

A Comparative Study on the Portrayal of Friendship Through the Lens of Queer Theory with Selected Novels

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Abstract

Friendship is a basic human relationship which can be defined by trust, support, mutual affection, and with shared experience. It transcends age, culture and serves as a vital source of emotional well-being and personal growth. And the friendship that we find with the queer community is not just emotional. It reshapes the assumption of bonding and challenges normative structure and paves way for the new forms of love, care and resistance. We can see that these relationships play a critical role in emotional survival, community building and political solidarity, especially in societies where LGBTQAI+ identities face systemic oppression. This study on queer friendship makes people understand that this relationship is more than a simple companionship, because it actually challenges heteronormative expectations and redefines the intimacy, care and chosen kinship. This research paper presents a comparative analysis of how friendship is portrayed within the queer community through literature.

Keywords: Friendship, LGBTQAI+ identities, queer friendship, survival, chosen kinship

Emergences of Queer studies are important because they challenge dominant norms and expands the understanding of identity and power, also creates space for voices that have been historically silenced. Here is a deeper look at why it matters. The insights from queer studies influence social movements, education, law and art. Queer studies is intellectually rigorous; it pushes students and scholars to ask hard questions and think critically about power, identity, history and knowledge. It invites us to the future that is not bound by tradition, hierarchy, or the status quo, and it encourages discomfiture in the pursuit of truth and justice. With the help of queer studies, let's delve deep into the topic with the acknowledgement of the dominance of queer friendship. Unlike traditional friendship, queer friendship challenges normative hierarchies of relationship by reimagining the value of platonic bonds, creating chosen families and embracing fluid boundaries between love, care and companionship.

The friendship between a queer and a straight person often creates opportunities for both people to expand their understanding of the world. The bond between queer and straight people can be beautiful and meaningful, but they may also face unique struggles that aren't always obvious to outsiders. In some cases, people start to assume a romantic interest in them simply because queer people are attracted to the same gender, so eventually, people begin to keep their distance. There are several reasons for the sinking of friendship with queers, such as the lack of understanding or awareness, where sometimes the straight friend may not fully grasp the realities of homophobia, gender dysphoria, and the queer friend may feel emotionally exhausted from constant explaining or correcting assumptions. And in some cases, the straight friend might come from a background where queerness is stigmatized even if they're accepting

personally. So, both sides may hold back out of fear, queer people's fear of rejection, and straight people's fear of offending. And sometime, it deals with the power dynamic and privilege, as if straight people may not realize how their social privilege shows up in the friendship, and the queer friend might feel they have to tolerate certain things just to keep the peace.

With the help of Queer Theory, we can understand the concept and the consequences of queer life under the legalized society. Theories by Teresa de Lauretis introduces us to a theoretical approach, which deconstruct the traditional understanding of gender and sexuality. And the theory proposed by Judith Butler in her work “Gender and Performativity” gives the proper explanation of how friendships found in their fluidity and choosen nature offers a space to express identities outside the heteronormative constraints. The following discourse on certain works was analyzed under the lens of these two theories, which approach the acknowledgement of queer friendship.

An American article by Jess Dominguez, which was titled “*What Difference Does A Queer Friend Make?*” states that, “Queer people are routinely advised to build a community with people of their same identity for social connection, support and solidarity.”

Is that really necessary? Like, why not queer people just come out of their shell, accepting the challenge and try to get friends with straight people. This way, people can get to know about the life and survival of the oppressed people, who were ostracised just for the sake of their gender preference. This referred article, also stated the recent data from *the American Friendship Project* (N=829), which revealed that, “People with at least one friend of the same sexual identity reported greater life satisfaction and less loneliness on average.”

Making a single friend with the same sexual identity will make queer people fly to the moon and back. They find it a great achievement, and it leaves a great satisfaction in their hearts; eventually, it makes way for a happy and cheerful life. Simply making one friend of the same gender makes them less lonely. But on average, this particular finding suggests that friendship for queer people is sometimes nuanced, as it can simultaneously provide disadvantages to well-being.

Studies says, that there is no specific U.S. law that directly regulates or restricts friendship when it comes to the queer community or otherwise. But there are various legal frameworks in the U.S. that indirectly support and protect LGBTQ+ people’s rights to form friendships, communities and associations through anti-discrimination protections. We can say, that roughly 75% of Americans favour non-discrimination protections when it comes to the sectors of employment, public accommodation like housing and etc.,.

Further views on the friendship held by the individuals from these communities can be analysed through the selected works with the help of queer theory. Queer friendship in literature reflects the real-life picture of people who often rely on friendship due to family or social rejection. It focuses on de-centring romance and challenges the heteronormative storytelling by validating emotions that come in various forms.

In the work, “*The Misleading of Cameron Post*” (2018), the author, Emily M.Danforth, presented the picture of a friendship that grows at a religious conversion camp, where the protagonist “Cam” was sent to navigate her sexuality, grief, friendship, and the pleasure that she experienced in her early adolescence. This work is of two parts, which give the two different characteristics of the same person. As the first part talks about the end of budding romance, grief, and affirmation of one's own sexuality. And the second

part presents the actual idealistic view of the author, where Cam was sent to the reparative therapy and ended up getting a good bond with Jane and Adam through a road trip. Thanks to the trip, which made them manage to talk openly as they found a sense of freedom and connection that they lacked in the camp's oppressive environment. Under the pressure of spiritual threats, this sudden support from the form of friendship made Cam strong enough to survive the program without losing herself.

Here, the author left the novel with an open ending, that she hasn't escaped yet, but she's no longer broke, which explores the view of **Friendship as a Tool for survival and resistance**.

And in the work, "*A Life Apart*" by Neel Mukherjee (2008), revolves around the story of a young gay, Indian man named "Ritwik," who struggles with his sexual identity and psychological trauma cause of his violent upbringing in Calcutta and the academic alienation in Oxford, made him mirrors his own feelings of exile and dislocation in his fictional work on Miss Maud Gilby, as an act of reflecting the empathy through storytelling, which can fold history into personal healing. As his visa expired, he was forced to do informal labour and eventually engaged in sex work. But through one of his labour work, he met Anne (an elderly lady) and got the missing bond of humane care and love, which he never expected was showered on him by her. And Anne's grief for her deceased homosexual son resonates with Ritwik.

The story explores the juxtaposition of shame, despair and hope in Ritwik's life, and states the fact that **longings can be uplifted by the bonds and making one single person accept them for what they are** will cheer them up to a level of eternal satisfaction.

Also, in the work, "*Talking of Muskaan*" by Himanjali Sankar (2014), the author depicts the story as the consequences of marginalisation where the protagonist, "Muskaan," a lesbian teenager who attempts suicide due to mental pressure led by the act of bullying and invisibility. The themes of the novel weave the struggles of heteronormativity, mental health and the need for empathy. This novel was subjected to the raw portrayal of heteronormativity. And the author gives the picture of the victim with the intense choice of letting Muskaan remain the centre of the story, yet silent. **The lack of empathy and lack of acknowledgement of comfort led Muskaan to devastating outcomes**.

Through this novel, we can see what the state of such victims would be if they don't have anyone to rely on. Accepting and recognising is the secondary, and it doesn't even matter when there is no primary concern. This particular novel unfolds the discrimination of the queer community in a vulgar way. The author depicts the view of queer existence without any support and invisibility, which gives realism to the Indian queer community.

By addressing these works, I am indeed trying to compare the two different cultures' adoption of queerness beyond just a mere comparison of the works. Whereas, the **American works give less tension compared to the Indian works**. This fact might be because of the social constructio, and the cultural services that see queerness as taboo in society. By applying Derrida's concept of de-centring on these traditional structures, we can see the old Indian mythologies, which showcase the holiness of queerness. And the general perspective on queerness makes straight people feel disgusted to make an acquaintance with them, even for a while.

In a democratic country like India, where the dominance of male patriarchy overshadows the families, it will be a disgrace to even consider the existence of queer people and accepting their children to be an acquaintance would make them lose their dignity according to their unwritten principles. Even after the decriminalization of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code by the Supreme Court, the legalization in society was still considered taboo. It might help to recognize queer rights, increase visibility and cultural acceptance according to the uplift of law, despite these positive changes, challenges remain, including discrimination and sexual harassment, taking advantage of their gender and preferences.

Little do they know that **all these taboo considerations are socially made and not culturally structured.** We can see the Queer representation in Hindu mythology, which transcends time, cultural boundaries, and sheds light on the fluidity and acceptance of gender and sexuality in Indian culture. It includes the story of “Aravan,” the transgender hero in Mahabharata, Story of the gender nonconfirming warrior “Shikandi” reflects the fluidity, The divine Androgynous Deity “Ardhanarishvara”- the combination of Lord Shiva and Parvati, the “kama”(cupid) once had desire towards Shiva and Lord Shiva let it slide as he is the god of love and desire, “Arjuna’s Exile as Brihannala” adds depth and complexity to the explanation of gender fluidity within the Mahabharata.

An article on the topic of “*Queer representation in Hindu Mythology: Exploring Diverse Gender and Sexual Identities*” by Dr Sunita states that, “ These mythological representations provide a historical and cultural context for discussion around queer rights and representation in contemporary society. They serve as a reminder that diverse gender and sexuality identities have existed, while Hindu mythology offers examples of queer representation, it is essential to approach these narratives with a critical lens.”

Furthermore, mythological representations were noted in history apart from India mythology, there are Ancient Greek and Roman mythology states about the relationship between “Zeus and Ganymede.” and in Roman mythology, we can see the story of “Hermaphroditu,” and in Norse mythology, there is a gender fluid story of “Loki,” and in Indigenous mythology, we can see the traces of queer representations serve as mediators and spirit leaders. Even in African mythology, we can see the bisexual interest of the “deity Oshun.”

The exploration of queer representation in different cultures was set as examples to let people know that queerness exists in society and culture throughout history, where culture evolves, and these narratives provide valuable insights into the fluidity of gender and sexuality. This study suggests, that by recognising and celebrating the presence of queer individuals shown in mythology, we can also promote the acceptance, diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of life. There has to be a lot of work done under the concept of making queer life the same as that of the straights. The label of “violating the socio-cultural” should be dragged down as the first thing to make things easy between the society and the queer communities.

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