
Displacement and Liberation: An Exploration of the Queer Characters in Tanuja Desai Hidier's *Born Confused*

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Abstract:

Being unaccepted and rejected by the communities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals/populations generally experience isolation, alienation, discrimination and anger. Women's engagement in lesbian relationships is interpreted as a determined effort to challenge and undermine patriarchal hegemony and moral codes. Repression has served as the foundational nexus interlinking power, knowledge, and sexuality since antiquity. But substantial amount of literature cantering around the lives of individuals identifying as gay or lesbian has gathered reputation across the world after 1950s. Conveyed through any medium or genre, homosexual literature usually delves into themes concerning gender dynamics and individual identity and explores the intricate relationship between ethnicity and social class and the influence it has on an individual's sense of self. The genre of gay and lesbian literature depicts sexuality as a product of social conditioning, a learned behaviour moulded by cultural norms and institutional influences. The present paper examines the young adult novel *Born Confused* by Tanuja Desai Hidier which portrays characters who identify as LGBTQ and they get the opportunity to express their desires because of the diasporic movement. The displacement, at times, affords the LGBTQ a newfound sense of freedom and liberation, liberating them from the constraints of their native societies, allowing the exploration and affirmation of their individual sexual orientations, as is poignantly illustrated in the present narrative. Consequently, it becomes evident that the concept of diaspora extends beyond the mere crossing of physical borders or the attainment of a transnational status. The second-generation diasporic progeny, inhabiting Bhabha's "Third Space," embark on a process of reorientation. Using Lesbian criticism and Queer theory, the present perusal explores sexual orientation of the major or minor characters occupying different backgrounds. These approaches look at the representation of the queer impasse, problems faced in heteronormative society, subjugation of sexual orientations; endeavour to unveil the concealed politics of resistance, place transgressive identities in the context of prevailing power structures that have historically subdued them and also the option of alternate physical relationships.

Keywords: Homosexual, Heterosexual, LGBTQ, Lesbian/Queer relationships, Transgender, Repression.

Introduction and Aim:

Being unaccepted, rejected or banished by the communities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals/populations generally experience isolation, alienation, discrimination and anger. Biological gender is generally mistaken and understood as the defining standard of human identity in the society. The idea that identities are fluid, unstable, and always in a state of flux is negated in favour of the social demand to stabilize them as the true symbols of human existence and biology. Exploring the same foundational principle of 'fluidity of identity' that pertains to sexual orientation, specifically in queer studies, Eve Sedgwick, in her work *Epistemology of the Closet*, examines the dynamics surrounding the process of coming out or disclosing one's homosexual orientation. In this regard Butler says:

Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis (378).

From the above statement, it may be ascertained that gender is not related to physical or bodily aspects. It is rather a social construction which keeps on shifting and fluctuating, and as a result can be challenged. Foucault believes, "repression has been the fundamental link between power, knowledge and sexuality since the classical age" (*The History of Sexuality*, 9). But substantial amount of literature cantering around the lives of individuals identifying as gay or lesbian has gathered reputation across the world after 1950s. The including and highlighting of LGBTQ characters has also witnessed an upsurge which has resulted in validation, connection, and acceptance.

Conveyed through any medium or genre, homosexual literature usually delves into themes concerning gender dynamics and individual identity. It explores the intricate relationship between ethnicity and social class and the influence it has on an individual's sense of self. The explicit affirmation of unconventional sexual orientations, particularly in historically conservative societies like India, remains a contentious topic that is susceptible to disapproval from the 'heteronormative' majority or the conventional social mainstream. In consequence, many authors in the homosexual literary sphere resort to extensive utilization of metaphors and allegorical expressions in their creative works, choosing to indirectly address themes related to gender identity and sexual inclination. They give space to transgression which "draws

attention to popular culture's role in struggles over meaning. It argues that the popular text is successful because it operates at the borders of what is socially acceptable; and, in order to provoke a widespread interest, the text must, at some level, breach the bounds of that acceptability. It must, in other words, challenge social standards and norms (McCracken 158). Although the diasporic movement is generally a traumatic experience of displacement but it also provides the liberating potential to the queer to lead a life away from anathemas and constraints. In many cases, the geographical movement produces new identifications and experiences of sexuality and gender identity. The shift to a relatively less conventional environment endows the queer with liberatory positions. At its core, the genre of gay and lesbian literature is rooted in gender criticism, a theoretical framework that challenges the notion of sexuality as a predetermined biological trait. Instead, proponents of this perspective view sexuality as a product of social conditioning, a learned behaviour moulded by cultural norms and institutional influences. Intentionally moving away from traditionalist archetypes, supporters of gender criticism strongly contest the inflexible cataloguing of sexual orientations into homosexuality and heterosexuality, thereby, championing the concept of gender constructionism.

The present paper examines the young adult novel *Born Confused*, published in 2002 written by Tanuja Desai Hidier, an Indian Diaspora novelist residing in America. The work under consideration portrays characters who identify as LGBTQ deferentially and precisely, and they get the opportunity to express their desires because of the diasporic movement, as mentioned above. The adolescents and teenagers can effortlessly relate with the 17-year old protagonist Dimple's views on the discomforts of growing up, muddled selves, realizing ones' dreams and falling in love. Dimple is a second generation American-India or, as she calls herself, an ABCD (American Born Confused Desi). Hidier's rich account of food, India, Dimple's parents meet, New York parties, religious beliefs, tattoos, heartbreaks and friendship attract the younger generation. The work presents the convoluted interactions among various female characters who employ 'female bonding' as a means to challenge the imbalanced power dynamics in American teenage life. One form of this 'bonding' is characterized by a close, platonic friendship between Dimple and Gwyn, which has also been represented as overtly sexual or lesbian relationship. The second relationship depicted in the novel, between Kavita and Sabina, is explicitly lesbian. Furthermore, there is an additional element of transgression introduced through a transgender character, whose deliberate and fluid shifts between male and female identities serve as a distinct attempt to resist the collective essentialism inherent in social relations. Using Lesbian criticism and Queer theory, the present perusal explores sexual orientation of the major or minor characters occupying different backgrounds of race, age, sexual identity, class, and status to name a few. These approaches look at the representation of the queer impasse, subjugation of sexual

orientations, problems faced in heteronormative society and also the option of alternate physical relationships. The present qualitative content analysis examines the portrayal of adolescents who identify as LGBTQ and investigates the messages being presented through *Born Confused*. Qualitative content analysis, has been described by Zhang and Wildemuth as a study that “goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes, and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text” (318).

Theoretical Framework:

Lesbian criticism focuses particularly on the practices of heterosexuality, which have traditionally been taken for granted and are seen as oppressive to female identity, encroaching upon women's choices and inclinations in matters of sexual fulfilment. Lesbianism and its portrayal in literary works, thus, become a means of breaching, transgressing, and deconstructing social-sexual codes and norms. In fact, “The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire” (Butler 31). Women's engagement in lesbian relationships is interpreted as a determined effort to challenge and undermine patriarchal hegemony and moral codes. The lesbian feminist perspective, as identified in Anne Koedt's essay “The Women Identified Women,” places lesbianism at the core of feminism. This is because lesbianism represents a turning away from various forms of collusion with patriarchal exploitation and instead involves relationships among women that, by definition, constitute a form of resistance to and a radical reorganization of existing social relations. While mainstream feminism has often concentrated on binary oppositions and codes that destabilize and malign women's discourse, practitioners and advocates of Lesbian/Gay Criticism emphasize sexual orientation and preferences, which are undeniably atypical, as the foundation for critically interpreting a particular literary phenomenon. In this case Abelow, Henry, et al remark:

In lesbian criticism, the defining feature is making sexual orientation ‘a fundamental category of analysis and understanding.’ Like feminist criticism, then, it has social and political aims, in particular ‘an oppositional design’ upon society, for it is formed by resistance to homophobia [fear and prejudice against homosexuality] and heterosexism... [and to] the ideological and institutional practices of heterosexual privilege (15).

Therefore, Lesbian Criticism presents a novel perspective for the critique of literary texts, a departure from the conventional evaluation grounded in feminist principles and other established theoretical patterns in the domain of gender studies. Lesbian Criticism endeavours to unveil the concealed politics of resistance, often found in relationships between individuals of the same gender or any other form of

experimentation with sexuality. This critical approach seeks to place these identities in the context of prevailing power structures that have historically subdued them. According to Assad, sexuality not only denotes “the biological instincts towards sex, mere genital, but a social construction created by and through the physical and social interaction of the individual with those around him or her” (10) A large amount of young adult literature features LGBTQ characters, and represents their backgrounds and explores their lives.

Queer theory is an off shoot of the gay and lesbian studies’ and it focuses on the social construction of classifications of customary and aberrant sexual behaviour. The queer theorists explore the biased treatment faced by individuals with deviant sexual conduct or sexual preferences in texts, history, and society. They repeatedly discard dualistic oppositions such as heterosexual/homosexual. The term queer now investigates all sexualities and sexual practices that are measured or proclaimed to be non-normative. Queer theory also purposes to scrutinize earlier ignored expressions, suppressed portrayals, and the expansion of the treatises that represent same sex or other perverse cravings which play a noteworthy role in the creation of sexual and political identity formation. These include heterosexual queers, who revolt against the norms of the society and also challenge heterosexual conventions of marriage and reproduction publicly. According to Sinfield, the queer critics read the text to “examine the constructions that a culture has put upon sexually ambivalent texts in order to expose its ideological repressiveness” (74).

An additional salient facet of the novel worthy of consideration lies in the nuanced exploration of the dynamics of voluntary or involuntary migration, a phenomenon through which individuals’ transition from their native homelands to unfamiliar regions takes place. This displacement can, at times, afford them a newfound sense of freedom and liberation, liberating them from the constraints of their native societies, allowing the exploration and affirmation of their individual sexual orientations, as is poignantly illustrated in the present narrative. Consequently, it becomes evident that the concept of diaspora extends beyond the mere crossing of physical borders or the attainment of a transnational status. Homi K. Bhabha’s conceptualization of the “Third Space” emerges as a pivotal theoretical construct in this context. This conceptual space represents a complex and ambivalent terrain wherein the act of cultural expression, declaration, elucidation, and interpretation finds fertile ground. The second-generation diasporic progeny, inhabiting this “Third Space,” embark on a process of reorientation. They endeavour to establish novel social networks while simultaneously navigating the intricate economic, political, and cultural realities of their host countries. It is in this unconventional and unorthodox host environment that they are afforded the liberty to express their sexual orientations freely, thereby expanding the multifaceted nature of their diasporic experience.

Background:

Dimple Lala, a 17-year-old girl of East Indian heritage, is navigating the complexities of her upbringing in New Jersey. She possesses an introspective nature, nurturing relationships with her loving parents and maintaining a close friendship with Gwyn, her white best friend, who exhibits a fascination with Indian culture. Dimple struggles with the dual sides of her identity, oscillating between her American and Indian heritages, and finding solace and self-expression in her innate talent for photography. When Dimple's parents introduce her to Karsh, a young man of Indian descent, she initially fears their intentions may involve arranging a marriage. Consequently, she adopts an unwelcoming behaviour towards him. However, as events unfold, she discovers that Karsh is a skilled DJ in New York City's club. It dispels her initial misgivings about his perceived nerdiness. This newfound connection creates a romantic entanglement, with Gwyn promptly developing feelings for Karsh as well. Dimple is now confronted with a dilemma, torn between her loyalty to her friend and her pursuit of personal happiness. Unwittingly, Gwyn exhibits a lack of restraint in undermining Dimple's chances with Karsh.

Karsh exhibits a strong attraction to Dimple, and his demeanour towards her is characterized by genuine kindness and supportiveness. He actively nurtures her passion for photography and endeavours to assist her in pursuing her musical interests. In response to his affections and support, Dimple finds herself irresistibly drawn to him, to the extent of contemplating relinquishing her friendship with Gwyn. Paradoxically, Karsh's affections are not exclusive to Dimple, as he is also emotionally drawn to Gwyn. He aspires to demonstrate to Gwyn that not all men replicate the negative experiences she has had with her absent father, consistently acting as her protector and confidant. When Dimple perceives signs that Karsh may favour Gwyn over her, she harbours feelings of insecurity and resentment. This mounting tension culminates in an altercation between Dimple and Gwyn, characterized by a rift in their relationship.

At the end of the novel, a significant transformation takes place as Karsh understands that his deepest affection is reserved for Dimple, ultimately leading to their union as a couple. In parallel, Dimple and Gwyn proactively engage in an earnest pursuit of one another, displaying a sincere commitment to mend the fractures in their friendship. Their reconciliation is underpinned by a candid and introspective dialogue, wherein Gwyn expresses her sense of abandonment, while Dimple conveys her perception of being utilized by Gwyn as a means to alleviate her own insecurities. Through this process, they arrive at a profound realization, recognizing the depth of their friendship surpasses their prior understanding.

Thus, throughout the course of the narrative, both Gwyn and Dimple undergo significant personal growth, gaining a deeper understanding of themselves. Dimple embraces her Indian heritage more fully, cultivates confidence in her photography

skills, and attains professional success by featuring her Indian-American transgender friend's photos in a prominent New York magazine. This adolescent romance novel is elevated by its multifaceted and emotionally intricate lead female character, marked by intelligence, introspection, and talent. Dimple's struggle with her ethnic identity adds depth to the story. Additionally, the inclusion of a transgender character treated with empathy and sensitivity enhances diversity and the reach of the novel. Dimple's journey is marked by a heightened appreciation for her parents, signifying a more profound understanding of familial bonds and cultural ties. This transformative experience collectively underscores the notion that they are fortunate to have one another in their lives. Hidier's writing exudes insight and understated elegance by exploring themes of romantic entanglements and friendship rivalries. Following its publication, the novel received accolades from prominent publications such as *Rolling Stone* and *Entertainment Weekly*, earning recognition as one of the finest young-adult novels.

Analysis:

Born Confused is a coming-of-age novel that follows the journey of Dimple Lala, a seventeen-year-old girl coping with her cultural identity and self-perception. Dimple, an Indian-American, finds herself caught between two worlds: she perceives herself as too American to fully assimilate into Indian society and too Indian to be wholly embraced by the American social set-up. She sees herself as a native of the United States, possessing limited knowledge about India. Consequently, she can be categorized as an "ABCD," signifying an individual who is 'American Born Confused Desi'. Dimple, at one point, expresses a poignant sentiment, articulating, "But for now I was an ABCD, I didn't really know what that meant. But that was the point" (Hidier 109). A pivotal and defining feature of Dimple's life is her close friendship with Gwyn (Gwendolyn), an American girl with a troubled family background. The extremely tumultuous environment in Gwyn's home resonates with Dimple, and she is naturally drawn to Gwyn, who epitomizes American beauty and independence. Dimple's friendship with Gwyn serves as a catalyst for her quest to discover new meaning in her bewildering existence. It offers Dimple something she yearns for as an individual of Indian origin—an illusory sense of unity with Americans, who, according to her own hypothesis, might otherwise have marginalized her. Being with Gwyn signifies that she too can be perceived as an American, distinct from her parents, whose enigmatic and exotic orientalism is considered foreign and unfamiliar. Gwyn's quintessentially American style of dress, characterized by its provocative nature, her forthrightness in dating, her casual approach to physical intimacy, and her comfort with recreational drug use captivate Dimple's fascination. Conversely, Gwyn also enjoys Dimple's company because of her idyllic family background, replete with affectionate and nurturing parents which is in a stark contrast to her own experience

due to her parents' divorce. This uninviting familial history serves as a magnetic force that draws Gwyn towards Dimple and her family.

Dimple's attraction to Gwyn can be attributed to her own status as a doubly marginalized individual, being both a woman and a member of an ethnic group rooted in an exotic cultural milieu. Lesbiansitic behaviour or homosexual fixation, as described above, can be traced in the fundamental sense of subaltern identity that Dimple feels to possess. This assertion is substantiated by the critical pronouncements made in the context of the predominantly male-dominated discourse of patriarchy. The union of these two women in such an intimate relationship represents a divergence from conventional cultural norms, as it challenges established notions of morality and piety. The proximity, overt sexual closeness and sharing of thoroughly guarded secrets pertaining to womanhood constitute pivotal aspects of this behaviour. Although the novel does not explicitly depict sexual encounters between Dimple and Gwyn, their intimate discussions, abounding in fantasies and expressions of longing for one another's companionship, serve as significant indicators of the 'woman-identified woman' phenomenon, as elucidated by Anne Koedt. These revelations underline the meaning of the bond between Dimple and Gwyn, particularly in light of their shared experiences of marginalization and their quest for understanding and validation in the face of parental authority that often disregards their voices for various reasons.

In addition to the theoretical lesbian dimension of spiritual solace exemplified through the friendship between Dimple and Gwyn during times of distress, there exist subtle indications of a deeper physical and emotional connection, wherein Dimple is depicted as harbouring a passionate fascination for Gwyn's impeccably sculpted, curvilinear physique. In stark contrast to Dimple's fleshy and obese frame, Gwyn possesses a slender and seductive figure. Dimple perceives herself as aesthetically disadvantaged, and her attempts to emulate Gwyn's glamour invariably result in her self-perceived failure. The novel records:

Looking at this black-and-white of a red, white and blue moment, Gwyn appeared the very image of the American dream itself, the blond-rooted, blond-haired, blue-eyed Marilyn for the skinny generation. And if I was her reverse twin-the negative to her positive-that made me? The Indian nightmare? The American scream? (Hidier 12)

The novelist's meticulous portrayal of the two young women's bodies, as perceived through each other's perspectives, underlines their mutual rejection of a world that had, in their opinion, betrayed them. This depiction further emphasizes upon their unwavering commitment to womanhood and sexuality as a means of escape from the pervasive oppression they encounter. The realization challenges the conventional notion that heterosexuality or companionship with a male friend represents the sole recourse available to women for expressing their latent

frustrations. Both Dimple and Gwyn embark on a journey to deconstruct the established signifiers of female sexuality and essentialism. The same sex friendship between these two women liberates Dimple from the constricting sexual norms imposed by the Indian family system. It is worth noting that these norms are, intriguingly, products of cultural constructs. Whenever Dimple finds herself compelled to conform to the conventional expectations of sexual fidelity to her husband, regardless of the conflicting interests he may embody, it is the sexually liberal and innovative Gwyn who provides solace and guidance to Dimple amidst the difficulties of her own evolving sexuality.

As for Gwyn, her attraction to Dimple stems from her own challenging family circumstances. Her divorced parents have shown minimal concern for her, leaving her in a state of deep emotional deprivation. In Dimple's presence, Gwyn discovers a sense of fulfilment that has hitherto been absent throughout her life. Furthermore, Gwyn admires Dimple's qualities of virginity and perceived sexual integrity. Experiences of romantic betrayals and the shortcomings of previous sexual relationships compel Gwyn to regard Dimple with a deep, platonic affection. Consequently, Gwyn allows Dimple's established female identity to transform into a more fluid one, shaped by her own imaginative constructs, as a means to challenge conventional notions of male sexuality. This postmodern notion of identity as an ever-evolving interaction among a myriad of roles and positions drawn from an expansive repository of potentialities enables Gwyn to find solace that her previously defined identity could not afford her. The voluntary blurring of gender identities emerges as a tool employed by both Gwyn and Dimple to transcend the constraints imposed by an unforgiving social superstructure and conventional relationships. They are no better than the monster "who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who has a story to tell—in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (Moi 58).

Along with the theme of queer, the novel also portrays Dimple and her parents as diasporas who are to contend with the issue of identity, space construction, safeguarding of one's culture, alliance and assimilation in host culture etc. The book predominantly employs a comparative and contrasting framework, utilizing the cultural backdrops of American and Indian societies as its primary settings to illuminate the characters of Dimple and her American counterpart, Gwyn. Dimple's parents are averse to her adoption of American customs and are vehemently opposed to her forming friendships with Americans. Shilpa consistently exerts pressure on Dimple to don traditional Indian attire, such as the Salvar Khameez, and insists that she wears a Bindi on her forehead during special occasions, symbolizing her connection to Indian culture. On one occasion, Dimple's mother conveys to Karsh, "you know the guest is god in Indian household" (Hidier 126). Dimple's parents wish that she embraces and immerses herself in Indian traditions wholeheartedly. Shilpa

tells Dimple that they are happy that their daughter would have a native company in person of Kavita: "Thank Ram Kavita is coming, the back of my mother's head commented. - Enough with these hanky-panky friendships of yours," (Hidier 76). Dimple's inclination towards photography serves as a distinguishing façade of her character, emblematic of her role as a discerning observer, rather than a mere participant. In the United States, she appears excessively imbued with her Indian heritage, while in India, her demeanour seems to be explicitly American. Consequently, she finds herself incapable of seamlessly assimilating into either cultural sphere, experiencing a pervasive sense of disorientation and exacerbation of her predicament over time. Her utilization of the Chikka Tikka, as a medium for capturing images, metaphorically encapsulates her unique perspective of viewing the world through a multifaceted lens of perception. Dimple desires disassociation from her familial culture, its traditions, and all elements considered quintessentially Indian. However, her meeting with Karsh helps to transform her perspective. Her antipathy towards these cultural aspects gradually metamorphoses into an affection and appreciation for them. Dimple and her parents spare no effort in their endeavour to diligently uphold and safeguard both their domestic and diasporic identities. Their unwavering commitment to their Indian heritage, which they carried with them upon their migration to America, is manifest in various aspects of their lives, encompassing culinary practices, clothing choices, religious observances, linguistic nuances, and many more. The novelist delineates intricate process through which Dimple and her family navigate the challenge of forging a distinct and meaningful niche in the unfamiliar terrain of America. But Shilpa is also aware of her daughter's suffering and tells her, "But I know it is not just your fault, she continued. - It is this America-you cannot escape it, like those golden arches everywhere you turn. It is hard to resist it. But if I'd known the price we'd have to pay for this land of opportunity was our own daughter, I might never have left" (Hidier 83). The trauma of geographical movement discussed here becomes the reason of Dimple's friendship with Gwyn.

In the novel, there is a conspicuous violation of sexual codes, centred around the formation of lesbian and sexual bonds among women. The deviation becomes evident in a significant shift in expected behavioural norms. This change is a consequence of prevailing radicalization of sexual behaviour as dictated by cultural conventions. In contrast to the experiences of Dimple and Gwyn, this particular lesbian association stands out for its audacious and unapologetic nature, as the individuals involved attempt to transcend established sexual ethical boundaries. The unique affiliation is skilfully depicted by the author within a sub-plot that revolves around the characters of Kavita, a cousin of Dimple, and Sabina, a typical American youth and their 'queer' relationship. Kavita's journey to the United States from India is facilitated by her connection to Dimple's family. She harbours conservative perspectives and experiences the sense of isolation while residing in America. The

constraints imposed by her cultural heritage inevitably give way to hedonistic tendencies and an assertive self-identity once the restraints are removed. It is in the American setting that Kavita finds the freedom and authority to openly express her suppressed preferences and desires, which were stifled in her Indian upbringing. Thus, Kavita's courageous choice to engage in a homosexual relationship can also be examined in the context of geographical/diasporic movement, liberation of accepting and portraying sexual orientation and resistance.

Originating from a traditional Gujarati family, Kavita finds herself deprived of her desires and ambitions as they are dismissed as unconventional. In her quest to overturn her marginalized position, Kavita resolves to openly acknowledge her non-normative sexual orientation, thereby distinguishing herself from the repressed cohort of women in her family. In doing so, she starts what is termed as the "lesbian continuum" which critiques the limited scope of feminism that overlooks intricate and personal experiences of women and their relationships. Adrienne Rich defines the term lesbian continuum as:

I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a rang – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman (184).

The concept of a continuous thread of womanhood manifests itself as a platform for addressing discriminatory practices not only perpetuated by male authority but also by certain factions of heterosexual womanhood aligned with the former's dominion, as evidenced by their complicit acceptance of female subjugation and conformity to behaviours that reinforce such dominance. Kavita's radical actions endorse the apparent virtue articulated in Rich's definition of *lesbian continuum* suggesting interconnections through various ways for the women to bond together. Kavita strategically employs this continuum to validate her choice of a socially and politically conscious homosexual relationship, while simultaneously rejecting and morally condemning culturally sanctioned heterosexual relationships that, in her view, betray the interests of women. In her efforts to legitimize her lesbian relationship in her diasporic circles, she de-sexualises it indirectly or transforms it into a political statement rather than a mere expression of sexual orientation, effectively cleansing/sterilizing it and reshaping it into something new. This exemplifies her unwavering commitment to her homosexual movement aimed at resisting oppression in her heterosexual dominion, a cause uniquely her own.

Dimple's meets Zara, a transgender, at an Indian gathering of young people, shortly after her friendship with Gwyn has broken. She is initially captivated by Zara's grace and is excited to meet her, only to be taken aback by the revelation that Zara is, in fact, a man. Zara proceeds to share his story, explaining how he fled India due to societal intolerance of his unique gender identity and preferences. He is trying

to sought solace and acceptance among like-minded individuals in the United States, where he could confidently express his true self. So, once again it is the movement from the Third world into the First one that allows Zara his own space and courage to declare his fluid identity. Zara fondly reminisces about his homeland and the siblings who had rejected him because of his unconventional inclinations and actions. He was ostracized from his family but he maintains a steadfast awareness of his own identity. He is a victim of a complex web of dilemmas. He offers Dimple the most valuable of lessons citing his example:

Believe it or not Dimple-and I would believe it-I am just a regular person who has decided to be who I am in life. That's all. That's how you make your life magical - you take yourself into your hands and rub a little. You activate your identity. And that's the only way to make, as they say, the world a better place; after all, good are you to anyone without yourself (Hidier 442).

Zara's sincere and blunt perspective on self-determined identity serves as a valuable lesson that helps renovating Dimple's perspective and life. As Dimple observes Zara changing his attire and transforming himself, she experiences a newfound sense of confidence. Through this experience, she comes to understand that one's identity is primarily shaped by one's attitude and inner disposition, rather than external circumstances. Dimple finds herself deeply moved when her photographs, taken during this transformative process with Zara, are published in a prominent New York magazine, bestowing upon her the title and accolades of an artist. Zara effectively demonstrates to Dimple the expansive realm of possibilities for identity exploration. He imparts the wisdom of how she can reimagine and reinvigorate herself, rather than dwelling on uncertainties about her roots. Zara's deliberate experimentation with his own body and persona serves as a testament to the capacity of individuals to craft and mould themselves according to their own volition. This revelation serves as a catalyst for Dimple, motivating her to harness the advantages of her own hybrid identity.

The transformation of Zara, transitioning fluidly between him to her identities and vice versa, serves as a compelling demonstration of how deeply ingrained binary paradigms and the conventional dichotomies of male/female can be transcended and supplanted by embracing innovative pathways departing from entrenched traditions. Dimple then chooses a journey to reshaping herself, drawing inspiration from Zara's courageous departure from social and behavioural norms. In this context, Zara exemplifies the poststructuralist argument in the gay-lesbian theory, effectively 'deconstructing' binary oppositions by revealing, firstly, that the distinctions in paired opposites lack absolute boundaries, as each term in the pair can only be comprehended and defined in relation to the other, and secondly, that it is entirely feasible to invert the hierarchy in such pairings, thereby 'privileging' the second term over the first. Zara makes the binary opposition of hetero/homo as inherently unstable.

Furthermore, Zara epitomizes the concept of identity fluidity by prompting a critical re-evaluation of the demarcation between the inherently ingrained normative 'self' of heterosexuality and the ostracized 'Other' of homosexuality. In this context, the 'Other' is both an element residing within us and extending beyond us, with 'self' and 'Other' perpetually entwined or interfolded. As fundamental psychology reveals, what is often identified as the external 'Other' frequently constitutes a rejected aspect of the self, subsequently projected outward (Barry 145). Zara's 'Other' remains suppressed due to the constrictive regulatory regimes and social structures prevalent in Indian households, which validate only the 'self' as the prevailing norm. The intense discomfort arising from this suppression compels Zara to embark on a journey of self-discovery, venturing beyond the confines of binary constructs of his/her and ultimately embracing a more authentic expression of identity which became possible only due to his geographical/diasporic movement from India to America.

Conclusion:

The preceding discussion illuminates that the LGBTQ Identities always receive social contempt and they have often been defamed and denounced. Their social ostracisation leads to make their queerness an offense. In *Born Confused* Tanuja Desai Hidier breaks the silence regarding the queer identities and deals with this issue with a deep human acumen and compassion. The pursuit of lesbian literary reorientations is aimed at establishing autonomy for lesbian or marginalized individuals and situating their reality on an equal footing with the visible one. The identities of queer individuals are constructed in binary opposition of the heterosexuals. The clichéd descriptions are the result of the governing discourses functioning in the society. In this regard Foucault observes:

In the nineteenth century texts there is a stereotypical portrait of the homosexual or invert, not only his mannerisms, his bearing, the ways he get dolled up, his coquetry, but also his facial expressions, his anatomy, the feminine morphology of his whole body are regularly included in this disparaging description (18).

But Hidier through her unreserved embrace of tolerance and acceptance introduces readers to the concealed reality of the queer segment of Indian society, perhaps ahead of its time. She de-sexualises the female bonding, thereby, sanitizing it and transforming it.

Generally the social norms pose difficulty in queers' acceptance of their real identities publically and they have to shield themselves behind the cloak of secrecy which at times leads to hypocrisy at large on behalf of the queers. To substantiate Jon McRae's words become helpful, as he writes, ". . . For the fault is not just the characters'-it is everyone's, in a society which not only condones but encourages hypocrisy, which demands deceit and negation, rather than allowing self-expression, responsibility and dignity" (46). But in *Born Confused*, we encounter various

characters who achieve a form of integration in their lives by deliberately subverting sexual norms and institutions such as marriage, which leads to their initial disintegration. These intentional acts are bold steps, as they often result in alienation following the declaration or coming out process. However, in due course, these actions garner the recognition they deserve through their queer ways. In the novel under consideration, Dimple's domicile serves as a nuanced convergence of two distinct languages and cultures, giving rise to a singular household characterized by multiple, intertwined identities. On one hand, we witness the unwavering adherence of Dimple's parents to their native culture. On the other, we encounter Dimple Lala, a character who inhabits an intermediary space between two distinct cultural spheres and physical locales, neither wholly Indian nor entirely American. Within the confines of her home, she assumes an American identity, yet in the broader external world, she assumes the role of an Indian, relegated to the status of an 'Other.' Kavita and Zara, both tormented souls, liberate themselves from the suffocating grip of patriarchy and social fundamentalism, respectively, by boldly crossing the gender and geographical boundaries. The characters deal with various encounters, complications and conflicts in the story. The deconstruction of conventional codes and deliberate exploration of gender identities instill a sense of courage in these characters, ultimately breaking the cast in which Dimple, the central character of the novel, had confined herself. She seems to camouflage her identity in order to maintain the reputation and to save herself from being ostracized from the society. By encompassing all features of homosexual relationships and examining the ensuing situations of disgrace, guilt, alienation, and anguish, the aforementioned literary work ushers in a new chapter in gender studies in India. It may also be asserted that the impetus driving the LGBTQ characters towards forming queer relationships stems from their transplantation to foreign soil and their aspirations for assimilation into a different culture, concurrently striving to transcend the lingering spectra of inferiority associated with belonging to a historically marginalized racial group.

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