of heterosexual childhood romance, the loss of love, the gaining of love, eventually, and the rambling difficulties due to class differences even when the ethnicity is the same. Shani Mootoo has set this novel partly on the fictitious island of Guanagaspar and partly in Vancouver, Canada. The protagonists, Harry St. George and Rose Sangha, knew little, growing up side by side, about the social structures that operate in the Caribbean which would pull them apart eventually. They grew up playing games and caring

for each other rather deeply. Mootoo has depicted the Caribbean society of Indians where intricate politics of class operate in rather vicious ways. Unlike Mootoo's other works, this novel focuses on heterosexual love with the question of identity and class difference at the centre. Unlike *Cereus Blooms at Night* in which physical violence is deployed to silence women, Mootoo depicts, in this novel, how effectively social institutions can do the same. The protagonists are struggling with the past which has a kind of deep bearing on the present and the protagonists' fate depends on how they navigate it to get what they desire the most. Another important aspect of the novel is a depiction of class differences between various East Indians as well as differences between East Indians and Africans in the Caribbean. The fictitious Guanagaspar suggests the historical reality of Indians and Africans living side by side in the British-governed island of Trinidad and Guyana. The novel had dream sequences in the opening and closing parts which lend not only flexibility but also a magical charm to it. The present happenings are the outcome of what happened in Guanagaspar years ago.

He Drown She in the Sea is the story of childhood love and eventual separation due to differences in social status and human agency, particularly women's agency, that ultimately resolves the story in the end. It is also the story of women trapped in patriarchy, unable to exercise their wishes, longings and desires. Patriarchy silences women in both covert and overt ways. Rose Sangha becomes Rose Shem Bihar after marriage because she could not dare to go against the diktats of her father by marrying below her social station. Quite late in Rose's life, after having two children with Shem Bihar, who are adults now, she feels herself falling into a wonderland, after reigniting her romance with her childhood friend, Harry. Her 'second chance' at life as she says to Piyari, her domestic help:

Who would have thought, Piyari, that so late in life a person could get another chance? Look: I have two adult children, and with no warning whatsoever, in what should be the downward slope of life, a light light up, brighter than the sun, to point me in a whole new direction (Mootoo 2005, 7).

She feels the utmost pain that after all she had done for her family, her children, and ‘boss’ (her husband), her desire never mattered. Her mother also used ‘boss’ to address her husband, and so did Rose. The use of the word ‘boss’ as the address for their husbands shows the power dynamics operating in a patriarchal household. Rose feels deeply about how her family, not even her children have ever “bothered to ask me what I think or what I feel” (8). We know that East Indian communities in the Caribbean lived by clear-cut gender-defined roles. The figure of the husband, the patriarch, towers above all in the family. In the novel, we see that Rose’s father’s authority is absolute. Even though he is having an affair with another woman, Rose’s mother, Mrs Sangha does not dare confront him and has the audacity to leave her husband. Social reputation for Indian women in a patriarchal society is defined by living with a husband and not living separately as a divorced or separated woman. Rose’s life also got cut into the same mould. So much so that Rose’s life resembles her own mother’s life. Both refer to their husband as “boss”. The word in itself contains authority where other people simply become subordinates. The relationship of husband and wife is considered equal in modern society. But in a patriarchal Indian society husband is the supreme authority in all matters of the household and outside. Given the situation, Rose couldn't think of getting married according to her choice. She ended up marrying Shem Behar, the attorney general of Guanagaspar. Not only that, she was celebrated in magazines and newspapers as an ideal Indian wife and mother whose own desires and ambitions didn’t matter much. Her ‘children came first’ and she “stood behind her husband, no matter what.”

It said that in spite of her money and her position as the A.G.’s wife, she was down-to-earth and wore no airs, traits most noticeable in her casual and gentle manner of speaking... the article joked that Caribbean husbands were not the easiest men for wives to put up with, even when that husband was the attorney general, yet Rose Bihar had never been heard to contradict, even in jest, her husband” (252-253).

We get a glimpse into the painful world of women, even women of affluence who have everything in terms of wealth, glamour and popularity, who feel so deeply that they

don't have an identity of their own and their wishes and desires are never aloof from what is good for their families.

The story's denouement is foreshadowed in Rose's words, "I am not stepping backward- I cannot go back to the way it used to be. Is time for a fresh start, in truth" (8). She has been the "exemplary wife" for over twenty years but she is not going to take more. It's enough for her because she is "finished with exemplary" (10). While confiding in Piyari about her feelings for Harry and the time she had spent with Harry over the summer in Vancouver, she says, "Piyari-girl, I come so accustomed to accommodating everyone else's wishes that I didn't even know I myself had desire" (17). Mootoo has depicted the notion of queerness and difference not in terms of sexuality but how differences operate in society which rather constitutes the notion of queerness. Queerness in terms of sexuality has only been mentioned once, in passing, with reference to Cassie, Rose's daughter, that she might be spending her time with her female friend.

Harry is strange in the context of Rose's affluent family because he grew up poor in the village of Raleigh, predominantly a black fishing village while Harry's ethnicity is East Indian. Harry finds his white female friend, Kay, strange for her assertiveness which he wasn't familiar with in the women of his native place, Guanagaspar. The queerness of belonging and identity is not only sexual. Mootoo gives her own reading of the Indian diaspora where she posits that queerness is one of the essential characteristics of Indian diaspora. In her essay on becoming an Indian star boy, Mootoo writes:

I suspect that once an Indian from India stepped foot on one of those boats in the nineteenth century, bound for the islands of the British empire, in leaving behind language, family ties, community, the village, tradition in general, very specific religious rites, he or she was transitioning into a queerness of no return (as cited in Taylor 2011, 69).

Harry's father, Seudath, an Indian by ethnicity, was abandoned as a child, found and brought up by an African couple, Uncle Mako and Tante Eugenie. Dolly, an Indian woman,

Harry's mother, got attracted to Seudath because he was nothing like the 'Indian' she was familiar with. He was brash and bold and "more like black people". Even Harry had been commented upon at many places that he had taken after his father. Dolly, despite being close to Tante Eugenie and Uncle Mako, the old African couple, she maintained a sort of distance in the fishing village of Raleigh in order to preserve her ethnic identity. She even moved to town and got married to an Indian man, Persad for the betterment of Harry's life. Although, affectionate towards uncle Mako and Tante Eugenie, Dolly maintains that "they were different." Despite the care and love Uncle Mako and Tante Eugene bestowed on Dolly and her son Harry, Dolly's ethnic pride always got in the way of her feeling oneness with the old African couple. For her, they were "different" and she didn't want Harry "to grow up boldface like Uncle Mako" (Mootoo 2005, 122). On the contrary, the class difference between Dolly and Mrs Sangha, her employer, didn't change their identity in Dolly's eyes. Dolly considered Mrs Sangha and herself of the same Indian identity brought across the kalapani in the same boat. She says to Harry:

They different, son, but they not better than you or me... all of we cross Black water, sometimes six and sometimes seven months side by side, in the same stinking boat, to come here. Same-same. All of we... how, child, how out of those beginnings some end up higher than others and some end up lower, tell me this? Well, God alone know. We come here same time, same boat, same handling. They not better than we, and that you should remember (178).

In the novel, the difference operates at many levels: in terms of class, gender and ethnicity. But all the time Mootoo has tried to show how the boundaries between them blur when we see them operating in the microcosm of human interaction and social relations. In Canada, Harry is an outsider because he is an immigrant from a different race. Still, he managed to educate and establish himself as a professional landscape designer. He convinces Rose of their relationship and why it wasn't impossible in Vancouver as it was in Trinidad. The status difference between Rose and Harry seems to have elided in Canada.

Regarding gender, we see how Harry admires Kay for taking charge of the canoe and finds it even 'intimate'. Towards the novel's end, we see that Rose breaks from her assigned gender role of a dependent wife in a patriarchal household, when she takes charge of her own situation. She eventually shows grit and fortitude and breaks away from the stranglehold of married life to be with her lover, by faking her drowning in the sea. "Rose he once knew and would have done everything for has turned into a confident, take-charge kind of woman. She feels foreign to him" (317). *Mootoo* has shown how differences operate in a multicultural yet orthodox society of the Caribbean and how identity is thwarted at various levels, even without weighing in different sexual orientations, other differences matter as much. Also, *Mootoo* has portrayed that individual will can make the difference; the 'difference' could be negotiated and may be made less severe by individual will and human agency.

The novel speaks about how women's identity or rather their desire and sexual identities are still policed by patriarchal institutions in the form of marriage and husband. When Dolly's family learned about her pregnancy, they thought of Dolly as the bringer of shame upon the family. She was stoned and chased away by the family. The two friends, Rose and Harry, who were inseparable were split apart by the patriarchy represented by Rose's father. Coincidentally, that's the time when we see American troops building bridges and roads to encamp military garrison in Guanagaspar during World War II. The novel critiques the hegemony of a nation and the institute of patriarchy that establishes its hegemony on a country and on a body and conduct of a woman respectively.

However, the powerful grip of patriarchy gets unravelled the moment Rose decides to take her fate into her own hands. After spending a vacation at her daughter's place in Vancouver, Rose gets the opportunity to get in touch with her childhood love Harry. After returning back to Guanagaspar, she decides on a plan for how she will execute it. The plan was no easy bait; she faked her own drowning to be with her love Harry. In the novel,

Mootoo seems committed to destabilising the lines, the boundaries which contribute to oppression. She has played fairly with the lines of race, ethnicity and gender; the depictions, however, stayed true to real Caribbean society. As this novel is about heterosexual love, unlike Mootoo's other works which centre upon queer subjects, we realize that it is not only sexuality that stands in the way of the realisation of one's true identity. Race, wealth and other social attributes, all work in tandem in keeping the normative structure of society functioning. However, Mootoo also depicts effectively how by education and immigration to bigger countries, one can relatively enjoy a freer life. Dolly and his son could move up the ladder because dolly got support from Persad, another Indian man she married, which resulted in Harry's education and their relatively better life economically and socially. But class differences remained unresolved. Even though Harry got an education in the same school Shem Bihar had, Rose's mother was still very much aware of the difference in their social status, as Harry was the son of once-her-servant, Dolly. Despite her liking for Harry, she never encouraged Rose and Harry to establish the same bond that they had once in childhood.

Summary: Shani Mootoo's writings are conspicuous for their emphatic assertion of difficult questions and their relevance, such as the questions of gender-sexual violence, incestual violence, queer sexuality, queer identity and so on. *Cereus Blooms At Night* is the ardent criticism of institutionalised sexual violence and the predatory behaviour of men even within the confines of home and 'Hindu respectability.' It also explores the issues of queer identity and the everyday difficulty of queer people in navigating their life in a society which is largely homophobic. *Valmiki's Daughter* is remarkable for the representation of closeted gay people, their difficulties in coming out, and their fear of being received poorly or criticised for their 'different' sexual orientation. *He drown she In The Sea* interrogates into the nature of class and gender which complicates and prevents the possibility of even a heterosexual

romance. It portrays patriarchy's stranglehold over a woman's life and bodies. However, the novel also depicts women's agency in the character of Rose, the novel's protagonist, who eventually challenges patriarchy, leaves her husband, by faking her death by drowning, to be with her lover Harry.

Chapter 5

The Study of Oonya Kempadoo's Novels: *Buxton Spice*, *Tide Running* and *All Decent Animals*

In this chapter, we have tried to analyse Oonya Kempadoo's three critically acclaimed novels: *Buxton Spice* (1998), *Tide Running* (2001) and *All Decent Animals* (2013). We have tried to closely read and analyse her novels along the themes of gender and sexuality. Of course, these themes are closely intertwined with the themes of identity, ethnicity and belonging which Oonya Kempadoo has successfully woven into the fabric of her writings. Oonya Kempadoo has a special knack for depicting the colourful Caribbean landscape in realistic details in its own vernacular, 'creole'. Her writings are notable for her academic and creative engagement with the themes of sexuality and gender along with the issues of identity and belonging in the Caribbean.

Oonya Kempadoo was born in the United Kingdom, in 1966, to Guyanese parents. The author currently resides in Grenada. She grew up in the village of Golden Grove, Guyana, from the age of five. Before starting out as a writer, she worked as a graphic artist, illustrator and painter. She lives in Grenada in order to observe and participate in the different facets of society. She states in one of her interviews: "The scale of small island life magnifies the connections and gaps between different cultures and classes. But, best of all, communication is easy and spontaneous" (Leusmann 2001, 107). As a child, she was more interested in drawing than writing. Coming from an illustrious family of writers (her father, Peter Kempadoo, was a well-known novelist), she got support and encouragement at home,

particularly from her mother, who was a teacher in her days. Her parents emphasised “self-expression, reasoning and exploration” for the holistic development of one’s personality. Oonya was interested in all types of art forms ranging from local Amerindian to Western Classical forms. She received a lot of critical appreciation in U.K. and U.S.A. for expressing the theme of the ‘end of innocence’ in *Buxton Spice*. *Buxton Spice* also generated academic interest and was translated into five other languages.

Buxton Spice (1998)

Buxton Spice is the first novel of Oonya Kempadoo, first published in 1998. It’s narrated by a very young girl who presents a commentary on the day-to-day affairs of a community and also what was unfolding at the political level which affects almost everyone in the community. She describes her formative years with a sense of wonder, curiosity and dead-pan humour. *Buxton Spice* is the author’s semi-autobiographical novel which is woven with her childhood memories of roaming around the village with her friends, observing the smaller details of nature, “dreaming and reading books” in trees (Leusmann 2001, 108). The book abounds in childhood memories and snippets of a multiracial community. A lush Caribbean landscape dotted with wild vegetation provides a realistic natural setting to the novel. The story is told by a first-person narrator, Lula, who is a pre-teen girl on the threshold of puberty. The novel is written against the backdrop of the dictatorship of Forbes Burnham in Guyana and how his rule flared up racial tensions among different races.

Oonya Kempadoo has used ‘creole vernacular’ for dialogues in the novel which provides the work needed immediacy and momentum along with a certain grounding in the place which only makes the novel more enriching in its texture and authentic to its setting and the story it is telling. It is a coming-of-age story of four girls including the narrator Lula and the changes happening in their heterogeneous community which falls apart as a result of

racial violence owing to racist dictatorship at the centre. *Buxton Spice* employs the means of a first-person narrator, Lula, to tell the story of a community that lives in apparent peace with its interracial neighbours until one day when everything goes wrong. *Buxton Spice* is set in a village called Tamarind Grove. The village of Tamarind Grove faces dictatorship under Burnham's rule leading to an economic crisis causing shortages of daily products at stores and racial tensions.

Lula, the narrator, is a pre-teen girl growing up in an East Indian family in the village of Tamarind Grove in Guyana in the 1970s. Lula is of mixed descent; her dad is a Madras Indian man. Her mother is a creole woman with a "strong European nose, flat forehead, and the curve of her creole lips, held something from a gentle past" (Kempadoo 1998, 24). She hangs out with her younger sister Sammy and her two friends Judy and Rachel, daughters of Deabros, a Portuguese family. The story is set in the political period of Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, the dictator of Guyana, in the 1970s. Tamarind Grove is a predominantly black region. Lula recounts that only "Dads, Bunt family and Aunty Babe" were the only Indian family that lived there. Her own family was mixed of three ethnicities: "Indian, black and white" (1998, 43).

Through the girl narrator, Lula, we come to know about how different races live together, their eccentricities, their common practices, their joys and tragedies. Set in 1970s Guyana, we witness the political situation of Guyana and its various tragic implications for the people of Indian ethnicity. As we dive deeper into the day-to-day happenings of the people of Tamarind Grove, we see how gender is constructed and performed in everyday life. Through the sharp observation of Lula, the narrator, and her 'games' with her three friends, one of them is her sister; we see the configurations and reconfigurations of gender and sexuality as it happens and is performed in the everyday life of an individual. The writer, Oonya Kempadoo, by means of four pubescent girls and their experimentation with their

bodies, depicts what is normatively expected of a body in terms of gender and sexuality. These experiments, however, also suggest how normative acts/performances can be re-enacted and reconfigured thereby showing the malleability and fluidity of the constructs of gender and sexuality. The games these four girls play may not be uncommon among children and their communities. As they are on the threshold of puberty, they observe people and their behaviours around them to make sense of their gender and sexual performances one needs to learn. By doing this, they try to make sense of their lives, their changing bodies and how they would negotiate their life as adults. In one of their games, they recreate the gendered-sexual performances between a man and a woman. “Today Rachel is Wife and I am Husband, Sammy is Wife and Judy Husband. Sometimes we all just girls, with towels over our heads for long hippie hair” (85). The use of the word ‘today’ points toward the fact that there are other times when they play different games assuming different roles. This shows their direct manipulation of sexual and gender roles. In the game, they performed gendered duties attached to the roles of husband and wife in a gendered patriarchal society. They haven't got preached about these roles by their elders. Rather these roles and their understanding got to them subconsciously through their observation of the repetitive performance of gender roles in the family and community at large. Lula says:

When I was a wife, I took pride in my housework. I didn't pretend - got down on my knees and buffed the whole floor of the houseroom. I put away the kitchen neatly, made the beds without a crease... They didn't even do anything, and then all of a sudden, their house'd be spotless and dinner ready to serve (86).

Lula's curious eyes unravel all complicated knots: socio-political, economic and cultural, primarily laden with gendered and sexual roles. *Buxton Spice* is also the story of self-consciousness during the pubescent years of those four girls and their transition into maturity, i.e., to say, from innocence to experience. Apart from her general observation of gender and roles, Lula is also observant of the changing social and political milieu around her. Lula and her friends are growing up like any normal child. Their keen sense of

observation, particularly of sexual behavior of men and women, their games, their awareness of their own changing bodies- all of it gets a serious jolt by violence unfolding in their neighbourhood, in her community and eventually in her own family.

Buxton Spice, the mango tree, which gives the title to the novel is a character in its own right. It is symbolic of the historical continuity of the existence of different races at different points in time around its area. Lula is also a highly imaginative child. She shares a sentient relationship with the Buxton Spice Mango tree in her yard. "This is Dreamers Tree... When I wasn't flying around in the tree and was human size again..." (13-14). The tree, by virtue of its age, becomes the embodiment of wisdom, which makes Lula angry also because the tree would not lend its wisdom to her. Lula would be frustrated with Buxton Spice for "It knew everything and wouldn't tell me nuthing" (29).

Lula displays her sexual agency in terms of her curiosity regarding these matters. She also experiences her sexuality with a boy called Ramesh. Lula is not only a curious child with a keen sense of observation. She also describes the different inhabitants of the Tamarind Grove in exact detail. The novel reads like a person's diary entries. At the very beginning of the story, we see the curiosity of children about the topic of sexuality. Lula describes uncle Joe's penis in quite a detail: "... peeping down that hole into the darkness of his pants. Inside, the curve barely visible, was a wrinkled, wrinkled thick dull brown almost black skin. A few glints showed was hair there too. Plenty behind the curve and some curling out of the balls" (7). Those children laugh with uncle Joe trying to understand the act of sex by invoking uncle Joe's crush, Ann. Their talk with uncle Joe reveals their almost obsession with the body and its physical function in terms of sex and sexuality. Ramesh, a worker boy, is the object of sexual curiosity for Lula like several others. With her growing sense of her own body and sexuality, at times, she looks at Ramesh to find in him those signs too "Searching for signs on his chest, down to where his shirt was buttoned. And on his chin" (17). It is no surprise that

children on the verge of puberty are curious about understanding sex/sexuality-related matters. Lula wonders about 'sexy- Marilyn. Her description and understanding of Marilyn show how she had picked the information about body and sexuality from snatches of conversations among people in her family and community. She had her own little sexual experiences with the boys from her neighbourhood. "My matchbox dress, taut across my thighs, stopped him wedging his leg in between them. Hot air from the fridge blew up my legs to my crotch ... I felt a warm liquid wet his fingers" (35). Lula, as a preteen girl, is not only getting aware of his sexuality through her observations of adult conversations in her family and neighbourhood and through her experimental games, including gender swapping and sexual acts, with other girls her age: she is also very keen on observing the changing political situation around her. While Tamarind Grove is majority black region, she belongs to a minority mixed race family of Indian and European descent. Her sharp memory recalls the riot that happened years ago. She has a vivid memory of rioters ("PNC people") running amok the streets menacingly. It was so terrifying that her parents barred themselves in their house, held their children and waited patiently in deep fear for the frenzied moment to pass (44). However, people of Indian, European and mixed descent lived peacefully with their majority black neighbours until the dictatorial regime of Burnham started. It does not mean, however, that there was no racial prejudice in the communities. Sexual-racial mixing was not encouraged. Judy suffered at the hands of her mother who suspected she had sex with Mikey- the black guy. Mrs. Deabro was horrified at the thought of her daughter, a white girl from a Portuguese family who had been going out with a black guy. After realizing what Judy had done, she scolds Judy: "Is rape, you know, Black man does rape ... but he can't rape you if you get away to go an' take it!!" (167). This statement shows the prejudices people have against black people that black people are promiscuous by nature. Also, she feels superior as

a White person to other races in Tamarind Grove. She just couldn't stand to watch her daughter going out having sex with a black boy.

Oonya Kempadoo has used creole in a deeply evocative and sensuous way that brings out the authentic picture of Guyana. The writing is visual and honest, capturing the nuances of a child's voice perfectly growing up in multiracial Guyana. Oonya Kempadoo has successfully depicted how sexuality and gender are constructed in the formative years of a child's life. It is through conscious observation of repetitive sexual and gender behaviours that we learn to act in a sexual-gendered way as adults. The juxtaposition of a pre-teen girl's observation with Forbes Burnham's menacing dictatorship makes the book what it is: it is not a book written for children but a book for all adults written through the eyes of a child.

Tide Running (2001)

Oonya Kempadoo interrogates the issue of sexuality and the exploitation of sexuality in the Caribbean through her novel *Tide Running*. *Tide Running* is set in the distinctive locale of Tobago. Nevertheless, the novel stands in direct contrast to its neighbouring island of Trinidad. From The unified naming of the twin island as one country, Trinidad and Tobago, one might erratically assume that they are one and the same. Oonya has succeeded in bringing about the differences between Trinidad and Tobago.

The novel follows the daily lives of two brothers, Cliff and Ossi, in their boring and less eventful life. The novel depicts how unemployment is rising in Tobago while TV unceasingly blares out American shows of success and wealth. The story takes a turn when Cliff meets Bella and Peter. Bella is a Trinidadian while Peter is an English man. They come to Tobago to have a relaxing time on the island away from the humdrum of their professional lives. An affair starts between the three, Cliff, Bella and Peter, indicative of the rampant sexual tourism in Trinidad and Tobago. The novel also portrays in realistic terms how Caribbean bodies are exoticised and sexualized. Having been offered a flurry of U.S TV

Shows such as Oprah Winfrey's show, selling the American dream; in comparison, the Tobagonians are poor and are in a constant tussle with the wealth of the countries like the United States of America. Unemployed, Trinidadian youths are forced to roam idle about the streets. Oonya Kempadoo, however, draws further distinctions: Trinidadians, a relatively wealthy people look down upon Tobagonians who are ridden by poverty and other social evils. SC, a friend of Bella and a Trinidadian, frowns upon all Tobagonians as criminals. The novel has two narrators, Cliff and Bella, narrating the story in their own distinctive English. Oonya Kempadoo has managed to seamlessly blend the grammatically correct English of Bella and Cliff's distinctive Patois (a Trinidadian dialect) that serves to show their skewed perspectives and aspirations. The novel starts and finishes with Cliff's narratorial voice. This shows the writerly intention to keep the Tobagonians and their various issues at the centre of the narrative. As readers, we get the parallels between the paradise-like setting of the ocean island and the eroticized body of average Tobagonians. The economic exploitation of the Caribbean, its resources and its natives through tourism is one of the central issues in Caribbean scholarship. Jamaica Kincaid, in her memoir, *A Small Place* (2000) critiques the idea of behavior and attitudes of tourists and tourism, in general, in the Caribbean. The novel, *Tide Running*'s real intention, it seems, is to portray how tourists take the Caribbean as their holiday gateway for their mental peace and relaxation while turning blind eyes to the daily issues of island people. Through the novel, Kempadoo offers a fresh view of the island country; the idyllic beauty of the Caribbean presents a sharp contrast to the people who inhabit those regions.

Women writers in the Caribbean have been gaining prominence with their sincere engagement with the issue of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. There is a shift in terms of how women characters are being depicted in literature through the pens of these women writers. The representation of Indian women in Caribbean literature has been primarily based

on stereotypes or marginal ones until strong women writerly voices emerged. Like their creators, these strong characters have resonated with the audience at large and have the ability to contribute to the narrative even when they are not significant characters. Writers like Shani Mootoo, Jamaica Kincaid, Patricia Powell, and Oonya Kempadoo have been engaging with women's issues in various social and psychological contexts.

Oonya Kempadoo is one strong voice in the collective of strong women authors. Her novel *Tide Running* is an expository of the complicated tapestry of sexuality, ethnicity, and global consumerism. The novel demonstrates how the Caribbean is famished internally, even though it serves as an exotic destination for tourists from developed countries. *Tide Running* is set entirely on the island of Tobago, a sister island to Trinidad, with three major characters intersecting each other, thereby revealing the pertinent questions related to race, sexuality and gender. Cliff and Bella are two strong narratorial voices in the text. Cliff is a young African Tobago man who is in love with the beauty of his island, particularly the ocean. Bella is a Trinidadian woman married to a British White guy. The racial status of Bella is unclear. Cliff is a poor, unemployed guy who was encouraged by Peter, a corporate lawyer, to have an affair with her wife, Bella. Bella, as her name suggests, is a beautiful woman who wants to capture the exotic beauty of Tobago. The complicated threesome relationship between Bella, Cliff and Peter starts unravelling multiple meanings over the course of the story. As the novel develops, we learn that Cliff has started stealing from Bella and Peter. The moral compromise that Cliff exhibits raises a telling question about the compromised state of the Caribbean. The outwardly beautiful island, which entices tourists from all over, has a population of famished unemployed masses who are sold the great American dream of material success through the airing of American shows on their TV. The double narrators of the novel help to bring in the competitive Caribbean voices claiming their legitimacy and acceptance. The multiple aspects of Kempadoo's identity, like her characters, claim for a freer creole space that is, at present,

being buffeted by the currents of global consumerism while struggling to meet their daily demands of essentials. Like Bella who trains her photographic lens on the Caribbean, we, as readers, are obliged to do the same to see for ourselves, to witness the nakedness of the truth of the Caribbean. The Caribbean, stereotyped as hypersexualised, is not a luxury but a necessity as it emerges from oppressive, debilitating, economic and social structures. We, readers, are both insiders and outsiders simultaneously; as we drench ourselves in the beautiful Tobago Sea, we can't turn a blind eye to the stark realities of the island.

Tide Running complicates and challenges the stereotype of the sexualisation of the land. The novel is set in the dreamy Plymouth on the Tobago Island. It explores the consequences of foreign intrusion on Tobago which puts people in a double bind, poor in reality yet aspiring to become the material success America is. The result is the mental anguish and disillusionment which has been portrayed through the character of Cliff. Through Cliff, Kempadoo shows the distasteful reality of foreign intrusion on the poor, uneducated naive populace of the Caribbean who have been treated as sexual commodities by tourists from rich countries. Over the course of the novel, we see the breakings and fissures in the psyche of Cliff that once used to be deeply anchored in the elements of the Caribbean: the beautiful Tobago Sea, the land (Plymouth) and the beautifully cadenced creole they speak. The sea is a stabilising presence in the life of the people of Tobago. It is quite a humane anchor as Kempadoo describes the sea as, "Out past the swellin' chest, all blue and green, the sea stretch 'e arm way up along the hills ... Every time it heave, the arm ripple and, far far away, white waves wash over rocks, silent" (Kempadoo 2001, 3). We also see the deep psychological connection Cliff has with the sea. Cliff could not imagine his life without the sea for its absence may leave a 'hole' in his chest. He will have felt imprisoned if there is no sea as he says, "If I could'a never see it at all, nowhere 'round me, it go be like you lock me up. Drain something out'a me and leave a hole in me chest" (5). Cliff experiences what he

says is the ‘sea feeling’ that land cannot give. As the novel progresses, after committing mistakes and blunders, Cliff feels alienated from nature, and his unstable psyche is reflected in the “drain out” colour of the sea (186-87).

However, it is not only the sea; the people of Tobago feel a deep organic connection to their land as well. Even with half-eaten stomachs, Cliff and Ossi traverse the length and breadth of Tobago; as Cliff claims, it is the second-best thing after the ‘sea feeling’. “All the streets and the corners in Plymouth is like the veins on the back’a we hands. The main roads from Buccoo to Arnos Vale is them long veins running up we vibrating arms ... We can make them roads sing even with them li’l bikes. Is the next nicest feeling ’part from the sea feeling” (22).

Plymouth is the home for Cliff and Ossi, where even in their impoverished state, they share a deep bonding with the place. Plymouth is deeply rooted in their psyches. The deep bonding with the sea and land is caressed and nurtured by their own language, creole. Through his lyrically cadenced creole, Cliff being the narrator is able to draw the audience to share his experience. Kempadoo’s rich poetic prose, full of vivid descriptions, brings forth the literary quality of the novel. The creole narration by Cliff also describes his rootedness and belonging to the land. Some of the most poetic and poignant moments in the novel are when Cliff is describing his relationship with the sea; the only time we gain access to his deepest thoughts. The relationship between Cliff and nature (sea and landscape) is very elemental, organic and unified, so much so that we feel that both embody each other. The sexualisation of Cliff’s body is then the eroticisation of the landscape. It reinforces the stereotype of a hypersexualised black body of the Caribbean with nature as a potent catalyst or maybe another exotic erotic character in the background.

Given the complex dynamic between nature and sexuality, it is pertinent to ask whether Kempadoo is successful in enforcing or exposing/ subverting the colonial narrative

which views the Caribbean as a place of eroticism and hypersexuality. We contend that Kempadoo, while indulging in the language of sexual pleasure, yet manages to bring out the iniquities of power, race, class and gender. While claiming the erotic environments of the Caribbean from degrading discourses, she engages with the multivalent registers of the Caribbean that allow her to portray the Caribbean as it really is and not what is promoted as a part of colonial discourse. She navigates through the narrative structure and erotic poetic beauty of the novel in order to bring forth a complex vision that lays bare the reality of historical and discursive violence in the region; while reclaiming the aesthetic possibilities for pleasure and beauty of the region, nonetheless. Her depiction of landscape and sexuality exposes the reality of exploitation of the land and the people who belong there.

The Tobago of the 1990s was ridden with the issues of poverty and unemployment while being exposed to the impact of American mass culture. In the very beginning, Kempadoo lays the foundations for non-normative social sexual possibilities between her three major characters. Cliff, Bella and Peter meet on the beach for the very first time. Later, Peter and Bella start inviting Cliff to their plush beach house which leads to their sexual liaisons. Soon class disparities become evident when it appears that Cliff has stolen from Bella and Peter; he is subsequently thrown in jail and even beaten by the police. The sensuous landscape charged with lyrical creole seems to be reinforcing the colonial stereotypes of sexually uninhibited, well-endowed black men and the rich, powerful, calculating White man. The novel seems to reinforce the colonial stereotypes in its setting, it is fraught with subtle ambivalence nonetheless. Kempadoo stated in one interview,

I don't want to see the Caribbean romanticized and exoticized, but at the same time, when I'm actually writing, I don't want to tailor something to meet the market, or fill the gap or do this or that. It has to stay true to the story, true to the characters. It has to flow naturally[...] the language, the use of colloquial language, and then what I'm portraying through the natural environment has to work in a sensory way. I don't want to edit it to make it less stereotypical even if I can look back at *Tide Running* and think maybe I'm adding to this image of the Caribbean as hypersexual and eroticized. But that is the main theme of that story- the central event and characters which drive

the novel. If I try to tone it down, it would start to read strange (as cited in Nichols 2016, 148-149).

Oonya Kempadoo invokes the colonial narrative of the Caribbean as a hedonistic paradise. Bella perceives the site as an erotic place and Cliff as her sexual partner and the nature enabling it. The western discourse of the Caribbean sees it as the heaven for hedonistic pleasures which permits sexual licentiousness and the tourism industry thrives on it. In fact, the state becomes the enabling agent here as tourism is the biggest thrust to the economy, making the Caribbean the site of exploitation. It is not only the aesthetics of land and sea which draws our attention; Kempadoo succeeds in showing the rather crude reality of everyday life which is poverty and unemployment while the TV sets display materialistic pleasures of wealth and luxury. Cliff's organic relationship with the sea couldn't keep him contented; he craved the life of wealthy people he sees on American programs every day; Bella and Peter become the embodiment of that life that Cliff wanted. He wonders about the wealthy life of Bella and Peter with their "film style house", "fancy car" and "foreign talk." They have money to spend and places to go. "Easy in life" (Kempadoo 2001, 188). Class becomes the most compelling factor in the novel. We don't see the portrayal of sexual violence on the female body typically. We rather see the objectification of the black body. There is another kind of violence imposed by the state on Cliff's body. We realise that Cliff is poorly compensated for his sexual labours which may have resulted in thefts by Cliff. Cliff suffers the consequences when he is beaten by police and sent to lock up. The sexual encounters between Bella, Cliff and Peter make us investigate the context, compulsions, and consent. In contrast, Bella, the wealthy tourist, suffers nothing except for her feelings of guilt.

Oonya Kempadoo's *Tide Running* becomes a vehicle for cultural depiction, representation and reproduction while navigating different modern realities at the same time. The story of Bella and Cliff is the tale of high hopes, expectations and even bigger disillusionment. Cliff is portrayed as bitter, introverted, and barely showing emotions.

However, there are times when we see glimpses of his inner self, his thoughts and his vulnerability. His home is matriarchal with an absent father as is common in African households of the Caribbean and the artificial modern world of wealth and recognition as being represented on American tv shows. Through two narrator-protagonists, we get to see two different worlds with their own conflicts and needs.

All Decent Animals (2013)

Oonya Kempadoo's *All Decent Animals* presents a realistic depiction of the Caribbean with its multifaceted cast of characters who are torn between their choices, personal and artistic, in the burgeoning metropolis of Port of Spain. In the novel, the essence of the Caribbean, i.e., the mas of carnival, is juxtaposed with the story of a group of friends and how they negotiate their everyday reality on the island of Trinidad. A young girl Atlanta, generally referred to as Ata, forms the crux of the story along with her boyfriend Pierre; and Frazer, their friend, a closeted gay man dying of Aids. The story begins with Ata's coming back to Port of Spain to work as a graphic artist for the Slinger's band for the carnival.

The realistic portrayal of Trinidad by Oonya Kempadoo brings out the essential characteristics of Trinidad. At the core of it is violence and sweeping changes, initiated by the government, to make Trinidad a world-class country, a fast-growing metropolis. Amidst all, the mas of carnival towers high, as the national identity of Trinidad. But the question remains. Ata, at the centre, brings out various discrepancies of Trinidad through her musings. The question of carnival and vagrants, "Where do the vagrants go for carnival?" (Kempadoo, 2013, 12) is pertinent. Carnival which is supposed to erase differences, hierarchy, and a celebration to subvert hierarchy is still very much about class. Frank E Manning (1983) very pertinently mentions that how after the end of colonial regime, blacks have emerged as new elite class. Class reality ironically is still very much real in Caribbean even after the departure of "bourgeois" "white predecessor" (194). Carnival in all its celebratory spirit, in its

subversive characteristic, could not really precipitate into changes in the lives of poverty-stricken people. It's been rightly said, "Massa day (elite domination) never ends in the Caribbean. It only grows blacker" (194).

The novel is replete with news and events of violence happening across the city of Port of Spain. However, violence is not happening in a vacuum. Racial, sexual and gendered considerations are at the base of almost all violent incidents. Violence against women is one of the most frequent crimes happening every day in Trinidad. That's why Ata is considered "brave" by her boss when she decides to live and work in Port of Spain all by herself. At a UNDP meeting that Pierre attends, one feminist activist makes an assertive plea for changing policies so that crimes against women may be contained.

These statistics are real. And dark and ugly. Because each number is a woman who had no choice, no one to turn to. There is no protection, no hiding place - not for the magnitude of Violence Against Women that we face in Trinidad and Tobago. And so, ladies and gentlemen, I for one can't wait to see the policies changed, the measures put in place and the actions taken to ensure that no more lives are lost at the hands of merciless and alcoholic men. The mothers and daughters of this land are bleeding and dying, they are under attack. And it is up to *all of us* to do something about it. (Kempadoo 2013, 97).

The presentation by a woman activist at the UNDP meeting corresponds with the gruesome killing of Douli's family by Douli's father. Despite being a developing nation, the ugly picture of Trinidad is glimpsed in its violent character. The author rightly describes people killing their own families with cutlasses as "death by chopping an Indian tonic" (96). The brutal massacre of Douli's entire family by its patriarch, Douli's father, who also kills himself, is another example of gendered and racial violence. Douli is in love with a black man, Sammy, who is already a father of a child. Douli shows no agency and does not go against her father's wishes to be with her boyfriend Sammy. Sammy keeps hoping that one day, Douli's father will come around. However, things change for the worse when Sammy learns about the brutal killings of Douli and her family. It has been suggested that Douli's father killed the entire family because of Douli's affair with a black man. For a patriarchal

Indian household, fear of miscegenation is immense and Indian men in the Caribbean are known for their ‘cutlass- temper’. Indian women, when they first came to Trinidad, experienced a certain degree of economic and sexual freedom. Women showed sexual agency in choosing and changing their male partners at will (Reddock 1985). Indian men, faced with refusal, sometimes chopped their spouses/ partners with a curved blade instrument called cutlass, which is primarily used for harvesting sugarcane (Bahadur 2013). These kinds of violent murders have been called “wife-murders” by feminist scholars. The period of indentureship is over long ago, yet violence against women has not stopped.

Another important aspect of violent crimes is homophobia. Most of the countries in the Caribbean had anti-gay laws to persecute homosexuals. Some countries still have such colonial laws. Law might change and have changed, but Homophobia is an integral part of social behavior in the Caribbean. Amidst the general display of sexuality in the carnival, the lewdness, and the openness one enjoys, it is ironic that the Caribbean is not very tolerant of alternative forms of sexuality, particularly gay sexuality. Francisco, Ata’s friend, who is gay, decides to leave Trinidad to settle in London with his aunt for a better life. He has a constant fear of death looming over him in Trinidad. When Ata questions if he really is going to leave Trinidad, Francisco replies: “Stay here and wait for what? To... to get stabbed next time? ... I look like I ready to die for being gay?” (Kempadoo 2013, 15)

Even some acts of violence remain a mystery as to their perpetrator. A kind of ghost is looming over Trinidad and presiding over the daily happenings of violence. The mysterious death of Pierre calls for deeper interrogation into the acts of violence and the causes behind them. Even Ata, while her stay in the cottage on the North Coast, has an unusual encounter, a sexual encounter with a man she could not properly locate where he came from and how. Even well-educated people from well-off families find it difficult to come out of the closet as gay people to their families and society at large. Frazer, a well-read architect, dies of Aids as

a closeted gay man. Frazer chooses to die by refusing treatment and medication instead of prolonging his life a little bit longer with the help of new developments in medical science. This particular act of Frazer adds to the debate on euthanasia.

Ata is a girl of mixed descent of Indian and Black ancestry. Her artistic temperament and solitary musings bring out various discrepancies in Trinidad. She feels a deep connection to the carnival, making her return to the Port of Spain again and again. Her internal monologues reveal her discomfort and her struggle with her sense of identity and belonging to Trinidad. She never feels welcomed at Trinidad. Yet, it draws her in that she has to “come back to this prancy, peacock Island” (3). We see Trinidad in the process of becoming a bigger ‘metropolis’. Alongside, a group of friends is getting on with their lives amidst the hustle and bustle of the preparations for the ‘national festival’ carnival. In the very beginning, Ata listens to a piece of news about violence while travelling in a taxi which sets the tone for the story. Ata has a complicated and conflicting sense of identity. She belonged to the entire Caribbean and not to a mere part of it. Her conflicted sense of identity made her not settle and move “from island to island” (6). Ata understands her deep attachment to Trinidad. Her ever-inquisitive mind questions her identity and her belonging to Trinidad. However, the varied experiences and musical rhythms of Trinidad keep tugging at her, making her revisit Trinidad. But she also wonders why most Indians do not embrace ‘carnival’? why are so many Indians running away from Trinidad to settle somewhere abroad? Though Trinidad is developing with its high-rise buildings and mounting traffic on the roads, there is an ugly side to it. The rising unemployment and inflation are making its own people migrate. Mariette’s brother’s remark is pertinent in this regard when he says,

Is colonialism all over again, yuh understand? But dis time the owner not responsible for de slave. Whereas, long ago, the owner had to feed, clothe, give house and land, make sure they don’t get too sick... Now the government self, the blasted politicians, only selling out every last piece’a crown land, and is every man for thyself (25).

News of kidnappings and murder are daily staples of Trinidad. And the growing incidences of violence are one of the prime reasons for the migration of Trinidadians abroad (26). The novel also critiques the abysmal healthcare system in Trinidad. The growing prosperity in Trinidad in terms of GDP is not reflected in its healthcare facilities for its people. A lot of money is being invested by UNO as the UN has several offices in Trinidad. Pierre, who works at UNDP, reflects thus on the condition of Trinidad: “Too much money in HIV, distorting the true health picture and creating useless projects, organizations and campaigns to spend it, while people can’t even get primary health care” (92-93). The meetings at various UN offices along with government and NGOs take years and years to develop plans of action to combat various issues only yielding the result of the publishing of shiny, glossy pamphlets for awareness-generation in public. However, the ground realities remain the same as the rate of crimes does not go down. It is really important to ask why so many government-funded and internationally-funded agencies have regular offices and meetings when the output is negligible. Ata and her friends are well-educated and academically and artistically inclined. Some of them have their education at prestigious institutes such as Oxford. Ata and Frazer, particularly, relish discussing various topics and issues related to the Caribbean and its history. Their talks range from Greek mythology, the history of the Caribbean, and the bacchanal of Carnival to sexuality and sexual preferences. In one of their discussions, Ata makes a very interesting point about sexuality. “I believe everyone is born bisexual... Then through physiological, hormonal, emotional, psychological occurrences, they choose, or find a comfortable preference or preferences. Sometimes in phases. One choice is not better than the other” (140). Another important interjection Oonya Kempadoo makes through the character of Ata. While discussing with Pierre, Ata says how our different expressions of sexuality is, more often than not, equated with animalistic, baser instinct in a human being. However, the fact is, she argues further, that “the beastly behaviour

part is when we dehumanize” in order to conform to “power, religion” etc. which dangerously results into “abuse” and “oppression” of someone (142).

By unravelling the real Trinidad through her penmanship, Oonya Kempadoo not only questions but also answers. The spirit of Trinidad is a celebration and carnival represents that spirit. Carnival is the chaotic blend of the diversity of Caribbean, its various ethnicities, its variegated culture in all its crudeness represented in its “brash way of life and language” (27) where the experience and joy of celebration is paramount.

Carnival and Gender

An important part of the novel is composed of the descriptions of the Slinger’s band at Camp Swampy as they prepare for the carnival. Ata is also a part of the group in her own artistic capacity as a graphic artist. In order to understand carnival and the way it presents the two genders; it is important to understand its history. Carnival has a complicated history in the Caribbean. It has its roots in colonialism, religious conversion, liberation, and celebration. Carnival started with Italian Catholics in Italy and later spread to France and Spain. The Spanish settlers brought carnival to Trinidad around 200 years ago. Now, it is considered as the world’s one of the most spectacular cultural festivals. After the emancipation of slaves, the carnival was taken over by Afro-Trinidadians. Calypso and Steelband along with costume masquerades form an important feature of the carnival. Street masquerading drew people from all ethnic backgrounds to participate in the carnival. Carnival has got such special importance in Trinidad that scholars assume it is a national festival rather than a racial festival. (Manning 1983, 19)

Trinidad and Tobago as a nation are gendered from its very formation. Trinidad and Tobago is also considered mother, as in the mother Trinidad and Tobago, very much like mother India, mother Russia and so on. Across cultures, women’s role has been to provide care and sustenance in the national imaginary. Yet, carnival, which represents the cultural

ethos of the country has largely been created by males. The role of women then, as M. Jacqui Alexander states, in service to the nation, is guaranteed by protecting her virtue as well as bearing the duties of a 'woman' in terms of domestic duties as well as transferring the significant values of "culture" to the next generation (1994, 13). Women have always been a significant part of the carnival, though, in a smaller number. There were 'jamettes' women who were part of carnival musical bands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Crowley 1988). Crowley suggested that these women might be prostitutes gone respectable. In present-day parlance, a jamette is simply referred to any sexually promiscuous woman. Calypso, the dominant form of music used in the Carnival festival, was clearly dominated by men and their voices. Very few women ventured into calypso- singing by the 1960s. In the earlier calypso, women were described as crafty, unfaithful and sexually promiscuous. By the 1970s, the description of women in calypso took another turn. She is now described as an exemplary woman who is reputable and moral and spends her time in child-rearing and other domestic responsibilities. It is not until the World War II that respectable women could start participating in carnivals. Post-1992, women started participating in carnival festival in huge numbers, even outnumbering men sometimes. Also, the media's lenses turned more towards women's participation in the colourful carnival festival. However, men are still predominant in calypso and musical bands and are also leaders and designers of a large number of masquerade bands. One newspaper reported a huge presence of women in the carnival of 1992: "Blaze of color. Women by the thousands. WOMEN, COLOUR, MUSIC and brilliant weather were the major ingredients that went to lay the groundwork for Carnival 1992 which ended in a blaze of glory yesterday" (De Freitas 1999, 19).

No doubt, Women's participation in the carnival has significantly increased. Women outnumber men in masquerade bands. They are no longer dependent on their male friends for protection. Also, women participating in carnivals no longer behave within the codes of

“respectability” expected from them by their community and society at large. Irrespective of race, colour or class, women gyrate, jam and wine in skimpy costumes on the streets of the carnival. This is not to say that all women indulge in ‘wining’ and ‘jamming’ by wearing revealing clothes. However, this is the image portrayed by the media in order to sell Trinidad as the one of the greatest exotic shows in the world. De Freitas states that the “unapologetic” beautiful, sensual “female Masquerader” symbolises not only the spirit of “Carnival” but it subsumes the identity of ‘Nation’ as well (1999, 20). It has been assumed that more women’s participation, masquerading and wining in the carnival is a political act of articulating alternate voices. Peggy Phelan (in Noel 2010) argues that participating may give “representational visibility” but may not be very effective in catalysing change. It may just be a safe space for expressing repressed emotions and frustrations in one’s life.

Summary: All three novels we have discussed above depict the Caribbean realistically and in its true form. We find that Oonya Kempadoo has not shied away from foregrounding the issues of sexuality and gender in her novels. Rather, Gender, sexuality, and sexual violence are central themes of her novels. In *Buxton Spice*, she has shown how children learn their gender/sexual roles from their observation of adults in their daily life. Therefore, it is clear that sexual and gender roles can be reconfigured and reconstructed and can also bring about a change in our attitude towards people of alternate sexuality by humanising them and not criminalising them for their non-normative sexual orientations. In *Tide Running*, Oonya Kempadoo threadbares the reality of famished-stricken Tobagonians and the exploitation of highly sexualised black body in the name of sex-tourism economy. Oonya Kempadoo has exposed the hypocrisy of colonial scholarship which terms African Caribbean as hypersexual and promiscuous people. While at the same time, tourists, particularly from America and Europe, shamelessly benefit from rich natural resources of the Caribbean as well as indulging in physical/sexual pleasures with the natives of the island country. In *All decent Animals*,

Oonya has dexterously woven the themes of sexual/gender violence, gender and sexual identity unfolding through the story of a group of friends residing in the metropolis of Port of Spain, Trinidad. Oonya Kempadoo raises pertinent questions about the developing Trinidad and the increase in the rate of crimes against women. Also, the general homophobia in Trinidad is contributing to the rise in crimes against gay people. Oonya Kempadoo's writing comes across as a brave voice in raising these issues in explicit terms in Caribbean where these issues are considered a taboo.

Conclusion

The research study presented in this thesis aims at understanding Caribbean society and its attitude toward gender and (queer) sexuality in particular. As we know, the Caribbean is a group of nations that had been under various colonial occupations at different points of time in the past. Firstly, discovered by Spain, France and England quickly followed for mercantile reasons which led to major power tussles for gaining control over the Caribbean. This made the Caribbean a multi-racial, multicultural place with its own distinctiveness. The study has also been done in order to understand the condition of Caribbean women; how they were during the period of British colonial occupation and, later on, after Caribbean countries got independence from their European masters. Before women writers arrived in the Caribbean literary space, Indo-Caribbean women have barely gotten any representation in the Caribbean literary works. Whatever scanty representation they got portrayed them as demure Hindu women having no say in the state of affairs. But the truth is, Indo-Caribbean women have always shown great resilience and agency during the period of their indentureship and even afterward.

In Chapter one, we have discussed a brief history of the archipelago of the Caribbean and the arrival of Indian women in the Caribbean through the system of indentureship. Before colonial countries discovered the Caribbean, the Caribbean was inhabited by indigenous tribes such as Caribs, Arawak and Tanyo. Spain was the first country to discover the Caribbean through an expedition helmed by Christopher Columbus in 1492, followed by Britain, France and the Dutch. This resulted in conflict between the natives and the colonial powers which resulted in almost the decimation of the native population over a period of centuries. By the 1700s, the British claimed dominance over Trinidad, Tobago and Guyana and hundreds and thousands of slaves were brought to the Caribbean via the route of the

Atlantic to work in the sugarcane plantations of Britain. After the emancipation of slaves in 1834, another system was introduced to provide the workforce to the plantation estates. It was called indentureship, and Indian men and women were brought to the Caribbean through this system. Rhoda Reddock (1994) has found out that most of the women who came to the Caribbean during indentureship were independent women, who were either brahmin widows, prostitutes or lower-class women. In contrast with the women of their homeland, India, these women exercised a certain degree of economic and sexual freedom during the period of indentureship.

In Chapter two, we have outlined major theories about gender and sexuality. Modern theories have successfully opened new ideas about how gender and sexuality can be better explained and understood. This chapter aims to investigate and understand the concepts of gender, sex and sexuality and how they evolved and the kind of scholarship available in this area. In the 1960s and 1970s, major agitation and protests were brewing for the rights of marginalised people, such as the civil rights movement, women's rights movement, gay rights movement and so on. This also led to the growth of scholarship on feminism. Feminism contributed a lot towards broadening our understanding of gender and sexuality. Feminists contested the idea of gender and sex as natural categories by bringing in the crucial interplay of socialisation in their construction. The central argument was that the patriarchal nature of our society and gendered division of labour is not only disadvantageous to women but also results in their oppression. Simon de Beauvoir, in her book, *The Second Sex*, rejected the theories of biological determinism; she rather argued that women's secondary status in society is not due to their biology but because of the gendered way we raise our children as men and women. Kate Millet, Nancy Chodorow, and Catherine MacKinnon, all argued that gender is constructed through the process of socialisation. Judith Butler, a post-modern critic, is remarkable for her path-breaking ideas surrounding gender identity, the relationship

between gender and sex and the theory of gender performativity. Queer theory contributed a lot to developing theories on the idea of sexuality. Foucault, Denis Altmann, Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick made scholarly contributions to the idea of sexuality. The modern approach to sexuality questions the idea of binaries of sex and gender. By insisting on the incoherent definitions of sexuality, Sedgwick calls for broadening the discourse of sexuality to explore sexual variation within and beyond the boundaries. She also underscores the markers of cultural differentiation, such as race, class and sex, should not be subsumed under the discourse of sexuality. Butler espouses a liberal outlook on choosing one's sexuality when she says that since we are the possessor of sexuality, why not we exercise freedom and how we want to embody our sexuality without being considered less real for it.

Chapter Three aims at understanding the ideas of gender and sexuality as they are perceived in the Caribbean society. It presents studies and research about the discussion and explanation of the structuring of Caribbean society in terms of men and women relationships, their coordination, marriage, mating arrangements, sexual identity and so on. The socio-cultural life of the Caribbean is not a homogeneous one. However, with various nuances, the construction of gender follows the gender system of patriarchal hierarchy in terms of dynamics between men and women. Sex/gender roles is still prominent in terms of the socialization of children. Besides, the historical experiences of slavery and indentureship are partly responsible for the shaping of experiences of men and women in the Caribbean society. The primary roles of Caribbean women stretch up to conjugal, maternal and domestic dimensions. In terms of conjugal relationships, there are three patterns observed: Marriage, Common Law Unions and Visiting Unions. The most common mating pattern is women start with unstable unions in visiting relationships to Common-Law Unions to formal marriage. Numerous Indian women gained control over their social and sexual lives for the first time as

they emigrated to the Caribbean as indentured labourers. Access to modern education played an important role in the development of Indian feminist consciousness, social and political activism, beginning with the limited and basic primary education of women encouraged by Presbyterian efforts and continuing into advanced higher education by the 20th century. The right and access to education was one of the major issues for Indo-Caribbean women, with the legacy of plantation labour and internal challenges thrown at them by Indian patriarchy. The family structure of Indian-Caribbean families is in many ways similar to their Indian counterparts. In the conventional Indo-Caribbean family, the roles of family members are clearly outlined. The father is generally seen as the head of the family, the figure of authority and the primary breadwinner and provider for the family. It has been seen that males are often valued more than females and act as disciplinarians and policy makers in decision matters. In the family, the mother plays a caregiving and nurturing role and is usually in charge of the children and household obligations and responsibilities. Indo-Caribbean Women are generally raised to understand that their principal responsibility is to get married and support their husband and his family. In the present time, however, there have been some notable alterations. More women are attending high school and university and working in high-rank positions. In addition, marriages are becoming more egalitarian. When compared to African-Caribbean families, these households have fewer female heads, and when they do, they are frequently headed by widows rather than single mothers. The chapter also sheds light on the issue of violence and sexual violence against women, the homophobic nature of the Caribbean, Caribbean feminism and how queer identity can be better negotiated in the Caribbean society.

Discrimination based on gender is illegal and infringement of civil and human rights in most nations, but discrimination based on sexual behaviours and sexual identities are still imaginable in many jurisdictions due to laws that prohibit homosexuality, prostitution and

other alternative sexual activities. As a result, sexual difference is rigidly engraved as semi-autonomous and different from gender in Caribbean society. The representation of female sexual desire and agency is not a significant concern in literature; the research is predominantly male-centred in this regard. Because of the significant cultural and moral stigmas around sexuality in Caribbean nations and communities, it may be difficult to discuss the issue openly, especially for and by women. In recent years, however, notions of heterosexuality as normative sexuality in Caribbean countries have been extensively questioned and criticized. Such critiques emphasize the intricacies of masculinity and femininity that challenge hegemonic sex and gender constructs.

In Chapter four, we have tried to analyse Shani Mootoo's three critically acclaimed novels: *Cereus Blooms at Night*, *Valmiki's Daughter* and *He Drown She in the Sea*. Our investigation of her works pertains to understanding gender and sexuality through her novels in the larger context of the Caribbean. Shani Mootoo has often been considered a writer of many nationalities. But she is not accepting of these labels. She thinks branding anyone's identity in this era of globalisation is rather 'limiting in scope' (Adams 2011, 101). She asserts that she is Trinidadian, rather Caribbean, in her sensibilities. However, the subjects she writes about and how she writes come from "living outside the Caribbean" (Adams 2011, 101)). Her assertiveness regarding her lesbian identity intensifies her feeling of being an outsider since Caribbean society is still not very tolerant of non-heteronormative identities. As a writer, she is committed to "speak the observation and analyses and conclusions" and her 'outsiderness' becomes a vantage point in this regard. (Adams 2011, 101)

Shani Mootoo's writings are compelling in terms of their engagement with human sensibilities with a certain delicacy that not only makes her creativity reach new heights but also engages readers in the humanity of, sometimes, deeply traumatised fictional characters. She unravels the idea of love, friendship, sexual desire and family not only to question but to

find a new meeting ground where differences could be negotiated and new possibilities for a better world could be forged. *Cereus Blooms at Night* is a sustained exploration of human solidarity with regard to queer potentiality in the face of decade-long violence and antagonism exhibited by society. The people's (of Lantanacamara) apathy is telling and disgust-inducing; while at the same time, it explores the new (queer) possibilities in the bonding between Mala and Tyler and Tyler's immense humanity towards Mala. Mootoo's works offer a real glimpse of the homophobic and misogynistic Caribbean society while simultaneously it persists in the belief that it can be transformed and reconfigured for the betterment of society on the whole.

Valmiki's Daughter shows how homophobia could make a person never come out of the closet and be forever 'trapped' in a mistaken identity. Valmiki, who maintains a facade of heterosexuality, feels 'trapped' and his daughter, Viveka, follows in his footsteps. She also chooses not to come out as a lesbian. This shows that learning and being able to stand up for him/herself comes at a price. Viveka has to learn her lesson at her own pace. Queer identity and recognition demand the exercise of certain individual will. However, it also reveals the deeply entrenched homophobic character of Caribbean society which makes it impossible for its queer subjects to live a normal life. *He Drown She in the Sea* explores the possibilities of women's agency and how society polices even a heterosexual romance. Rose finally shows her grit and agency in faking her death by drowning to be with her childhood love, Harry. A misogynistic society has high expectations and severe limitations on the movement of a woman. Rose, trapped in a patriarchal marital life, chooses to take her fate in her own hands in the end which embitters her husband that he could not let that happen. However, it all works out in favour of Rose and Harry.

In Chapter five, we have tried to analyse Oonya Kempadoo's three critically acclaimed novels: *Buxton Spice*, *Tide Running* and *All Decent Animals*. Oonya Kempadoo is

adept at presenting the Caribbean in its realistic locale and its distinctive vernacular. In one of her interviews, she says that story telling is so natural in us. There is an ardent need in us to communicate with others, to develop our ideas and thoughts, to understand stories and their underlying messages. The art of story- telling evolve us into more human, spiritual and creative people that we are (Kempadoo 2018. An interview with UWI). Through her writings, Oonya Kempadoo has brought the issue of gender and sexuality to the fore. Besides, her natural love for the Caribbean landscape fused with the everyday issues of the Caribbean shows her commitment to the land she belongs to. In *Buxton Spice*, she has shown sexual and gender behaviour is constructed through repeated observation and internalisation of gendered-sexual behaviour in childhood. The realism and the lilting creole of the novel are unmistakably Caribbean. In *Tide Running*, she trains her lenses on one of the major issues of the Caribbean: sex tourism. She unravels how sex tourism and global consumerism are an exploitation of Caribbean sexuality and its natural resources by developed countries of America and Europe without any real commitment on their part to deal with the issues of unemployment and poverty Caribbean people face in their day-to-day life. *All Decent Animals* deals with how homophobia is rampant in the Caribbean. It also critiques the lack of proper healthcare facilities for HIV-infected people despite the UN's huge investment in making plans and policies in Trinidad to curb these issues. Another important theme dealt with in extensive detail is the issue of gender/ sexual and racial violence. Besides, it extensively portrays the cultural festival of carnival which is an important aspect of Trinidadian identity.

All these writings bear testimony to Shani Mootoo's and Oonya Kempadoo's creative genius and their commitment to the land of the Caribbean. Their writings have clearly broadened our understanding of the issues of gender and sexuality in the Caribbean. Their writings are remarkable for raising the questions of (queer) sexuality, gender and violence

and what is needed to be done to address the issues related to gender and sexuality. Their writings are clearly anchored in authentic Caribbean-ness which shows their love for the place they grew up in. Both writers have their distinctive creative voices rooted in the humanitarian concerns for the general betterment of the people of the Caribbean.

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