

Alternative Sexuality: A Sensitive Research Guide

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Abstract

This paper tries to find out a guideline for the research of alternative sexuality. The new researchers can follow the suggestions that are given from personal experiences and groundwork.

Keywords: guidelines, methodology, alternative sexuality, queer.

From the previous research experience in the field of alternative sexuality my fervent wish is to write something that may provide guidance to the new researchers of this area. I certainly cannot claim this writing as the principles of research methodology for it does not provide any standardized way of doing research. The word “principle” relates to fundamental truth, therefore I think this word is too strong to use for my research guidelines. I rather try to present an useful research model that to an extent can be helpful to the aspiring researchers of this area. It comprises my personal observations and suggestions about how to work on it. There are certain unavoidable problems that a researcher often faces while doing research and the problems have been taken under consideration and tried to find out the best possible solutions of them. I suggest everyone to examine the differential research environments of alternative sexuality with a special focus on India. There are myriad reasons of why the premier universities of India are still not welcoming to the research on alternative sexuality and these

reasons partly work in other parts of the world as well. Moreover they should find out the advantages and disadvantages of the researchers in developing countries and developed countries. They must attempt to question research ethics which a researcher should always be careful about. Before the discrimination of homosexuality in India the researchers were caught in a double-bind because they were obligated to practice ethical research. But practising ethics on something with paradoxical effect is always complex and those who started work before the scrap of section 370 must be puzzled with ethical propriety at the early stages of their research. The question is how personally/ independently the researchers should carry out their research?

When I started working on alternative sexuality, the few books and material that were available at that time were unexpectedly similar in terms of ideas and value system. They mostly presented alternative sexual people of India in a way how successfully they fit in with Western figures and the western theories added a supplementary support system to justify them. While doing so, they set a “construct” which the later researchers blindly follow and thus a biased experimental design continues in research for many years. The indigenous alternative sexual people who are untouched of western influences and who are mainly from backward class are being left out. The institutionalized LGBT movement of India emanates from the western LGBT movement. In fact, the strategic implementation in identity making, coming out with pride, marching in Rainbow parade has similarity with the West. People, who belong to the marginalized gender position, are expected to be the part of this “institutionalized” movement but in India, there are a large number of lower class/caste people who lack comprehensive communication, the expected knowledge and consciousness of human rights; and therefore, they need to be trained up before joining as participants of this movement. The attempts, like to open space for lower class/caste sexual dissidents to take part in the movement, educate them, help them to realize the worth of rights are the objectives of the LGBT forum of India. But since the LGBT movement and its related culture is since borrowed from the West,

therefore, the sexual dissidents are expected to fit in under the labels of western identities like gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual etc. Thus, the LGBT movement of India can not address the traditional identities and other local possibilities of sex/gender dissidence with the force of class/caste issues. The *hijras*, *kothis*, *kinnars*, *panthis*, *jogtas*, *dangas*, *alis*, *double-deckers*, *chakkas*, *dhuranis* and some other local forms who are identified with their own sexual praxis cannot participate in the current LGBT movement.

So, the researchers should look the alternative sexual people of India through the lens of their class, caste, religion, history and location. In the early 1990s, queer theory is framed out of post-structuralist tool of deconstruction which inevitably calls the stability of “heteronormativity” into question. Queer theory destabilizes the dependence upon gender stating an essential self. Even in gay/lesbian studies, there are certain determinants in the classification of normal and abnormal behaviour of homosexuality but queer theory is broad and generous and it is capable of addressing the issues of cross-dressing, intersexes, gender ambiguity, gender-corrective surgery and all other possibilities. It is large enough to take in any type of sexual activity/identity and indeed, the analytical tool of queer theory offers a kaleidoscopic vision of sexual activities which might be “odd”, “peculiar”, “out of ordinary” or “queer” in true sense but indispensable in sharing an open space for all. The universal human rights agencies, capitalist modernism, new social movements and consciousness for democracy insist that the alternative sexual people of India be considered under queer identity politics. Queerness has become globalized almost in every field. In performing arts, literature, films, advertisement or in any discussion of human rights, it is the most discussed area. The increasing representations of queer lives in main-stream productions show how they have been accepted by common people. In the new globalized economy, the north-south/east-west dissension is an ongoing negotiation. The discourse of sexuality with “truth” and “power” archives has its out-turn from post-industrial, capitalist society of West. Sex and gender plurality, preference of

identities and self-assertiveness are some of the changing qualities of developed countries and countries which have not followed suit are considered “sexually repressed” and therefore, are needed to be improved by outside interventions. International aid agencies, NGOs, donor organizations adopt the same strategies of West to emancipate the queer people of non-West.

The concept of “Third World” in terms of underdevelopment is initiated by the West and the western organizations which exercise their massive power over the Third World countries. Subir K Kole states, “...India has a diverse, complex and elaborate spectrum of same-sex sexual cultures in which sexual minorities have always performed their identities in a variety of ways, in a variety of social spaces and *without* the political rhetoric of the West. The Western project of liberating the "sexually repressed" communities of the East attempts to contain this dynamic and diverse sexual culture by baptizing traditional sexual minorities to evolve into a globalized, universal, and totalizing LGBT identity category(Kole 5).With the advancement of time, the ground of LGBT politics is superseded by queer politics and its easy accessibility. In literary texts and films of India, the queer subjects are getting popularity for they capture beyond the imaginable patterns of gender/sex. Basically, speaking, the queer theory is one more advance step to reexamine gender/sex non-fixity. The visibility of queer lives and cultures is opening new opportunities in the market place of India. It is indeed reflective upon the queer literary texts which exert “queerness” in a broader sense and obviously with a non-essentialist point of view. So, a researcher should have a global understanding of Gender/ Sex politics. Moreover, it is important for a researcher about how he can deconstruct his self-identity shaped by different factors precisely their education, upbringing, class, culture as these factors sometimes intercept them to acknowledge the differential spaces of alternative sexuality. The liberal education system, friendly environment and research fund often attract many of the researchers of developing countries to join the research programme in US/ European countries. In fact, research on alternative sexuality of

developing countries takes place more in the academic institutes of developed countries than the developing countries within them.

However, it is important to be original with what resources are available and country like India which did not preserve its cultural history of alternative sexuality should encourage researchers to work on behalf of the people who are long deprived. Then the researchers should deal with research problems and reasonable countering strategies. For instance, when material or book sources are too limited to work, a researcher can do more fieldwork to fill the lacking space. Besides, the abbreviation LGBTQ has certain shibboleths attached to western alternative sexual identities and the capitalist globalization takes over the queer space of developing countries, therefore the researchers should examine on cultural history and try to find out territorial identities to create an independent queer space. Some of the queer spaces are impenetrable but the researchers can follow simple tricks to make it communicable. For instance, when Serena Nanda started a project on the hijras in India, it was quite daunting because the hijras never share their lives with people out of their community, Serena visited some of places where they lived, befriended with them and finally she succeeded in her mission.

To talk about sex is still a taboo in India and except pathological research; other life-style based research on homosexuality does not get countenance in most of the academic institutions of India. But it is not possible for all the researchers to earn a foreign scholarship or to afford a PhD programme abroad on their own expenses; so what they can do, they can take this topic in an undertone and not purely on sexual term. For example one can choose to work on female impersonators, the term female impersonator is a cultural denomination and homosexuality is an inevitable aspect of the female impersonators but one can easily avoid homosexual terms in the title of the topic and also at the surface-level of writing. These days lesbianism in India is being addressed explicitly under a cover of feminism. However, it is

neither a comprehensive solution for all topics related to alternative sexuality nor a suggestion to reach a compromise. The researchers should acknowledge plurality with a broader vision of non-heterosexual cultures from across the globe. A researcher should have knowledge of different spaces of alternative sexuality even if he works with a particular culture or region. Then they should learn how to discover a new knowledge domain to contribute the study of alternative sexuality. A researcher of this field should be focused on the philanthropic side of their research and the competency of research can earn more public support and engage many others to work on this area.

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