



Review Article

Homosexuality and Mythology

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Abstract

Homosexuality a term used for describing romantic and sexual relationship among the people of same sex. Previously understood as psychological disorder in psychiatry, but increasing understanding about homosexuality has led to current understanding as a normal variant in sexuality. The world comprising of varied geography and cultures also has their own way of understanding the phenomena of same sex love. The Indian mythology has mentions about homosexuality from the epic of Ramayana, 'Manusmriti', told about the punishment for homosexuality, whereas the European mythology wrote poetry about the love of Achilles' and Patroclus and Egyptians perceived a submissiveness in male homosexuality. Aztec mythology patronized homosexuality by giving them a place among Gods, though on contrary far eastern mythology depicted homosexuality associated with magical creatures like dragons, rabbits and punitive actions were incorporated. The depiction of homosexuality in mythology has been varied throughout the cultures and lands, but a common notion that carried with homosexuality even in the myths was, disapproval of the society, misfortune for the lovers and often associated with magic.

Date Received : 28th March 2019

Date Accepted: 17th May 2019

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Introduction

Homosexuality is an abiding structure of emotional and romantic/ sexual attractions with the people of same sex, which also colours their personality and based on those factors and their social behaviour, which leads to them being a part of the group who have similar attributes. In the United States of America, the Prevalence of homosexuality is about 1 % of the

population (Zuker et al, 2009). The government of India reported to the Supreme court that there are about 2.5 million Gay people in India although there is no demographics or studies related to prevalence (BBC news 2016).

According to the oxford Dictionary, a myth is a story which has been told traditionally concerning the early history of people of a specific

area or belief, regarding their evolution and society which often contain stories about God, Demigod, natural and supernatural powers. This idea, without evidence is often widely held and often deals with the exaggeration of truth (AduBoahen,1 978). When such folklores and stories collect overtime they accumulate into a mythology. But the myth often has a widespread and long-lasting effect over the people who belong to that culture or group. All the world groups have had their own mythologies which helped them to create a belief about their society which led to the development of norms among the social groups and later formulated unwritten mores that became a source of learning for the future generations(Pattanaik D,2019).

Mythology and social life

Often people seek reference to mythology for sociocultural validations. As these stories route to their long term beliefs and are more acceptable for their respective societies. Homosexuality was long considered as unacceptable and unnatural in the light of Colonial Europe and so as in their colonies and legislations were passed criminalizing this behaviour. These activities rendered a powerful influence on the following times. These actions were strictly because of the 'sinful depiction of sex' in The Bible, with the colonial rule came typical condescension and total disregard for values of homo sexuality and its perception in other cultures (Bullough VL,1973).

The expression of sexuality and sexual acts has been varied greatly from time to time and place throughout the world and there has never been a common understanding about the same sex relationships (Bullough VL,1973).

Mythological connotation regarding homosexuality

Mythology is a source from which we derive our norms and cultures (Pattanaik D,2019). World presents us with the varied tastes of homosexuality throughout the countries and cultures. The discussion about the various mythologies can be divided geographically.

Asian Mythologies

Homosexuality in Indian Mythology

We find various references of homosexuality in the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. To give a few examples here from the 'Valmiki Ramayana','Lord Hanumana' had observed various Rakshasha women embracing and kissing the other women who had been previously kissed and embraced by Ravana. A tale from 'Padma Purana' tells that a king dies before he could give the potion to his queens for bearing his children. In such a condition they out of desperation perform sexual activity and happen to conceive a child. As the father was absent in the conception, they give birth to the child without brain and bones.At that time it was believed that the father gave the bones and brain and mother flesh and blood. But these stories rather than showing a compassionate intimate

persistent inclination towards the same sex behaviours show more of act of desperation, frustration and often as replacement for straight heterosexual relationships.

The temple art and sculptures of homosexuality depicted in various shrines do tell tales about the existing sexual variations but then, myths never have been approving the stories are more condescending in nature and majorly describe it as an unacceptable behaviour. Like some of the old stories from Manusmriti carry messages of young girls who would engage in homosexual behaviour, their bride price would double and they would be fined 2000 pennies and 10 whips. Mature women who were found to engage in same sexual behaviours, often their heads were shaven and 2 fingers would be cut and they were put on a donkey and outcast from the village. If men were found to engage in same sexual behaviours they had to take the heating vow of consuming 'prayshchitta' by consuming a mixture of cow dung, cow's urine, cow milk, cow milk curd and sacrificial grass(Pattanaik D,2019). The depictions of the homosexual behaviours although existed in the in Indian mythology but the depictions are mere acknowledgement of and filled with condescension and disapproval for the same sex relationships, rather than the concept of love and affection filled conjugal variant of sexuality (Bullough VL,1973).

African region

Egyptian mythology

The Egyptian mythology also has certain aspects related to homo sexuality. In their mythology, homosexuality among men depicted a submissive attitude among the men and who engages in this type of behaviour were considered as effeminate. It is quite uncertain that this type of behaviour took into account of animalistic instincts determining that is difficult, but certainly it had meant a dominant submissive relationship(Clarke WM, 1978).

European region

Greek Mythology

Greek mythology is coloured vividly by the stories about various characters like "Achilles and Patroclus" as they were more than friends and apart from brotherhood they shared the forbidden love for each other (Cartledge P, 1981). Iconic characters like Agamenon mourned over the loss of his beloved friend and lover, Argynnus after he lost him to drowning in Cephissus river. He commissioned him a tomb and a shrine to Aphrodite Argynnus and this legend is found in various scriptures and writings of that time to Aphrodite Argynnus. This episode is also found in Clement of Alexandria, in Stephen of Byzantium Propertius, III with minor variations(Zumwalt N, 1977).

Another famous character from ancient Greece. Heracles had a lover who was kidnapped by water nymphs which remained an occupying topic of classical

mythology in paintings and poetry. Heracles defeated Theiodamas in battle, hid his young son. Hylas was taken by Heracles as arms bearer and made him warrior by training, developed a romantic attachment (Zumwalt N, 1977).

Anglo-Saxon Norse God myths

Among the Saxon mythology, the God of fertility 'Freyor' who was worshipped by some effeminate priests and they used to perform magic that was usually performed by women. This brought their status down as men in the society. Although homosexual depictions are not as pronounced among the Greek mythology but instances of Gods changing their genders completely and transforming from male gods to child bearing females was not uncommon (Tezer H, 2018).

Celtic Mythology

There are no overt references for homosexuality but perhaps the warrior romance between the heroes, foster-brothers Cúchulainn and Ferdiadh, their stories depict them as warriors with wives but still accounts of them sharing a sleeping space and romantic relationship are mentioned. Their forced duel ended by, Cúchulainn defeating Ferdiadh by "mysterious weapon" Gáe Bulg with which he pierced his anus. The lament of Cúchulainn after the death of Ferdiadh has been compared to the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus (Best, 1902)

Asian mythology from the Far East

Chinese mythology

"Homosexuality" translates as

"tong-xing-ai" (love between people of the same sex) in Chinese. There was no such term existing before 19th century in China. The expressions in Chinese usually have been poetic and metaphorical ("nan feng", male wind), which includes the exclusion of females completely from intimate relationships. This symbolically meant male supremacy. Other similar idiom references include nan se (male beauty) which refers to seductive features jiao, or mei (female beauty and flirtation). Poetic euphemisms for homosexuality were used commonly rather the terminology for homosexuality, whereas the female homosexuality included "Jin-lan zi-mei" (Golden Orchid Sisters) and too-ring (polishing mirrors) as metaphorical references (Lau MP et al, 1989).

The Chinese literature is most importantly influenced by the periodicals, roughly divided as the pre-Confucian, pre-Taoist, Buddhist tradition. The pre Confucian and Taoist mythology was mainly shamanistic. The Male homosexuality was believed to be originated from the Southern China so metaphorically termed as the southern wind. There are various deities in the Chinese mythology who were associated with homosexuality. These include Chou Wang, Lan Caihe, Shan Gu, and Yu the Great, and Gun (Wang K, 2014). One of the famous mythological stories found in these folklores are about the dragon and the old farmer, dragons are one of the most ferocious and mysterious animals, a tale that tells the story of

a 60 year old farmer who was being forcibly sodomised by the passing dragon and his injuries required medical attention (Wang K, 2014). Despite the mentions in the stories, they have always been observed as unacceptable in the Taoist traditions. There is also a story about the rabbit Spirit deity who was actually a man who fell in love with a provincial fuji inspector and was punished death sentence. This was regarded as an act of love and was pardoned by the underworld Gods, and he was appointed the safe guarder of the homosexual love, also known as Tu Er Shen (Eberhard W, 2006).

A similar folklore of Mizi Xia and Duke of leng of Wei are also found which tell us about the homosexual love between two men and their satisfying homosexual relationships although historical evidence is unclear (Wang K, 2014; Eberhard W, 2006).

Japanese Mythology

According to the Japanese mythology homosexual love was introduced by Shinu No Hafuri and Ama No Hafuri. They were the servants of the Primordial Goddess (Sun Goddess, Amataretsu), the story goes like after Shinu died, Ama committed suicide and were buried inside the same grave and due to this the Sun did not shine on their grave till they both were again buried separately (Ben R E, 2004; Long-Ari E, 2000). Another story concerning the Goddess Amateretsu is when she had a fight, with her brother (god of Storm and Rain) Susanoo also known as Takehaya, and retracted herself into the

heavenly cave for uncertain time, then to bring her out of the cave Ame No Uzume (Goddess of Dawn) performed an erratic dance “kagame” in which she tore her clothes and started dancing hearing the other Gods and Goddesses Amateretsu cleverly peered out of her hiding place and taking advantage of that other gods closed the cave door and thus light was restored upon the earth. Although it is unclear that homosexual reference is directly elicited or not (Conner RP et al, 1997; P flugfelder, 2000). In the Medieval Japan it was thought that any woman alone if encountered could be a fox as they were considered as shape shifters and would take up any form to get benefits from the passer-by men (Capstein M, 2002).

Buddhist Traditions

According to Buddhist traditions both heterosexual and homosexual relationships would be a hindrance in the spiritual growth so was considered unacceptable within the monastic rules. The homosexuals were considered as innuendoes, and were debarred from clergy ship (Morris R, 1990). Buddhist texts have very subtly avoided sexual references and not much can be found about homosexuality, but there are some depictions of same sex friendships, probably they are depictions of mostly brotherly love rather than, platonic relationships (Morris R, 1990). There is also a story of Indian Buddhist monk 'Ananda' who once became very fond of the Naga King and as his relationship was progressing towards a sexual

type, he cut all the ties with him to remain true Buddhist monk (Greenburg YK, 2007).

Pacific Islands' mythological references

The Pacific islands are the group of Islands in the Pacific Ocean, where the people are related to the Asians and the Oceania, they belong to a diverse group, and have diverse mythologies. These mythologies are mainly polytheist and various gynandrous God and Demigod references are found in them many of them have changed their genders to fulfil their duties and had same sex relationships with their counterparts (Looper M, 2002). It is seen that commonly there are references to the homosexual as well as queer relationships. Other Polynesian mythologies also contain homosexual references regarding their mythological Gods and Goddesses but the acceptance of homosexual behaviour is not acceptable in those stories (Dowden et al, 1995).

Mythologies of America

Maya and Aztec

The oldest among the American civilizations the Mayan god Chin, was considered to have introduced homoeroticism (Kunzel, 2018). This consequently became associated with homosexuality. This inspired powerful people from noble families to buy young lovers (men) for their sons, thus legalizing the relationships to marriage. One of the important, Mayan deity known from the ancient period (200-900 AD, Tonsured Maize God), who was

effeminate and is often associated with art and dance, and believed to be from the 'third gender'. "Xochipilli" ('Flower Prince') was considered the Deity of art, games, beauty, dance, flowers, maize, and song in Aztec mythology, and considered a great patron of homosexuals (Looper, 2002).

Middle East Asia

The Middle-East Asia has been the birthplace for loads of religion and has been a home to the human civilization from time immemorial. The Mesopotamian, Sumerian, Akkadian, followed by loads of other civilizations developed on the banks of Tigris and Euphrates rivers. As the civilizations were interlinked their mythologies also have been found to mention similar stories with a change of name of the characters. Here one of the famous epics of Gilgamesh and Enkidu bore a reference to homosexuality (Beckman G, 2005). Enkidu was the companion created by the gods for Gilgamesh, and their poetry reveals about their similar status and long term companionship which often has led to the speculation of Notion about a homosexual relationship perhaps existed among the protagonists of the longest known poetry called as the "The Epic of Gilgamesh" (Beckman G, 2005). Moving forward from that era into the period of old testament it has been observed that the relationship of David and Jonathan who formed a covenant and Jonathan who helped David rise to power was more than merely a close platonic relationship and sometimes

presented as a justification to homosexuality. Their story is vividly pictured in the Old Testament (Beckman G, 2005).

The middle east also the home for the Christianity and the mythology of Judaism also influenced the mythology of Christianity, the orthodox Christian mythology carefully has avoided and condemned homo sexuality although some excerpts about Saint Sebastian who has been a long standing Christian Gay Icon has been portrayed in pictures as tortured with arrows depicting the overt view of homosexuality in the Christian Era(Horne et al,2002).

Conclusion

“At a touch of love everyone becomes a Poet” – Plato

The love of a human has been an important subject of poetry and folklores thus making a bulk of myths and colouring the culture and source of teaching. Until recently the patriarchal, orthodox societies of the world has become more accepting toward the notion of non-procreative homosexual love, and has recognized it as a normal variant among the heterosexual love. This has made many men and women come out of their shells and express their preference of love and companionship. Throughout this article, various depictions of homosexual relationships that were present in the myths, paintings, folklores tell a tale of the existence of this variant of love. Although through out the world there has been mentions of homosexuality in mythological stories but never an appreciation or

social acceptance of that behaviour. The notion of procreative and heterosexual love has always been given a moral high ground. Thus it can be evidently stated that, the references of mythology have rarely made it clear about socially acceptable homosexuality, where ever it exists it has been generally considered as an imperfect and undesirable love which has brought about loss and misfortune upon its beholders.

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