



CAST(E)ING QUEERNESS

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the relationship between caste and queerness in India, arguing that caste is not merely an intersecting identity but a constitutive force that shapes queer lives, identities, and political possibilities. Drawing on the writings of Bahujan, queer and trans scholars and activists, it explores how caste and heteropatriarchy operate through institutions such as family, marriage, and the state to regulate gender and sexuality. The paper demonstrates how caste invisibilises queer subjects, structures access to dignity, labour, and citizenship, and reinforces compulsory heterosexuality. It further interrogates caste privilege within queer movements, highlighting the persistence of ‘upper-caste’ dominance, homonormativity, and the myth of castelessness. By centring the experiences of Bahujan queer persons, the paper argues that queer politics cannot be separated from anti-caste struggle. It concludes that meaningful queer liberation requires an explicit commitment to anti-caste politics, solidarity, and social justice.

Keywords: *Caste, Queerness, Trans, Heteronormativity, State*

INTRODUCTION:

One does not embody a single identity. Identity is a complex phenomenon. Subjects, as substantiated by postmodern and gender studies literatures, are constituted in multiple ways. Multiple experiences intersect at a point to give rise to what we term identity

How does heteropatriarchy complement caste in Indian society, and in what ways does caste become a necessary factor in guiding and shaping gender relations, performances, and power? These have become pressing questions in contemporary times, as discourses around multiple identities have entered both public life and academic inquiry. This paper attempts to illuminate the complex relationship between caste and queerness — a relationship that has long

remained underexplored in mainstream academic literature. Pushpesh Kumar (2014) argues that 'a sociological understanding of sexuality issues in Indian context or elsewhere in South Asia cannot distance from the issues of caste, class, religions, ethnicity, rural, urban and a complete interplay of these institutions for homoerotically inclined individuals.' Kumar (2014) further notes that caste has not been adequately theorised beyond heteronormativity in academic writing. Even in Nivedita Menon's volume on sexuality, caste is treated heteronormatively, despite most of its essays engaging with queer concerns. The failure to theorise caste beyond the heteronormative has meant that the narratives of dually marginalised subjects — Bahujan queer persons — have remained largely absent from academic literature.

This paper brings together and analyses questions and narratives that address the intersection of the sexual and the social. The paper's central preoccupation may be stated as follows: what does it mean to be a queer person in the existence of caste?

Caste, this paper argues, functions not merely as a social hierarchy but as a constitutive and constraining force upon the gender and sexuality. As Gautam (2015) puts it, 'caste system creates a vertical hierarchy where gender and sexuality issues interact mostly horizontally across this vertical plane.' Caste creates the lines along which discrimination and violence extend, and gender intersects these in between. Queerness might, in this sense, be a matter of individual becoming, but caste is always a surveilling factor. Caste constructs normative gender identities and reinforces them through reiteration; accordingly, caste can be understood as both a constitutedness and a constraint of queerness.

CASTE, INSTITUTIONS, AND THE INVISIBILISATION OF QUEERNESS:

At the heart of the relationship between caste and queerness lies the question of how caste renders non-heterosexual persons invisible. Gautam (2015) argues that the 'invisibilisation' of non-heterosexual behaviour is achieved through coercive means: family and society work in concert to suppress it, with the state serving as their guarantor.

The institution of marriage is central to this process. In India, marriages are often endogamous — designed to maintain caste purity and hierarchy. As Ambedkar (1916) argued, caste is built upon the very foundation of endogamy. Marriage is a social institution that legitimises relationships and produces offspring who carry forward caste identity and values. The activities of organisations such as Bajrang Dal and the Anti Romeo Squad in restricting pre-marital heterosexual relationships further demonstrate that love and romantic relationships are considered legitimate only when they culminate in reproduction — so as to maintain caste based patrilineal lineage. Queer sexuality and relationships, not being oriented towards reproduction, directly challenge caste-patriarchal morality and the structure it sustains. Caste, accordingly, validates, celebrates, and protects compulsory heterosexuality whilst invisibilising queer persons.

Surya (2016) recollects how their father shouted at them and questioned their worth for refusing a marriage proposal from a caste-matched NRI cisgender man. Surya says: 'It was unthinkable and dangerous sign that I imagined my worth to be higher than appropriate.' This personal narration crystallises the theoretical point: marriage functions as a disciplinary mechanism to enforce caste endogamy, and the refusal to comply is construed as a threat not merely to family honour but to the caste structure itself. Gautam (2015) further notes that marriage is used as the primary tool for the invisibilisation of queer persons.

Gee Imaan Semmalar (2017) argues that most narratives of family violence against Trans persons are rooted in shame, and that shame and respectability bear an inextricable connection to caste. Semmalar recounts how their family took pride in them as a Trans man who 'could do anything that boys do or better', yet poses the question of whether that same pride would have been forthcoming had they expressed femininity. Trans men remain with their families longer than Trans women, and one reason Semmalar identifies is that caste preserves and promotes masculinity as a source of familial pride.

Dhamini Ratnam (2017) points out that the fundamental rights of liberty, equality, dignity, and privacy had been denied to persons across the gender identity and sexual orientation spectrum until August 2017, when the Supreme Court ruled that the right to privacy is an element of human dignity and, therefore, a fundamental right. Even though self-determination of sexual

orientation was thereby accorded fundamental right status, Ratnam argues that this right cannot be effectively exercised unless one simultaneously confronts caste. As Ratnam asserts, 'Equality and privacy can't be separated. Violate one, and you violate the other' (Ratnam, 2017). Society promises to maintain the privacy of married heterosexual couples precisely because family and caste dignity are bound to that privacy.

Even many heterosexual couples, even while having the right and promise to privacy, cannot access it for having inaccessibility to infrastructure that entitles privacy because of structural exclusion and marginalisation. Non-heterosexual relationships, simultaneously, rupture caste dignity and respectability; as a result, the privacy of queer people is routinely violated. Additionally, those without having access to basic infrastructures such as proper housing, among others, are not just at risk of violence, but also remain at the very margin of imagination of desire, relationship and sexuality.

THE BRAHMINICAL STATE AND THE GOVERNANCE OF QUEER BODIES:

If family and community function as primary agents of caste discipline over queer persons, the state operates as their guarantor. The state has consistently failed to provide safety and security to inter-caste couples who defy endogamy, positioning itself not as a neutral arbiter but as a perpetuator of the caste system — one that complements and reinforces compulsory heterosexuality.

The evolution of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2016 into an Act in 2019 illustrates this with considerable clarity. In its original form, the bill required Trans persons to obtain a certificate of identity from a District Magistrate on the recommendation of a 'screening committee' comprising a medical officer, a government official, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a district welfare officer, and a Trans person. This provision, only partially modified in the 2019 Act, strips Trans persons of the fundamental right to self-determination of gender identity and vests that power in the Brahminical state. A Trans person is required to submit to institutional scrutiny — to present themselves before a committee that will certify their gender identity. This constitutes a state-

sanctioned violation of bodily autonomy and, importantly, a shaming of the Trans body conducted openly and in public knowledge.

This, Semmalar (2017) argues, is how the state operates as an agent in the strategic invisibilisation of Trans persons. To protect society from what it construes as the shame of Trans visibility — a shame that emanates from Brahminical pride — the Brahminical state protects its own Brahminical ego and shames the bodies of Trans persons in full public view.

Semmalar further argues that whether in British colonial records, media, court judgments, Hindu myths, modern cinema, academic writing, or social movements, the Trans person is invariably hyper-sexualised, over-determined by gender characteristics, and constructed as someone who engages in 'immoral activities', to be consigned accordingly to the social periphery. The Trans person has been, in Semmalar's words, 'the perpetual 'other' against whom public decency and caste morality could be constructed, reinforced and perpetuated' (Semmalar, 2017). Caste grows out of shaming, oppressing, and violating the rights of these perpetual others — it requires them in order to construct and reinforce its own morality, values, and decency.

The historical dimensions of this are equally revealing. Semmalar points to the 1881 imperial census, in which Hijras under Berar were classified under the title 'Hijada' and included under the category of 'mendicant and vagrant caste'. In Bombay, they were listed under the caste of dancers and musical instrument players; in the Central Provinces, they were included as singers and dancers at birth and marriage feasts — effectively, as beggars. The colonial state, in assigning Hijras a caste location, both recognised and entrenched their social marginalisation. The postcolonial state has continued in this tradition.

Semmalar further observes that some Trans activists have — in countering the criticism that homosexuality and gender variance are Western imports — relied upon Hindu epics to prove that gender variance already existed in India. Semmalar views this as a regressive form of Trans identity politics that fails to account for the brutality of caste, instead reproducing the very Brahminical frameworks that oppress Trans persons. This reliance is, in their assessment, the result of an unfair 'burden of proof' placed upon vulnerable communities, but one that produces deeply problematic consequences.

CASTE, LABOUR, AND THE OCCUPATION OF QUEER SPACE:

Caste does not only shape the intimate and juridical dimensions of queer life; it also determines the material conditions under which queer persons — particularly Trans women from Bahujan communities — labour and inhabit space.

Semmalar (2017) recounts that their sister observes how begging and sex work have become almost a confirmed caste occupation for Trans women in India. The jobs provided to Trans women from 'lower-caste' backgrounds by NGOs dependent on HIV funding are low-paid — typically involving condom distribution and community mobilisation — whilst cisgender persons from dominant castes occupy decision-making positions in well-salaried posts, retaining the upper rungs of the feudal power structures of these organisations. Trans women engaged in street-based labour are harassed by both the public and the police, and are denied dignity in their work.

Gautam (2015) notes that whilst workplaces may sometimes be inclusive towards lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons, they frequently deny access to Hijras. In the modern construction of Hijra identity, Hijras are positioned not only within gender and sexual minorities but also within the lower strata of the caste hierarchy. The responsibilities of maintaining public decency and protecting caste morality are imposed upon Hijras even as they are excluded from the very public spaces in which that morality is enforced. Since these are predominantly 'upper-caste' social spaces, the social prejudices attached to Hijras, compounded by caste discrimination, make survival within them extremely difficult.

When Trans women turn to begging or sex work to survive these exclusions and oppressions, the state criminalises them through legislation such as the Goonda Act, Beggary Acts, and related provisions. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, ostensibly crafted to protect Trans persons, but without providing reservations, meaningful employment, education, or constructive alternatives for livelihood. Criminalisation of begging always comes up discursively without any substantiative alternative when trans persons interact with state, for example it was also originally there in the previous bills before Trans Act was passed. This exposes how the state, in being formally caste-

ignorant, operates firmly within the caste structure — actively fuelling discrimination against Bahujan queer and trans persons.

Semmalar further argues that exclusion in healthcare, education, employment, and other sectors is compounded by the intersecting factors of caste, class, and ability. The state funds negligible amounts for Trans-specific research, signalling its institutional indifference. In the caste framework, as previously discussed, masculinity is more revered than femininity; feminine persons are taken for granted as available for the pleasures of cisgender men. It becomes, sometimes, necessary for Trans women to earn their livelihood through sex work or to perform exaggerated femininity. Trans women who seek breast augmentation do so in this context, but the state's indifference to their safety and wellbeing places them at serious risk. The state, without openly propagating the caste structure, nonetheless safeguards it in shaping queerness.

QUEERNESS AND CASTE PRIVILEGE: HOMONORMATIVITY AND THE MYTH OF CASTELESSNESS:

If the foregoing analysis establishes that caste structures, constrains, and penalises queerness, a further and more uncomfortable question must be confronted: do queer persons have caste? Can queer identity override, transcend, or displace caste? And if it cannot — as this paper argues it cannot — how does caste reproduce itself within queer movements and spaces?

Surya (2016) observes that 'upper-caste' people have made themselves appear caste-neutral and spoken about caste in ways that render their own caste positions invisible. This raises the question of whether queerness is, by default, Savarna — and whether the language of intersectionality has merely been used by 'upper-caste' people as a gesture of inclusion towards Bahujan persons. Surya responds emphatically that the queer movement in India is, in fact, a Dalit-Bahujan movement. As Surya (2016) writes:

Before HIV funding oiled and co-opted 'queer', before it re-created and held in place caste hierarchies — Indian collective queer spaces were found in hamams, and bastis, and parks. It was found in villages where the only visible queer was the local (Dalitbahujan) Transfemme community. She was the one that poor, Dalitbahujan queer femmes and Trans men sought out and befriended and asked

for help. Before the globalized repeal IPC-377 campaign cemented the meaning of what queer caste neutrality looks like — it was queer Dalitbahujans who were being beaten, tortured, raped and killed by the police, by the public and the state. While the sexuality rights consultancies and speaking engagements went to Savarna queer persons, it was Dalitbahujans who arrived in masses and protested police stations and courtrooms, and were lathi-charged, beaten and arrested. It's hard to tell from the images that come out of India, celebrating its queer moments — it's hard to tell from the rainbow flagged, pride marching exuberance, and the Savarna stamp of approval on the HIV prevention project — but the queer movement in India is a Dalitbahujan movement. (Surya, 2016)

The claim of castelessness within queer identity is, then, itself a caste privilege. Vishal Tondon (2017) terms urban gay men in the queer movement who are oblivious to their caste, class, and male privileges as 'depoliticised' gay men. Depoliticisation — or the performance of castelessness — is not a neutral position; it is enabled by the cultural capital and privilege of those who need not speak about caste because it works in their favour. Tondon notes that these depoliticised gay men are not devoid of political power or intent — but they tend to align with corporate-funded activism, which has been accused of diluting queer politics. The power differential between donors and recipients within these structures cannot be ignored in any serious analysis of queer politics.

The matrimonial advertisement placed by Harrish Iyer's mother in the Mumbai newspaper *Mid-Day* in May 2015 serves as a telling illustration of this dynamic. She advertised for a groom for her son, asking for someone who was well-placed, animal-loving, and vegetarian, with the specification that caste was no bar but that the groom should preferably be an Iyer — a Hindu 'upper-caste'. Whilst the advertisement generated public admiration for its progressive endorsement of a gay son's desires, Baudh (2015) argues that the language of caste-based discrimination was encoded in words like 'culture' and 'preference for vegetarians'. The culture of 'upper-caste' communities is linked to respectability, whilst the occupations associated with caste-oppressed communities are precisely those that cannot be endorsed or accepted by 'upper-caste' individuals.

Many people simply defended the advertisement and dismissed critique without engaging with it, deploying arguments such as 'how dare someone question the man behind the ad who has done so much for the LGBT community'. This reveals the unquestioned acceptability of persons from certain caste locations. Empathy, too, is caste-specific: the 'upper-caste' gay identity of Harrish Iyer permitted his validation of the caste structure, whilst Bahujan persons would have received no such dispensation. These debates resulted in the idealisation of one person, the patronisation of the rest of the community, and Harrish Iyer becoming the *de facto* spokesperson for all queer persons.

The question of choice and preference that emerged in these debates is politically significant. Arguments were made that individuals should be free to select their romantic partners on the grounds of cultural compatibility or personal preference. However, preference cannot be legitimised when it is rooted in discrimination, hierarchy, and supremacy. Are choices free from social conditioning? Do they lack political connotations, historical contexts, and cultural entanglements? If every choice can be legitimised on the grounds of personal preference, then transphobia, homophobia, and the refusal to accept queer persons could, by the same logic, be equally justified.

Homonormativity — what Tondon (2017) defines as the modelling of gay masculinities in traditionally accepted male gender expressions — represents 'upper-caste' and upper- and middle-class gay masculinities. It consolidates hegemonic ideas of masculinity that suppress gender non-conforming identities, the feminine cultural practices of 'lower caste' communities, and masculinities that deviate from the dominant norm. Caste renders masculinity more revered than femininity; gay men, accordingly, often tend to suppress the feminine aspects of themselves, and suppress or avoid any feminine person who attempts to occupy queer spaces. Rachana Mudraboyina, the founding member of the Telangana Hijra, Intersex and Transgender Samiti, tells Tondon that the elitism of 'upper-caste' urban gay men is the reason for their non-engagement. When Hijras asserted their identity by specifically incorporating 'Trans' in the title of a public event, this assertion was unwelcome. Rachana says,

'While they may be comfortable with English-speaking Trans persons, they continue to be uncomfortable with Hijras' social and cultural practices such as doing badhai work, begging, blessing others for money, etc. Many gay men at

the helm of queer related NGOs are English speaking and Savarna, and the vernacular and lower socio-economic class Trans persons and Hijras face discrimination from them too.' (Tondon, 2017)

Rachana also shares her own experience of subjugation. She formally changed her name from to Rachana to assert her gender identity. Yet one 'upper-caste', upper-class corporate employee queer 'activist' in Hyderabad repeatedly called her by her dead name. This was insulting and oppressive — as though her change of name and gender counted for nothing. This reveals the 'upper-caste' queer tendency not only to believe that only they are entitled to transcend gender normativity, but also to subordinate Bahujan queer persons through discriminatory everyday practices. As Rachana makes clear, the person believed he could get away with this gender discrimination because of his caste and class supremacy.

Projection of gay love through the lens of masculine homonormativity also involves the construction of transphobic and pathologising representations of Trans identities such as the Hijra. Rachana notes that the film by Vinayak Kalletla, *Walking in Wilderness*, in projecting gay love, stereotypes and demonises Trans identities as horrifying. Homonormativity presents itself as progressive and modern, but its effect is the disassociation of the gay community from Trans communities — a distancing motivated by the desire to protect a certain 'image'.

Tondon (2017) writes that many straight-acting 'upper-caste' gay men regard the cultural practices of Kothis, Hijras, and Joginis as stigmatising and threatening to their image as both forward-looking and masculine. JC, a gay lecturer from Mumbai, tells Tondon that young gay men entering the queer spectrum tend to disassociate themselves from Hijras — with whom a social stigma is linked — and assert their supremacy as Savarna gay men. To fit into heteronormative social expectations, 'upper-caste' gay men subscribe to homonormative gay masculinity, thereby reinforcing the power structure they were ostensibly meant to challenge. Due to this idealised masculinity, Hijras, and even homosexuals who do not conform to the necessary masculine standards, often internalise fear and anticipate discrimination.

CASTEISM WITHIN QUEER GROUPS: OTHERING, EXCLUSION, AND THE LIMITS OF SOLIDARITY:

A queer movement that claims to fight oppression but reproduces caste hierarchies within itself is a movement that has failed its own foundational commitments. The evidence of such internal casteism is not difficult to locate.

Tondon (2017) narrates the absence of depoliticised urban gay men from the Telangana Trans Queer Tribunal, hosted in Hyderabad — an event that had been well publicised and that stood as an example of intersectional politics, drawing Trans groups, feminist organisations, Dalit activists, media persons, lawyers, and academics. Their absence, despite its public prominence, exemplified the sense of supremacy these gay men felt with respect to those 'others'. Tondon writes that pride was handed over to the Telangana Hijra, Intersex, Transgender Samiti and community-based organisations, after which Trans persons, sex workers, and Dalit participants became more visible and active. The parade was renamed 'Telangana Queer Swaviman Yatra', and vernacular identities were reinforced and asserted.

Gautam (2015) writes that LGBT groups and spaces led by 'upper-caste' and upper-class people voice issues concerning certain sections of the LGBT community while ignoring others. A story of discrimination narrated by Tondon (2017) reports that Dalit participants in the Chennai queer community complained in 2016 that Savarna queer persons did not acknowledge their caste privileges. Dalit voices and opinions were neglected, and choices such as the venue of meetings — conducted in vegetarian restaurants — were set according to the preferences and convenience of Savarna queer persons.

Moulee (2016) states that they regret having suggested renaming the Chennai pride parade from Vaanavil Perani (Rainbow Parade) to Vaanavali Suyamariyathai Perani (Rainbow Self-Respect Parade). Self-respect was in the rhetoric, but the ideology never found its way into praxis. Moulee writes that they are oppressed by queer comrades on multiple fronts — oppression that is blatant, subtle, behind their back, and sometimes violent. Within the queer world and queer movement, they are permitted to carry only a single identity: queer. Those Bahujan queer persons who find their own ways to share their experiences as Bahujan individuals within the queer community are distanced, satirised, and ignored. Moulee also recounts how an 'upper-caste' equal rights

activist mocked three Dalit queer persons who asserted their Dalit queer identity at the Delhi Pride Parade in 2015, laughing at them as they shared their experiences on stage and tagging them as mad.

Surya (2016) narrates a comparable episode in which a new lesbian group arrived in the town where they were living and suddenly occupied considerable space in the news. At an early meeting of the group, cisgender women rumoured to be lesbians joined — an event that unnerved Surya. When the question of including Bahujan persons in the space was raised, a Brahmin woman commented that she had spoken to 'the other groups' — by which she meant Bahujan groups — and concluded that they would not 'get along'. This statement effected the perpetual othering of Bahujan people within a queer space, constructing that space as 'upper-caste' by default. The use of the phrase 'get along' encoded Bahujan persons as the problem. Surya's anger and frustration could not be expressed in that moment, since the assumption of 'upper-caste' default had already been spoken into the room.

As Surya (2016) pointedly observes, intersectionality functions as a code for caste in India — a vocabulary that 'upper-caste' people have used to appear inclusive whilst rendering caste itself invisible within the queer movement.

Ashley Telis (2012) observes that the queer movement in India has been largely preoccupied with the abolition of Section 377 and considerably less with questions of caste, class, and political economy. He also notes how difficult it is to identify a single moment in which the queer movement has stood in solidarity with labourers, farmers, women, or sex workers in contemporary India. Kumar (2014) similarly notes that caste has not been seen beyond heteronormativity in most academic writings, and that the narratives of Bahujan queer persons have yet to enter academic literature in any meaningful way.

From the above discussions, we can understand how Bahujan queer persons undergo an analogous form of marginalisation and vulnerability due to the intersection of both their marginalised identities. Through this paper, I have attempted to bring the narratives of persons from these dually marginalised communities into the academic discipline.

Sobhna S. Kumar (2018) argues that queer visibility, as it is currently constituted, is a fading phenomenon — fading, that is, from the perspective of those who were always at the margins of the movement. Visibility for whom, and

on whose terms, remains a question that the queer movement in India has not yet adequately confronted.

I will conclude this section by quoting Moulee (2016), who addresses 'upper-caste' queer persons with the following words:

Do not say caste is a thing of the past. Listen to our stories. Listen to us when we point out how you bring your caste preferences within the queer movement. Don't play victim when we point out your privilege. Do not say 'not-all-upper castes...'. Do not say that you are helpless because you were born into that 'unfortunate' caste — you still carry your privilege. Do not say you are casteless — that is offensive. (Moulee, 2016)

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS LIBERATION, AND ANTI-CASTE QUEERNESS:

Caste is interwoven with gender and sexuality. Caste delegitimises queerness, and also defines what it means to be a queer person. Caste invisibilises queer persons, and also constructs an ideal of queer visibility. Caste oppresses, discriminates, and enacts violence upon queer persons, and sometimes people barely survive through it. The simplest lesson that caste teaches about sexuality is that sexuality is not isolated — it is always already entangled with power, hierarchy, and history.

Queer is not a homogeneous identity category. Queer struggle is not simply about fighting a draconian legal provision or agitating for gay marriage. Queer struggle is about identity, freedom, equality, the right to privacy, the right to life, and much more. This is what anti-caste struggle is also about. Unless queer struggle incorporates itself with anti-caste struggle, freedom, equality, privacy, and justice will remain in rhetoric — and will benefit only certain sections of the community.

Queerness is not confined to romantic or sexual relationships. Queerness teaches openness, acceptance, and liberation. But if queerness makes its alliance with caste, capitalism, and supremacy, it dilutes its own ideology and undermines its own struggle.

Ratnam (2017) says that they cannot talk about being queer without talking about being Savarna. 'How can one be queer and fight systematic

inequalities against oneself, without acknowledging the ways in which the same oppressive system works through us?' (Ratnam, 2017). Queer persons, from their experience of oppression, are in a position to understand how oppressive systems make alliances with one another and function in concert. Queer persons, like everyone else, cannot be casteless — but they can acknowledge their privileges and subordination, and frame politics accordingly. Queerness is about fighting oppression, discrimination, and marginalisation, as is anti-caste ideology. Both are fundamentally about liberation — liberation understood as cultivation of equality, liberty and fraternity. Queer struggle must make coalition with anti-caste struggles.

Surya (2016) reflects that queerness taught them what it means to bring together a family that did not rely on blood, caste, geography, or language. It is queerness that showed them a love that is inexplicable and unpredictable, a love without condition.

Semmalar (2017) writes that Trans communities have developed a familial system in which sisterhood across castes is practised. Whilst caste practices within Trans communities cannot be ignored, the sense of belonging and 'consciousness of a kind' — arising from similar roots in exclusion, discrimination, oppression, and violence — must simultaneously be acknowledged. There are many stories of resilience, love, courage, and beauty from Trans communities that inspire and sustain. As Semmalar (2017) writes: 'I opened my heart and mind to the possibilities of creating families outside of heteropatriarchy and caste endogamy after I started living among Trans communities.'

The foregoing discussion has been concerned with the marginalised among the marginalised — the perpetual others. Yet at the same time, there is a desire for liberation. The question of how that liberation is possible is ultimately a question of power. Intersectional theorists such as hooks (1984) argue that power can be used to bring people from the margin to the centre; power is not indestructible, but it can be mobilised to fight oppressive powers. Bahujan queer persons must accumulate power, must occupy the spaces to which they have never been entitled, and must speak for themselves — not merely exist as data or as stories in someone else's account. Bahujan queer persons must become the spokespersons of intersectional politics around queerness and feminism. The

liberation of Bahujan queer persons requires not charitable inclusion from those in power, but the organised, principled, and self-determined exercise of power by those who have been denied it.

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