# Chapter 1

# Introduction

## I. Context of Study:

What is a myth? The dictionary defines myth as stories of God. So, what is a God? Joseph Campbell in his work *The Power of Myth* states that "a god is a personification of a motivating power or a value system that functions in human life and in the universe—the powers of your own body and of nature" (Campbell, 1988, 28). Myths are metaphors for the spiritual potentiality in human beings and the powers that animate human lives also animate the life of the world. There are myths and Gods related to particular societies and Gods that play the role of being the patron deities of these societies. Hence, there are two different orders of mythology—one that brings humans to be one with nature and be a part of the natural world, and another that is strictly sociological and links the human to their social group. A human being cannot simply be a man of nature—they have to belong to a group as well. Myths play a key role in doing that (Campbell, 1988, 28-29). In his works, *Masks of God* and *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell claims that myths reveal the commonness shared by all human beings. Myths are born as a result of human being's search through the ages for truth, significance, and meaning. It stems through our need to share our story and have our story be understood. It stems from a need to understand death, to cope with death, and it aids in our passage from birth to life and then to death. Humans need myths for life to signify, to understand the mysterious, to touch the eternal, and to find themselves (Campbell, 1991, 46; Campbell, 2017, 1-2).

Mythology, as the Oxford Languages Dictionary (2023) defines it is the study of myths. Greek, Latin, and biblical mythology and literature used to be a part of everyone's education. After these subjects were dropped, a whole tradition of occidental mythological information was lost. These stories used to live in the minds of people. As a result, people could relate to these stories and their relevance in their own lives. These myths would give people perspectives about themselves. However, these myths are now slowly getting lost. The myths supported themes of human lives, built civilisations and informed religions over the centuries, dealt with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, and inner thresholds of passage. Myths define traditions and they mark every aspect and moment of human lives (Campbell, 1988, xvi).

Mythology, as Campbell defines it, “is an interior road map of experience, drawn by people who have travelled it” (Campbell, 1988, xvii). He believed mythology to be “the song of the universe”, “the music of the spheres” (Campbell, 1988, xvi). Mythology can range from the babbles of some witch doctor to the translations of beautiful sonnets and even to the meaning of some unknown fairy tale. Mythology began when our ancestors’ told stories to themselves of the animals that they killed for food and about the supernatural world that the animal’s spirit would go to when they died (Campbell, 1988, 14). Mythology became a means to understand the unexplained mysteries around us, the creation of life from birth to death, and to find meaning within our lives. New myths are created every day in society through following and resetting traditions but every myth has some point of origin in our past experience. Even though mythologies differ from country to country, and place to place, the main motifs of these myths are the same—they have always been the same.

Mythology teaches about the meaning of life and society. It looks beyond the literature and the arts and teaches one about their own life. It is a great, exciting, life-nourishing subject. Mythology is present at every stage of human life, from the initiation ceremonies as one moves from childhood to how an adult should be and take care of their social responsibilities, from how they move from their unmarried state to their married state through ceremonies. All rituals are mythological rites. They have to do with the recognition of the role of the individual, the process of becoming a new person, and fulfilling their roles as responsible humans in their professions. Campbell explains that when a judge walks into a room, and everybody stands up, they are not standing to the man. They are standing up to the robe worn by the man and the role he shall play wearing the robe. It is his integrity as a representative of the principles of that role that makes people stand up to him. So, people, in actuality, are standing up to a mythological character (Campbell, 1988, 17). People like kings or queens may be some of the most dull or controversial personalities and yet they are respected as personalities and celebrities, not because of themselves but because of the role of the position they hold. Hence, people respond to their mythological roles. When someone becomes a judge or assumes a governmental office of eminence like the President or the Prime Minister, they become the representative of that eternal office. Assuming that office means sacrificing their personal desires for the role that

they occupy. Hence, understanding mythology and mythological roles is important to understand the intricacies of political thought in society.

To understand the importance of mythology, it is also necessary to understand the importance of rituals. Rituals play an important mythological role in human lives—from initiation ceremonies as a child to coming-of-age ceremonies as a teenager to marriage ceremonies as an adult. Rituals are important to preserve the meaning and story behind a myth. It provides reason and order to a process. Campbell, in his work *The Power of Myth* documents an example where anthropologists studied a group of Indians whose community animal is the peyote and they have special missions to collect peyotes. These missions are mystical journeys and are characteristic of the typical mystical journey of worship. First, there is disengagement from secular life. They believe that unless everyone going on the mission confesses some sin of theirs, the magic of the mission will not work. Then they start on the journey, even speaking a special language. Then they come upon special shrines that represent stages of mental transformation along the way. When they come upon the peyote, they sneak up on it, shoot an arrow at it, kill and collect it by performing a ritual. The whole ritual of the journey is a duplication of the kind of experience associated with the inward journey, a journey when one leaves the outer world and comes into the realm of spiritual beings. Each stage is supposed to be a stage of spiritual transformation and is sacred (Campbell, 1988, 38-39). In India, similar rituals are performed during pilgrimages such as the ritual of worship for Ayyappa (a detailed description for the ritual of prayer for Ayyappa is given in chapter Two). These rituals are supposed to be a disengagement from social life for the pilgrims providing them mental and spiritual transformation along the journey. Such transformation is, hence, possible only through following mythological rituals.

To further understand the relevance of mythology in everyday life, it is necessary to understand the functions that myths play in society. Myths serve four functions. The first is the mystical function—realising what a wonder the universe is and experiencing awe at the mystery of the universe and human life. Myths open the world to the dimension of mystery and subsequently to the understanding that mystery underlies all forms. Without mystery, there is no mythology. The second function of myth is the cosmological dimension that science is concerned with—presenting to the world that shape of the universe, how it came into being, and so on but doing so in a

mysterious and spiritual manner. Myths have told us ages ago what scientists tell us today. Today scientists may have all the answers to the questions of the universe but myths, centuries ago, had already answered these questions in its own mysterious and spiritual manner. The third function of myth is the sociological one—supporting and validating a certain status quo. Here the myths vary from place to place. Indian, Greek, Roman, and other mythologies vary in accordance to their own social orders. The mythology for polygamy, for example, would be vastly different from the mythology for monogamy. This function of myth is perhaps its most important function. Finally, the last function of myth is the pedagogical function. This is the most relatable function of myth and it teaches how to live a human life under any circumstances. Myths teach us how to live.

However, it is not enough to understand a myth on its own. Myth can be fully understood only along with philosophy and religion. Every myth is centred around a hero who pushes forth the narrative and provides a philosophical meaning to the myth. Campbell called this the concept of monomyth—a hero's journey underlying the world's stories and simultaneously providing a moral education. He believed that the journey of the hero in the myth was not to deny reason but was to overcome the dark passion symbolising our ability to control the irrational savage within all humans (Campbell, 1988, xiii-xiv). A hero's journey, for example, Arjuna's from the Mahabharata, is not a journey of courage only—it is an act of self-discovery. A hero is not a celebrity. He identifies himself with the light and strives to always pursue it. A hero would never think of himself but would always strive for others. The ultimate aim of his quest would neither be release nor joy for oneself but the attainment of wisdom and power to serve others. One of the key differences between a celebrity and a hero is that the former lives for themselves while the latter only acts to redeem society.

Campbell's ideas of myth continue to resonate with readers. He was of the opinion that all stories of mythology are essentially similar. Thomas C. Foster in his work *How to Read Literature like a Professor* allocates an entire chapter to this concept. He believed that irrespective of countries or communities, all myths tell the same story at its deepest (Foster, 2003, 185-192). Campbell draws on Peter Berger, William James and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, blending the older belief in religion's essential qualities with social science's emphasis on concrete data. James states that the sacred inspires

strong emotions in individuals: “There must be something solemn, serious, and tender about any attitude which we denominate religions” (James, 1987, 38). James uses emotional rhetoric to characterise religion, implying that religion has given qualities. It is obvious through *The Power of Myth* that Campbell shares James’s belief in religious qualities (Campbell, 1988, 207). Campbell’s concept of all myths being equal resembles the conclusion of James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In it he argues, that many gods can be considered real as all world religions provide divine solutions to earthly problems (James, 1987, 507-526). He points out the religious pluralism of the 20$^{th}$ century as an example. Thus, both James and Campbell believe that one must look around the world, beyond European-American Christianity, for spiritual truth.

Campbell stressed on the importance of personal experience in religion. Humans must accept the hero’s journey in the myth of suffering and having new adventures. The hero in the myth must, in addition to being courageous, also learn how to love. Ultimately through the hero’s journey humans must find sublime peace—a spiritual salvation that cannot be fully articulated in words (Campbell. 1988, 230-231). He believes in the concept of sacred or ‘numen’ which he describes as an abstract energy. Humans create myths to respond to this energy which gives meaning to human life. The monomyth structure of the hero’s journey appears in the myths of most societies indicating the universality of myths. Although myths appear to become more obsolete with time, humans can rediscover myth by following the ancient principles. Seeing the divinity in all humans, according to him, can lead to a rediscovery of myth and can restore spiritual meaning to modern society (Campbell, 1988, 208-209). Campbell believes that “myth harmonises the world with stories of eternal significance” (Ellwood, 1994, 215). Influenced by Campbell, Peter Berger states that myth creates plausibility structures or sacred canopies—structured belief systems which place a meaningful order (nomos) into the world (Berger, 1991, 16-28). Campbell believed and influenced many others to believe in religious pluralism—a state of being where every individual in a religiously diverse society has the freedom, right, and safety to worship (Berger, 1991, 125). He believed in the universality of myth beyond Christianity and often alluded to other religions, especially Hinduism.

Hinduism has one of the richest mythological structures in the world. It constitutes one-sixth of the world’s population and is one of the world’s oldest living religions.

The world image of traditional Hindu culture, like those of other societies, provides its members with a template which can be superimposed on the outside world with all its uncertainties, helping individuals to make sense of their own lives (Kakkar, 2012, 18). This Hindu world image has been shared with remarkable continuity through the ages, acknowledged and codified in elaborate rituals and has heavily influenced Indian languages as well as ways of thinking. The image is so deeply inculcated in Hindu soul that one may not even be aware of it, in spite of many westernised Hindus attempting to reject it. Erikson writes:

"For such images are absorbed early in life as a kind of space-time which gives coherent reassurance against the abysmal estrangements emerging in each successive stage and plaguing man through life…And even where such explicit world images are dispensed with in the expectation—or under actual conditions—of 'happiness' or 'success', they reappear implicitly in the way man reassures himself when feeling adrift." (Erikson, 1969, 34)

Hindu culture set forth the ultimate aim of existence, the chief *purushartha* (man's meaning) to be moksha or *mukti*. The term moksha can be used to mean transcendence, salvation, self-realisation, a release from worldly attachments. In Hindu philosophy it is described as the state in which all differences between subject and object have been transcended creating a direct connection with the infinite. The Upanishads describe this concept in a metaphorical yet passionate language:

"…just as the person, who in the embrace of his beloved has no consciousness of what is outside or inside, so in this experience nothing remains as a pointer to inside or outside. It is the entry into *brahman,* a merging with *brahman,* eating of *brahman,* breathing of *brahman's* spirit. It is the unity of the self and the world." *(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad,* 4.3.21*)*

The problem with this description, however, is that it holds meaning only to the initiated and hence mean differently to different people. For western readers, Kakkar cites a few lines of Blake that resonate with the moksha-like state (Kakkar, 2012, 19):

"All are Human, & when you enter into their Bosoms you walk

In Heavens & Earths, as in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven

And Earth & all you behold: tho' it appears Without, it is Within,

In your Imagination, of which this World of Mortality is but a

Shadow" (Kazin, 1946, 486)

While the concept of moksha incorporates the ideal of fusion with the 'Other' (energy), it also defines the Hindu's sense of hell, separation from others and from the 'Other'. Any shift towards autonomy arouses in them cultural anxieties and a fear of estrangement and isolation. For Hindus who have rejected this idea of autonomy and yet share the universal human anxiety of being estranged, the only movement towards the goal of moksha is through living a slow yet fulfilling life by following the path of dharma—the second most important concept of the Hindu world image.

In Hindu philosophical tradition, dharma is the central concept of *mimamsa,* the activist philosophy of the first two parts of the Vedas (Kakkar, 2012, 41). It was first mentioned in the Rigveda and has evolved gradually through each historical era. The list of formal writings on dharma from Gautama's *Dharmashashtras* (600BC) to present day, spans over 172 pages in Kane's *History of Dharmashashtra* (1930). It is today translated as law, right action, moral duty or conformity with the truth. But between dharma as the image of the human life cycle (*asramadharma*) and dharma as the principle underlying societal relations, there lies a common thread: Dharma is the means through which man approaches the desired goal of human life (Griffith, 1920, 606). According to the *Vaisesikasutra,* dharma is "that from which results happiness and final beautitude" (Kane, 1930, 3). Hindu tradition and culture emphasise that a person has to stay true to the path of his life and fulfil his life task (his *svadharma,* the path he is travelling on towards moksha). It also teaches that right action or dharma depends on *desa* or the culture in which he is born, *kala* or the period of historical time in which he lives, *srama* or the efforts required of him at different stages of life, and *gunas* or the psychobiological traits of his previous life (Olivelle, 1993, 216). Right or wrong, in case of dharma, is relative. The person cannot know of this in any absolute sense (Kakkar, 2012, 42).

One of the consequences of this uncertainty is that the Hindu from his earliest childhood harbours a doubt as to the wisdom of individual initiative. Acting on one's own momentary judgement is not only an enormous cultural but also a personal risk. For most Hindus, acting without a cultural dependency, upon their own judgement and solely for themselves is unthinkable. The search for certainty is futile and to

increase one's sense of security they can act the way their ancestors did in the past or the way their social group does at present. Right action or *svadharma* thus increasingly means traditional action or caste (*jati)* dharma, in the sense that an individual's act is right or good if they conform to the traditional structure prevalent in their caste group. The Hindu view of action is a conservative one as it goes back to a golden age and harbours the assertion that social change is unnecessary, a persistent deviation from traditional ways.

Dharma dictates that the activity of anyone, be it a shoemaker or a housewife, or a priest or a farmer, or a social worker who helps everyone or a *yogi* who is indifferent to everyone, is equally right or good if it is a part of the individual's life task and is accepted by them as such. Hindu dharma assures that any activity fulfilled in the spirit of *svadharma* leads equally to the goal of life: "Better one's own dharma, bereft of merit, than another's well performed; the death in one's own dharma is praiseworthy, the living in another's is fearsome" *(Bhagavad Gita,* III. 35, Debroy). Most of the teaching and transmission of Hindu cultural values to the next generation takes place through the narration of stories and parables by mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and others in the circle of the extended family. The stories of Mahabharata, an epic based on the upholding of righteousness and dharma, is one such example.

An individual's work, through which he acts on the world, has two aims for the Hindu. The first aim is to earn a living according to his social group, satisfy the worldly purposes of accomplishment, power, and status, the desire to create a family and perhaps also indulge in community service. Hindus can be absorbed in the means of enjoyment and powerful recognition from others and the Vedas prescribe these goals for the householder stage of life (Olivelle, 1993, 217). The second aim is a preconscious, culturally generated belief that the real purpose of an individual is within themselves (Kakkar, 2012, 43). The belief that the measure of an individual's work lies not only in the outside world but also in how far it helps him in the realisation of his own *svadharma* which is the dawning of wisdom and the prerequisite for moksha. The refinement of the self is necessary in the unfolding of the Hindu life cycle.

This sense of dharma as the spirit of the inside rather than the activity of the outside relates to the Hindu's tolerance of various lifestyles other than his own. As chronicled

in the Vedas and other ancient Indian literatures, Hindus tend to accept deviance which in the West would be labelled as antisocial requiring a correction or care. Take for example, the groups of cross-dressed transvestites who are often seen in the streets of the large cities or towns. They earn their living mostly through donations on certain festive occasions such as the birth of a child or a wedding. Instead of being ashamed, they can point with pride to their ancient tradition, to their own holy places and to their origin and representation in one of the Pandava brothers, Arjuna, the famed warrior who was transformed into a transgender for a year. The cross-dressers, like other groups such as faith healers, or yogis, or sadhus are as integral to the Hindu social order as any other person (Kakkar, 2012, 44). The idea that every individual's *svadharma* is unique enhances a deeply held belief in equality among all humans.

The word dharma derives from the root *dhr* which means to uphold, to nourish, and to sustain. Dharma is the social cement that holds the society and the individual together. As the Mahabharata expresses it, "Neither the state nor the king, neither the mace nor the mace-bearer governs the people; it is only by dharma that people secure mutual protection" (Prabhu, 1954, 73). Dharma is the principle and the vision of organic society in which all the members are interdependent, and their roles complementary (Kakkar, 2012, 45). The duties, restrictions, and privileges of every role is prescribed by an immutable law, the *sanatan dharma* or eternal dharma and applies equally to the king and his subjects (Griffith, 1920, 75). Hindus believe that the legitimacy of the social institutions around them lies in the dharma they incorporate rather than contractual agreements and obligations (Kakkar, 2012, 45). They accept more easily the traditional social structures that incorporates the social elements of dharma. Criticisms and suggestions for reform of these social structures are accepted but they are not meant to question the institutions but to bring them closer to the ideal structure laid down by the eternal law. Moreover, it is believed that social conflict, unrest, and oppression does not originate from the structuring of the institution but from the *adharma* of those in positions of power.

As a result, social reform in India moves not to abolish these hierarchical institutions or reject the values on which they are based, but to remove or change the individuals in positions of authority in them (Kakkar, 2012, 46). Thus, when an institution fails to work properly, it is understood that the individuals in the position of authority in that institution have veered from the path of dharma. Indian mythology is full of instances

where dharma deteriorates to such an extent that it requires divine intervention for balance to be restored in the universe. According to legends, whenever *adharma* rules upon the universe, the preserver of creation, Vishnu must reincarnate on earth and annihilate those responsible. The culprits are always found in positions of spiritual authority in these social institutions (Griffith, 1920, 27). Thus, King Hiranyakashipu, through years of ascetic practices had secured Shiva's promise that he would never be killed by a man or an animal, that he would die neither on earth or in the air. He had unleashed such a reign of terror, in spite of being Shiva's devotee, that dharma was endangered and Vishnu had to take his *Narasingha* form—a form of half-man half-lion, and kill the king by putting him across his thighs, and ripping open his chest to rid the universe of *adharma* while honouring Shiva's boon.

In conclusion, the system of beliefs and values associated with moksha, dharma, and karma together forms a meta-reality for Hindus (Kakkar, 2012, 56). Beyond the objective world of phenomena which can be termed real and the denials of this phenomena which can be termed unreal, there are world images that constitute a third category which is a meta-reality for Hindus. This meta-reality is neither universal nor distinctive but fills the space between the two. It is culturally specific and accepted, even subconsciously, as the heart of the community identity. The meta-reality of a culture is rarely summoned for examination, criticism, or suggestions, yet it exercises a tremendous control over individual thought and behaviour. Denial of this meta-reality can create tension and disease for the individual (Kakkar, 2012, 57). As a result, the definitions of dharma and *adharma,* in spite of many reforms, have been rigidly similar to the ideal blueprint set years ago. However, it is necessary to read into this original blueprint and find what constitutes dharma and *adharma* in order to prevent the marginalisation of certain communities by people in positions of spiritual authority in these social institutions.

Hindu communities foster a wide range of philosophies and consider a number of texts to be sacred. For every story, situation, or phenomena, there is a Hindu god and a Hindu way of life. This diversity is considered to be divine abundance and to be a manifestation of divine energy by Hindus. Every living organism is believed to have divine potential and every god can be seen encompassing male, female, and neuter forms. The multiplicity of gender is considered to be a basic Hindu premise. For over two millennia, variations in gender and sexuality have been discussed in Hindu texts.

Same-sex love flourished in pre-colonial and ancient India without any fear of persecution. Sacred texts like the Kamasutra contain irrefutable evidence of the range of sexual behaviours known to ancient Hindus. Hence, when European Christians arrived in India, they were taken aback by Hinduism. They termed the culture to be licentious. When the British colonised India, they inscribed modern homophobia into education, law, and politics. Thus, homophobia that was marginal in ancient India, became an essential part of modern India. Indian nationalists, including Hindus, soon imbibed Victorian ideals of homophobia and heterosexual monogamy.

Ancient Hindu ascetic traditions see all sexual desires, heterosexual and homosexual, to be problematic as it causes souls to be trapped in the cycle of rebirth. While procreative sex was encouraged only for householders, non-procreative sex was looked down upon. Many Hindu texts dictate that every man has a duty to marry and procreate children during the householder stage of life (Olivelle, 1993, 218). However, ancient Hindu texts mostly emphasise on gods as erotic beings and Kama (desire) to be one of the four normative aims of life. Although Hindu law books dating from first to fourth century CE categorise *ayoni* or non-vaginal sex as impure, the penances for these acts were minimal and very less compared to heterosexual acts such as adultery (Danielou, 1994, 10). The *Manusmriti* punishes a man or a woman who has engaged in same-sex acts by admonishing them to bathe during the day with their clothes on (Buhler, 1886, 437). In the *Arthashashtra*, the punishment for a man who commits minor theft is a minor fine, similar to the punishment for a man who has *ayoni sex.* (Swidler, 1993, 3-4). The *Manusmriti's* more severe punishment for the manual penetration of a virgin is not an anti-lesbian stance but is due to the virgin's loss of virginity and marriageable status. The punishment for this act is the same for a man or a woman. The *Manusmriti* does not mention a punishment for same-sex sexual acts committed by non-virgin women (Buhler, 1886, 76) and the *Arthashashtra* prescribes a negligible fine for this act (Swidler, 1993, 58).

However, the sacred epics and the Puranas contradict these law books as they depict gods, sages, and heroes indulging in and even being born from *ayoni* sex. Hindu texts narrate the birth of Ayyappa born through intercourse between Shiva and Vishnu when he was in his Mohini avatar. A number of texts also mention the birth of Bhagiratha, the king who brought the Ganges to earth, who was born through the intercourse between his two mothers. The text *Kamasutra* emphasises on pleasure and

joy as the objectives of sex. The text categorises men and women who desire the same sex as 'third nature' or *tritya prakriti* and describes the range of sexuality among them in details. Even dating from the first century AD, Hindu medical texts detail a wide range of gender and sexual variations including same-sex desires. Close same-sex friendships propagated as the *sakhya* (male) and *sakhyi* (female) culture are celebrated in Hindu texts and was socially approved by most Hindu communities. The friendships between Krishna and Arjuna, and Vavar and Ayyappa are iconic examples of such friendships.

But why is the trajectory of Hindu texts with relation to gender and sexual variations important? Over the last two decades, the media has reported a series of same-sex weddings as well as joint suicides, mostly by women in small towns. Most of them were Hindus. The weddings would take place according to Hindu rites with familial support. The suicides, on the other hand, are a result of families forcibly separating the couple and forcing them into heterosexual marriages (Vanita, 2005, 1-2). The attitudes towards homosexuality today, hence varies from community to community and even family to family. Conservative organisations declare homosexuality to be alien to Indian culture and tradition and has been imported from the West. (Vanita, 2005, 1). In addition to these, the Indian government has time and again opposed the legalisation of matters related to the LGBTQ+ community, including, most recently, the legalisation of same-sex marriages in India—a law, if created, would benefit the community immensely.

However, in contrast to these dark narratives, there are queer positive scholarly works being written to promote a more queer-friendly environment. Gay activist Ashok Row Kavi recounted that he once had a monk tell him that he should live boldly and ignore social prejudices. Inspired by these words, he founded the gay magazine *Bombay Dost*. In 2004, when a conservative Hindu leader had denounced homosexuality openly, he wrote an open letter to the press asking the Hindu leader to "read ancient Hindu texts, and pointing out that not homosexuality, but rather modern homophobia is a western import" (Kumar, 1996, 6-7). In the work, *World of Homosexuals* (1977), Shakuntala Devi interviewed Srinivasa Raghavachariar, a priest of the Vaishnava temple at Srirangam who believed that same-sex couples must have been cross-sex couples in their past life. They sex may change through rebirth but "the soul retains its attachment and the power of love impels these souls to look for

one another" (Vanita, 2005, 147), Similarly, many priests have been documented believing that marriage is a union of spirits and the spirits have no gender (Vanita, 2005, 147). This centuries long debate that was suppressed in the colonial period, has now been revived. With the retellings of Hindu texts and Hindu philosophy being brought out to the fore, it is necessary to look at these texts analytically and use these texts to help uplift queer communities.

In order to do this, it is necessary, foremost, to understand the trajectory of queer studies as it began in the West and then was re-inculcated into Indian scholarly work. What is queer? The term 'queer' was used to denote anything strange or peculiar. During the beginning of the LGBTQ+ movement in the late 19th century, the term used to be used as a homophobic and derogatory slur. However, in the late 1980s, queer activists began to reclaim the word as a politically radical alternative to denote the various branches of the LGBTQ+ movement. The word 'queer' has since been adopted as a word of empowerment and strength that defines the entire community. From the 2000s, 'queer' became increasingly used to denote a broad spectrum of non-normative sexual and gender identities. It is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not cisgender or heterosexual. (*Queers Read This,* Anonymous, 1990). With the gradual popularisation and the adaptation of the word 'queer' among the LGBTQ+ communities, academic disciplines such as queer studies and queer theory began to arise and investigate and highlight the various nuances of the community, in opposition to binarism, normativity, and a lack of intersectionality. Queer arts, queer cultural groups, and queer political groups, thus, became examples of modern expressions of queer identities.

Michel Foucault, one of the pioneers of queer studies, in his acclaimed volume *The History of Sexuality: Volume One* discusses the repressive hypothesis, a widespread belief in the 20th century West that the discussion of sex and sexuality was widely repressed during the 17th, 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. He argues against this belief citing that sexuality was never truly repressed. He notes that by portraying past sexuality as repressed, modern westerners are pushing forth the idea that since past sexuality was repressed, future sexuality can be free and uninhibited (Foucault, 1976, 49).

"We must…abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression. We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities; but—and this is the important point—a deployment quite different from the law, even if it is locally dependent on procedures of prohibition, has ensured, through a network of interconnecting mechanisms, the proliferation of specific pleasures and the multiplication of disparate sexualities." (Foucault, 1976, 49*)*

Foucault argues that before the 18th century, sexuality focused on the role of the married couple which was monitored by the civil law. However, in the 18th and 19th centuries, society instead of discussing the sex lives of married couples, takes an increasing interest in sexualities beyond the heterosexual marital construct—"the world of perversion" (Foucault, 1976, 40). This included the sexualities of the mentally ill, of children, of the criminal, and of the homosexual. This world of perversion had three major effects on society. Firstly, there was an increasing categorisation of deviants or perverts. Previously, if a man engaged in sodomy, he would be labelled as a pervert. However, now if anybody indulged in same-sex activities, they would be categorised as 'homosexuals. Secondly, Foucault believes that this categorisation or labelling was done to give a sense of power and pleasure to those studying sexuality and to the homosexuals themselves. Thirdly, he believed bourgeois society depicted blatant and fragmented perversion—engaging in perversion themselves but regulating it for others (Foucault, 1976, 47).

Judith Butler, in her article, 'Gender Regulations' *(Undoing Gender)* defines gender as "the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalised, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalised" (Butler, 2004, 42). Thus, gender is a concept that reflects limitations, stability, and reconstruction, supported by the notion of heteronormativity, which means accepting heterosexuality as a natural and social norm. Hence, through the subversion of gender roles, this permanent, long, and well-established structure of gender may be destructed. Performance is the totality of acts and behaviour of a person living according to their gender and sexuality in society. However, according to Butler, performance is not related to sexuality or sexual practices. In her work, *Gender Trouble* , she says "Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalisation in the

context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (Butler, 2007, 146). Butler states that performativity is not a temporary concept. That is to say, without limiting to gender roles, the concept of performativity must be maintained through different and new performances. Performances are changeable, but they might be described as habits that can be repeated. Butler discusses the concept of performativity with this statement, "If one thinks that one sees a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man, then one takes the first term of each of these perceptions as the 'reality' of gender—the gender that is introduced through the simile lacks 'reality' and is taken to constitute an illusionary appearance" (Butler, 2007, 45). She questions people's probable mistakes in their frame of mind and visual perception. By putting forth this reality, she proves that the concept of gender is changeable, convertible, questionable, and reproducible.

Similarly, in the Indian context, Ruth Vanita in her work *Queering India* (2001) outlines that while most translated languages consist of the word 'man' and 'woman', there are always humans who do not conform strictly to these categories. Some, although they are born male or female, feel that they belong to the opposite gender or to both genders or none whereas some are born biologically intersexed. Many cultures acknowledge a third and even a fourth or a fifth sex. However, 'man' and 'woman' continues to be the primary known categories in most societies. Primarily, the man-woman relationship structure in different societies is based on a normative heterosexual marital union, aimed towards the procreation of men as a dominant group and females as a subordinate group. At that point, any feminist group targeting for the empowerment of the subordinate group must keep in mind two possibilities:

i) The structures of heterosexual marriage and family should be repaired to make them fair and impartial.

ii) Gender and sexuality need to be rethought and restudied in order to liberate people into developing alternative structures of family and living arrangements. There can always be a range of forms of familial living in any group. A movement can thus validate the less dominant forms (Vanita, 2001, 5).

Most people, Vanita documents, are dissatisfied to different degrees with being men or women (Vanita, 2001, 6). French philosopher, Monique Wittig points out that the

word ‘woman’ is similar in effect to the word ‘nigger’ and the word ‘man’ is in effect similar to the word ‘white’. The categories of man and woman are illogical as they are based merely on certain parts of the body and then used to justify certain predefined ends. In all societies, people who are unhappy with the heterosexual system have chosen, individually or collectively, various ways of opting out of it. In Wittig’s words, “the refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not” (Wittig, 1992, 13). In India, *hijras* function as this model of difference. People who opt out of these heterosexual structures always produce alternative narratives/structures. Men and women both alter gender categories by stripping them of meaning through various means of defiance—by walking naked, by growing their hair long, and by rethinking the terms in which gender is socially defined (Vanita, 2001, 4). These altered categories of gender, while not socially accepted, has gradually found its acceptance through popular culture, especially works of literature. However, many domains of popular culture still remain elusive to them.

A major point of interest in recent popular culture trends in India has been regarding the retellings and adaptations of old Indian mythological folklores. Mythological stories and figures have maintained an imminent importance in the Indian society. The majoritarian Hindu tradition has always referred to the epics and its characters for references to modern life. Thus, it is common in recent times for people to still speculate about the epics. A rise can be seen in the works of an emerging genre called ‘mythological fiction’ that retells the stories of the epics through new lenses. Thus, with such popularity of mythology still existing in India, it becomes necessary to look into the cause behind such persisting obsession for the epics. It is interesting to note that the epics, in spite of being an ancient culture, has never truly left the Indian society. One of the main proponents of keeping the epics alive within the Indian society has been literature. These mythological stories and characters have been a favourite subject for literature to portray. The evolution of the characters also helps in discerning the psyche of the Indian society and their perceptions regarding various societal issues, including the issues and concerns of the LGBTQ+ community. The portrayal of the community in these productions depict clearly the standards set by the Indian society for them and how they are perceived. In order to discern this portrayal, or the lack thereof, it is necessary to look into the mainstream adaptations of

mythological stories that cater to all age groups and understands how the misrepresentation or the absence of representation impacts the community. Queer politics has witnessed various struggles in gaining a foot in society and many arguments have been raised over the decades against the community and the legitimacy of queer studies and politics as a necessity in society. Among them, traditions, religious figures, and mythological references have been used as a prime argument against the existence of queer politics since its inception in India. However, after revisiting the mythological works, it is evident that many queer references made in these works get manipulated or omitted in their representations/retellings in popular culture. Thus, the larger audiences, unable to have access to the original work, relies on these manipulated representations to base their opinions and beliefs, which affects their outlook of the society. My research will, thus, inspect these popular representations of the mythologies and compare them to the original work in order to highlight the deliberate discrepancies, omissions, and manipulations in the representations that caters to the heteronormative construct. It will also evaluate the effect that these manipulations have on the mind of the masses and how it influences their opinions on the legitimacy of queer around them. In order to do so, I have chosen the popular domain of *Amar Chitra Katha (ACK).*

In 1967, Anant Pai started a form of comic writing that revolutionised the face of the comic culture in India. Started for International Book Trust, Pai's creation, the *Amar Chitra Katha* franchise, introduced Indian literature to the comic book genre—a genre which until then was highly monopolised by the American and British publishing houses. The subject matter at first was Hindu mythology, particularly the epics. The first title was on the life of the Hindu god, Krishna. Although only 10,000 copies were printed at first, the work went on to sell over half-million copies. After that, *Amar Chitra Katha* produced over 500 titles over a vast range of subjects, each overseen by a central editorial committee comprising Pai and his assistants, and each in a standard format of thirty-two pages. There are currently ninety titles on Hindu mythology in the *Amar Chitra Katha* series. There are also comics on Indian folktales, and legends (56 titles), *Jataka* tales (24), teachers and saints (27), makers of modern India (13), tales from ancient Indian history (13), and an assortment of stories from Sanskrit classics, histories, and biographies of kings, scientists, doctors, and others (Kasbekar, 2006, 95).

The most important objective of the series was to educate the Indian children about their classical and religious heritage. Although written mostly in English, the series was aimed primarily at middle-class children and adults alike as a vehicle of both education and entertainment. Large numbers of the urban, English-speaking young Hindu population remained unacquainted with their own heritage and culture. The *Amar Chitra Katha* catered primarily to the need to educate these urban children on the glories of their own Hindu traditions. The series also educated generations of diasporic Indian children on Indian mythology, folklore, history, and other aspects of Indian culture, often becoming the primary source of stories about India for them (Kasbekar, 2006, 95). However, the series has been widely criticised among academics. It has been accused of being nationalistic, contriving to show India as a homogenous entity, and ignoring the inner political and social tensions. It has also been accused of omissions in its library of modern hagiographies with relation to particular religious minorities, women, lower castes, and gender and sexual minorities. It can be argued that as the series was compiled at a time when nation-building and national integration was of primary importance, the series strove to provide a harmonious and homogenous portrait of the nation and its people without portraying the internal turmoil and tension. However, in spite of reprints, the narratives have remained unchanged till this date.

The influence of the misrepresentations begins from childhood itself, and in India, *Amar Chitra Katha* has been crucial in influencing the young minds. The ideas thus incurred from these misrepresentations are then strengthened in their adolescence and adult life. In this thesis, I would also investigate how those ideas incurred from comics influences their opinions on queer politics in India. *Amar Chitra Katha's* most widely adapted work is the Mahabharata which includes a massive three-volume set and also various individual titles. Hence, for the purposes of my research, I have chosen the Mahabharata as my primary text as the work features a range of queer references in its original text but its representations/retellings, which are some of the most popular retellings in India, lack many of those elements.

## II. Review of Literature:

In the following section, I try to map the literature on queer studies, popular culture, and the *Amar Chitra Katha*. These texts assisted me in formulating the thesis's central

argument. In his work *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Michel Foucault famously claimed that categories based on sexuality were invented in the nineteenth century Europe, and before this invention, they did not exist (Foucault, 1976, 30). Recent historians and mythologists have challenged this notion, and have traced the beginnings of the recordings of such categorisation to beyond the second century BCE. Through their writings, they also challenge the popular notion of queer studies and literature being an import of the West, by proving that these notions existed in the Indian subcontinent long before. The literature dealing with homosexual love in ancient India are few but extant. A prominent rupture in these notions was Vatsyayana's celebrated text *Kamasutra*, perhaps the first text to talk about Indian sexuality and its categorisation based on identity and sexual orientation. The Kamasutra is an ancient, Indian, Sanskrit text on emotional fulfilment in life, eroticism, and sexuality. Written in tense, aphoristic verses, the text is a mixture of prose and *anustubh-meter* poetry verse. It acknowledges the concept of *purusartha* (the goals of a man's life), and cites eroticism, sexuality and emotional fulfilment to be some of the goals in life. The text provides a treatise on desire, on philosophy, and the theory of love, on good desires and bad, and how the desire may be sustained. In addition to that it also provides the definitions and characteristics of a wide range of sexualities, which has been very helpful with my research. Besides recognizing same-sex relations and a wide range of gender identities, the Kamasutra provides a detailed description of oral sex between men and promotes recreational sex over procreative sex at a time when the Vedas dictated that sex should only be for procreational purposes in order to achieve moksha. While the most popular and first translation of the Kamasutra was by Sir Richard Francis Burton in 1883, I have chosen Alain Danielou's translation *The Complete Kamasutra* for my research. Burton's translation, although the first, has been known to have quite a few discrepancies from the original in its text. Burton, whenever he gets puzzled by the text in Sanskrit, tends to translate the thirteenth century commentary and present that as the text. His translation often imbibes his own fantasies in the text and distorts gender issues throughout. For example, in a translation that reads:

"…when a woman says 'Stop!' or 'Let me go!'" (in the original text of Vatsyayana)

Burton's translation reads like this:

"She continually utters words expressive of prohibition, sufficiency, or desire of liberation" (Burton, 1883, 111).

Most importantly, Burton uses the terms *yoni* and *lingam* for female and male sexual organs respectively. This is a far stretch from Vatsyayana's text which rarely used the word *lingam*, and never used the word *yoni*. Instead, he, according to Danielou's translation, uses a number of gender-neutral terms like *jaghana*, *yantra*, or *sadhana* that can be translated to 'between the legs', 'pelvis', or 'genitals'. Even when the word *lingam* is used in the text, it is used in a gender-neutral manner, unlike Burton's translation. Most other translations of the text are abridged from Burton's translation making them as flawed as the original. Danielou's translation, published in 1994, on the other hand, is the complete and unabridged translation of the original text by Vatsyayana. It was first translated into French, whereby it was translated into English. Unlike Burton's translation, Danielou preserves the numbered verse divisions of the original text and does not include his own notes into the text. He also includes two commentaries by Devadatta Shashtri, and Jayamangala as endnotes. His translation remains to be the one most used by scholars today.

Following the Kamasutra, there are mentions of the existence of homosexual love in various work but the most prominent of them was perhaps the epics, specifically the Mahabharata. One of the foremost tropes in homoerotic and homosocial love in ancient India is friendship that would either lead to a life of celibacy or cohabitation in intimate relationships. This theme of *sakhya-sakhyi* (same-sex friendships) has been explored extensively in the Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa. For the purposes of my research, I have chosen Kisari Mohan Ganguli's *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa.* This work was crucial for my research as it was the primary translation of the Mahabharata that formed the base of my work, Ganguli's translation of the Mahabharata is the first complete English literal translation, most used by scholars. It was translated between 1883 to 1896 and published by Pratap Chandra Roy (1842-1895) who hailed from Calcutta and owned a printing press. Ganguli and Roy had collected funds for the project themselves. In the 'Translator's Preface' in Book 1: *Adi Parva,* Ganguli narrates the sequence of events that led to the publication of the series. In the early 1870s, Pratap Chandra Roy along with Babu Durga Charan Banerjee had visited Ganguli at his home, and requested him to take up

the translation project, which he did after some reluctance. He looked at Max Muller's translation for reference but found it lacking in flow. He started translating the text line by line until a dozen sheets of his first copy was finished and sent to noted writers. It was only after their approval that the project was initiated. Ganguli writes that Roy was against his desire to publish the work anonymously. Ganguli was concerned that due to the extensiveness of the texts, he would not be able to complete it and it will have to be completed by other writers. Roy opposed this and eventually a compromise was reached. The first work *Adi Parva* was published in 1883, without the name of the translator, with two prefaces, one by the publisher and the other titled 'Translator's Preface' so that people do not confuse the publisher as the author. However, Roy was soon accused as posing to be the translator by people who overlooked the prefaces. In spite of his many protests, the rumours continued. After the publication of all eighteen books, the name of the translator was finally added to the work. The Ganguli English translation of the Mahabharata was the first complete edition of the Mahabharata available in public domain. The translation was republished by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. The theme of friendship, as explored in this translation of the Mahabharata, has been explored extensively in the thesis through the characters of Krishna-Arjuna, Ayyappa-Vavar, and so on.

Another trope that is used to justify homosexual and homoerotic love in ancient India is the concept of rebirth. Vanita and Kidwai, in their work *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* argue that "the concept of previous births serves to legitimise actions perceived as improper in the present life" (Vanita, 2000, 28). Rebirth obliterates social boundaries and divisions and makes it possible for two people of conflicting gender, caste, or class to fall in love with each other. The concept of gender transitions through rebirth has been explored extensively in the thesis through the characters of Shikhandi, Bhagiratha, and so on. The two above mentioned tropes are culturally very significant in understanding the nature of ancient Indian society. While heterosexuality and heteronormative marriage was still the norm, the possibility of transgressing gender and sexual boundaries was also highlighted. And such acts were legitimised only through divinity.

Thus, a third trope that broke the boundaries of sexual and gender identities was through divine intervention. The thesis enumerates on the multidimensional forms and

fluidity of gender of the Hindu deities. They were known for their "duplicity and variability" (Vanita, 2000, 58). Thus, a deity may appear in any form be it male, female, neuter, or a non-human form. This fluidity of gender and the use of divine intervention to redefine gender and sexuality has been explored in the thesis through the characters of Krishna, Brihannala, Chitrangada, Mohini, Ardhanarisvara, Harihara, Shiva, Vallabhavardhana, and so on. Wendy O' Flaherty in her work *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic* (1973) writes that, Hindu deities like Vishnu or Shiva are the "realisation of all possibilities" (O'Flaherty, 1973, 253). The narratives of these characters have been studied as presented in the various Puranas. The Puranas are an encyclopaedic range of literature on Hinduism, and Hindu gods and goddesses spanning a set of eighteen *Mukhya Puranas* books, and a set of eighteen *Upa Puranas* books. While my research borrows various narratives, stories, and episodes from different Puranas, I have used primarily the *Bhagavat Purana, Kurma Purana, Padma Purana, Brahmanda Purana,* and the *Bhavishya Purana.* The Bhagavat Purana, also known as the *Srimad Bhagavatam,* is the central text in Vaishnavism, the Hindu tradition centred around Vishnu. The text consists of twelve *skandas* or cantos, with a total of 332 chapters (*adhyayas)* and 18,000 verses. For my research, I have used canto 8 (Mohini), canto 7 (Narasimha), and canto 1, 10, and 11 (Krishna). The Bhagavat Purana is known to be one of the most influential texts among the Puranas and is even often referred to as the 'Fifth Veda'. It is important as it emphasises on the practice of devotion rather than the theoretical approach of the Bhagavad Gita, for its detailed description of God in a human form or avatar and also for challenging the ritualism of the Vedas. The Bhagavat Purana is the most translated and commented text in Indian literature. It has been translated into various Indian and non-Indian languages. For my research I have used Sri Venkateshwar Steam Press's translation of the Srimad Bhagavatam, the complete translation *The Srimad Bhagavatam* by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1970-1977), the partial translation *Krsna: The Supreme Personality of Godhead* by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (study of canto 10), and the *Srimad Bhagavatam* by Kamala Subramaniam.

The Kurma Purana is one of the medieval era Vaishnavism texts of Hinduism and is named after the tortoise avatar of Vishnu. Although a Vaishnava text, the text is not dominated by Vishnu. Like other Puranas, the Kurma Purana consists of mythology, geography, legends, theology, and *tirtha* (pilgrimage). In addition to these legends,

such as the legends of the Ardhanarisvara, the Kurma Purana also explains *Brahma-Purusha, Atman, Prakriti, Yoga, Moksha, and Maya.* I have used Motilal Banarsidass Publishers's *The Kurma Purana* published in 1951 for my research. The Padma Purana is a text dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva, and Shakti, and is named after the lotus in which Brahma appears. Like the Kurma Purana, the Padma Purana also recounts various tales, legends, and mythological stories. It contains at least 50,000 Sanskrit metrical verses and is heavily dedicated to stories of Vishnu, Shiva, and Shakti. For this thesis, I have used Sri Venkateshwar Steam Press's translation of the *Mahapadma Purana* (1984). I have also used the Motilal Banarasidass Publishers's translation of the Brahmanda Purana (1958), and Sri Venkateshwar Steam Press's translation of the Bhavishya Purana (1917) for references to different legends, mythologies, and stories used in my thesis. In addition to the Puranas, I have used Kumkum Roy's translation of *Sachitra Krittivasi Saptakanda Ramayana* (as it appears in *Same-sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History, 2000),* and Danavir Goswami's translation of the Garga Samhita (2008) for references to different narratives mentioned in the thesis.

A key text that has also been explored in the thesis and has been crucial to my research to understand the definition of mythology itself and what constitutes divinity has been the Rig Veda. In order to form an understanding of Hinduism and the meta-reality of karma, dharma, and moksha; of what constitutes dharma and how the definition of Hinduism affects Hindus, it was necessary to read the Rig Veda. While, like the Mahabharata, many translations of the Rig Veda exist, I chose Ralph T.H. Griffith's translation as the translation crosslinks every page with the Sanskrit text which aids in ease of understanding the original text. It also is an original, unabridged, and literal translation, of the text written in a readable and intelligible manner. The Rig Veda is one of the four canonical sacred texts of Hinduism known as the Vedas. It is the oldest known Vedic Sanskrit text with the core text consisting of ten books (*mandalas)* with 1028 hymns in about 10,600 verses. For the purposes of my research, I read the *Purusha Sukta* (hymn 10.90) of the Rig Veda that is dedicated to the Purusha or the Cosmic being. The section introduces the varna system, highlighting the role of man in society, and the construction of social philosophies around it. In this book, mythology is transformed into philosophy, a concept that is later enumerated in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavat Gita.* My research also delves into

the '*purushartha*' or the goals of dharma, karma, artha, and moksha that fulfils a man's life. For researching the same, I have used Patrick Olivelle's *Dharmashashtras: The Law Codes of Apasthansha, Gautama, Bandhayana, and Vasistha* (2003), and Sudhir Kakkar's *The Inner World* (2012).

In addition to the tropes of homosexuality, the thesis also maps the various categorisation of gender and sexuality. Richard Burton in his translation of the Kamasutra says that "in all things connected with love, everybody should act according to the custom of the country, and his own inclination" (Burton, 1994, 127). Texts like the Kamasutra encourages sexual practices that heed towards pleasure rather than procreation. Thus, non-procreative sexual practice, a form of queer sexual practice finds its representation in ancient Indian literature. Although the Manusmriti prohibits non-vaginal sex or men from indulging in same-sex practices, the laws are fairly minimal and there is no evidence of anyone being executed or punished for the same (Vanita, 2000, 47). As Wendy O'Flaherty remarks "[this] celebrate[s] the idea that the universe is boundlessly various and…that all possibilities may exist without excluding each other" (O'Flaherty, 1973, 318).

However, the modern period, in contrast to the laws of ancient India, saw the criminalisation of queer orientation and identity. In 1860, the British Anti-Sodomy Law was introduced, which when enacted in India as Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code, was seen as a regressive move in Indian culture and society. The law states:

"Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term, which may extend to ten years, and shall be liable to fine.

Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section." (Narrain and Eldridge, 2009,9; Arondekar, 2009,76; Bhaskaran, 2002, 15)

Before this enactment, queer sexuality was accommodated if not approved. However, with the passing of this law, homosexuality officially became a criminal activity. Thus, in the twentieth century, as elaborated in the thesis, we see versions of the Kamasutra emerge from authors such as Pandit Madhavacharya, and N.N.

Bhattacharya that condemns the book for its free sexuality and recognition of all identities. In colonial India, queer identities used to be looked down upon as a minority and was termed as a "special oriental vice" (Ballhatchet, 1980, 3; Bhaskaran, 2002, 15-29, Choudhuri, 2009). The term was used for imperial expansion in India. Thus, Indians too were made to feel ashamed of their glorious queer past. Oriental or not, it was through the ardent puritanical campaigning of the British, that queer voices were turned into a vice.

Homosexuality and homosociality was also purported to be a threat to traditional masculinity and femininity. This was asserted by carrying out a series of attacks on homoerotic texts that celebrated the Indian queer culture. Cultural revisionisms and readjustments were done to purge the "literature of most erotic themes, especially of homoerotic themes" (Kugle, 2002, 38). After India gained its independence, queer culture retained its status as a vice but became a symbol of the imperialist influence on India. With the rise of homophobia in India, texts began to undergo a 'queer-washing' where homoerotic, homosocial, and homosexual elements were removed from the texts in order to deem it more acceptable for the puritan audience. These texts were then inculcated into curriculums from a very young age in order to propagate the anti-queer or the non-existence of queer notions deeper. In light of this, we see the rise of one of the major stalwarts of children's literature, one that has influenced countless generations of children and adults alike—the *Amar Chitra Katha*.

Established in 1967, *Amar Chitra Katha* sought to recapture the magic of the mythologies in an attempt to bring back India's glorious past to the younger generations (Hawley, 2001, 217-225). These stories were set against the background of post-Independence India, a country where the definition of religion, especially Hinduism, was being established. Thus, the series too began to reflect these sentiments (Jaffrelot, 2007, 3-26). Diana Eck in her work *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (1998) famously mentioned that often for Hindu readers of the comics, the images illustrated would be a form of *darshan* for them as "beholding the image is an act of worship, and through the eyes one gains the blessings of the divine" (Eck, 1998,3). Hence, as elaborated in the thesis, a comic book series that became popular for portraying the Indian identity quickly became synonymous with portraying the

Hindu identity (Rajadhyaksha, 1993, 47-82). This portrayal came with its share of biases that involved misrepresentation or non-representation of certain values that may seem offensive to the conservative Hindu reader. This biasness is carried forth in the queer representation as well. Stories from the mythologies that portrayed queer characters such as Shikhandi, Brihannala, or Bhishma Pitamaha, or had queer characters as a crucial part of the narrative such as Chitrangada, or Mohini, had their narratives changed completely or manipulated to suit their conservative Hindu readership. The most popular comic book adaptation by *Amar Chitra Katha* has been the Mahabharata.

The second primary text of research is the massive three-volume set of the Mahabharata by *Amar Chitra Katha* along with some of its other titles. Ganguli's *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa* was used as a foil to this work in order to point out the various queer misrepresentations and discrepancies in this text. This text is the comic adaptation of the epic poem Mahabharata. It was illustrated by Dilip Kadam and the team of script writers responsible for this work were comprised of TMP Negungadi, Kamala Chandrakant, Yagya Sarma, Subba Rao, Mihir Lal Mitra, Lopamudra, Shubha Kandhakar, Sumona Roy, Margie Sastry, and Mohan Swaminathan. It was published between 1985-1989 and is considered to be one of the most popular titles in the history of *Amar Chitra Katha*. It is the longest title of *Amar Chitra Katha*, reading over 1300 pages. *Amar Chitra Katha*, from the very beginning, has always maintained a strong commitment to the Mahabharata. From its first title, Krishna, many of its individual titles were based on Mahabharata stories and characters. Anant Pai recounts of persistent demands from readers for a comprehensive depiction of the epic in his comics. This demand led to the birth of the project in 1985. The project was based on some of the popular works of the Mahabharata, namely,

i) A Malayalam verse version by Kunjikuttam Tampuram (SPCS, Kottayam)
ii) A Sanskrit text in Hindi translation by Pundit Ramnarayan Dutt Shashtri Pandey (Gita Press, Gorakhpur)
iii) The Pune critical edition (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune)
iv) Kisari Mohan Ganguli's English prose translation (Pratap Chandra Roy, Calcutta)

Since this work covers only the Mahabharata and not the Harivamsa (an appendage to the Mahabharata), the scope of my research has been only the Mahabharata. The work begins with Vyasa addressing Ganesha to be his scribe and starts recounting the dictation. The panels then move to Vaisampayana narrating the epic to Janamejaya and this pair persists till the last panel of the series, appearing from time to time in different coloured panels. Additionally, the events of the Battle of Kurukshetra were narrated to Dhritarashtra by Sanjeya, during the battle sequences giving an effect of a narration within a narration. The comics also included various footnotes explaining the meaning of Sanskrit terms, a pronunciation guide, and a glossary. The various sections/chapters of the work begin with a recapitulation of the previous section in the backdrop of the illustrations of the Gita. The publication of the *Amar Chitra Katha* series of the Mahabharata coincided with the airing of B.R. Chopra's popular television programme *Mahabharat.* This conflicted the writers of the *Amar Chitra Katha* series as the television series became more popular than the comics since they both targeted the same urban, middle-class audience. However, the audience welcomed and enjoyed the presentation of the epics in both the platforms with the producers of B.R. Chopra's Mahabharat admitting to even using *Amar Chitra Katha*'s Mahabharata as a reference material. In turn, the *Amar Chitra Katha* series also capitalised on the growing popularity of the television series with advertisements of the series exhorting "Read it to enjoy your Sunday viewing [of B.R. Chopra's Mahabharat]". Some of the other titles used in my work that are also based on the characters of the Mahabharata are *Bhagawat- The Krishna Avatar, Krishna- Retold from the Bhagawat Puran, Krishna and Narakasura-Confidence versus Arrogance, Bhanumati-Granddaughter of Krishna, Krishna and Shishupala-He was Forgiven a Hundred Times, Sudama-The Power of True Friendship, Krishna and the False Vaasudeva-Pride Meets Its Doom, Krishna and Jarasandha-Krishna Outsmarts His Fierce Adversary, Pradyumma-Son of Krishna, Aniruddha-Beloved Grandson of Krishna, Amba- A Saga of Revenge, The Pandavas In Hiding, The Churning of the Ocean- Vishnu Saves Creation, Uloopi- The Naga Princess Who Fell In Love With Arjuna,* and *Bheeshma- Selflessness Personified.*

Although many studies have examined the misrepresentations and manipulations by *Amar Chitra Katha* over the years, such as Deepa Srinivas's work *Sculpting A Middle-Class: History, Masculinity, and the Amar Chitra Katha in India* (2010) that

explores the hegemonic politics and its effects on the series, or Karline McLain's work *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes* (2009) that explores the Hindu biasness of the series, or Christopher Pinney's work *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (2004) that points out the hypocrisy of the series when dealing with its audience, or Diana Eck's work *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (1998) that maps the divine/religious interpretations of the series, among others, there is a lack of research on how queer narratives specifically have been manipulated and misrepresented in the series. This research gap limits our understanding of how queer politics may be perceived and accepted in today's society. Therefore, this study aims to explore how queer narratives have been manipulated by *Amar Chitra Katha* in their adaptations and the effects of this misrepresentation on the readers.

## III. Aims and Objectives:

As established, there is a lack of queer representation in *Amar Chitra Katha*. Even when their stories are presented, they are misrepresented to conform to heteronormative gender norms. While comics such as Tales of Amnesia or Vivalok Comics have evolved into including more empowered representations of queer characters, they have failed to reach the same popularity that *Amar Chitra Katha* has reached. As a result, a large section of the readership is still bereft of the knowledge of this representation. Given the strength and history of the community's struggle and movements, the absence of this representation from one of the premier sources of information in literature in India, creates a distorted notion regarding them among its audience which percolates into affecting their acceptance in society. It is hence interesting to map this deliberate distortion of their portrayal in comparison to the epic Mahabharata and understand how it affects the middle-class Indian audience.

The objectives of this research, hence, will be:

i) To establish a framework of accepted Hindu norms for the queer community in ancient India.
ii) To develop a trajectory of how queer norms transitioned from being an accepted norm to being a socially condemned and criminalized community in the modern period.

iii) To discern whether the *Amar Chitra Katha* as an established literature of the modern period is biased in its adaptation of the mythologies.

iv) To map the misrepresentation or non-representation of queer characters of the Mahabharata in the *Mahabharata* and other Mahabharata inspired comic series of *Amar Chitra Katha*.

v) To ascertain the impact of this misrepresentation or non-representation on the middle-class audience.

## IV. Methods and methodology:

The following section describes how the study has been conducted and the methods used to collect and analyse the data. The aim of this methodology section is to provide an overview of the method used so that it may be judged as to how appropriate they are for the purpose and how valid the data generated has been. Hence, throughout the methodology process, it is imperative to remember the questions this research is aiming to answer:

This study tries to address questions about how queer communities and homosexuality used to be perceived in ancient India. Has that perception changed in the modern period and how? How has this change affected the literature, especially children's literature of post-Independence India? Is *Amar Chitra Katha* a biased source of information for children? What are the misrepresentations and manipulations done by *Amar Chitra Katha* in their adaptations and how are they different from the original text? What impact do these manipulations have on the middle-class Indian readership?

The purpose of methodology is to create an underlying paradigm justifying the research methods undertaken. For my research I have used the content analysis, specifically qualitative content analysis to analyse the data. Krippendorff defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 1980, 24). Basically, content analysis is a group of research techniques for making credible, systematic, replicable, or valid inferences from texts and other forms of communication. It is based on a systematic approach which is described in detail to the reader and is replicable by other scholars. Researchers can use the content analysis method to documents the views, attitudes, and interests of individuals, large or small

groups, and diverse cultural groups. The method is also used to compare content against previously documented objectives. While many strands of content analysis exist, I have chosen the qualitative content analysis method as the method allows the authors to show their readers how the analysis was completed by repeatedly linking back to the original texts. Such a method is especially useful in a comparative study where the material has to be compared and allusions need to be made to the original text repeatedly. The analysis made in the thesis does exactly that as the comparative analysis is regularly interspersed with quotations and references to the original text. This method also allows the researcher to identify patterns, themes, and other relevant features and to interpret the underlying meaning and implications of these features. In a thesis that examines the dialogue and visuals of a comic script to understand the idea it is trying to convey; this method becomes especially useful.

Having established the method to be used for the analysis of the text, it is necessary to enumerate on the method used for the collection of data. The choice of Mahabharata as the primary text for this thesis depended on a number of factors. As advertised on the official *Amar Chitra Katha* website, and on various other websites, the two most popular and best-selling collections of *Amar Chitra Katha* are the Special Shiva Collection and the Mahabharata series. Of these, due to its abundance of queer characters, variety of plotlines and characters, singular flow of narrative (unlike the Special Shiva Collection which is a collection of different stories with different plotlines and sources), and singular source, I chose the Mahabharata as my primary text. Having decided on one of the primary texts of my research, it was necessary to obtain the Kisari Mohan Ganguli's translation of the Mahabharata to act as a foil to the first primary text. In order to do this, I visited the National Library in Kolkata and located the necessary copies. Due to them being in dilapidated conditions, I had to scan the copies. After acquiring the two primary texts, the rest of my research required a detailed reading of both these texts in its entirety. The other texts such as the Puranas, the Rig Veda, the Kamasutra, and so on were also collected in a similar fashion.

The comparative analysis was accomplished using a mixed method of content analysis, thematic analysis, and discourse analysis. The comparison relied heavily on the speech bubbles used in the comics and the text of the original Mahabharata. For

example, *Amar Chitra Katha* avoid the use of any gender-neutral terms in their dialogue whereas the original Mahabharata used it repeatedly. In addition to that, comparisons were also based on the illustrations portrayed in the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics and how they contrasted with the descriptions in the original Mahabharata. For instance, Krishna, in spite of being described to be in the *tribhanga* posture (as enumerated in Chapter Four) repeatedly in the original Mahabharata is continually illustrated in a straight posture in *Amar Chitra Katha*. Finally, the findings from this comparative analysis are located in the social context where I attempt to understand how the analysis affects the middle-class readership.

While there are certain limitations to the qualitative content analysis method such as interpretive data analysis, self-selection of primary and secondary texts, heavy reliance on human interpretation, debatable data as it is subjective and is completely based on the researcher's experience, the thesis attempts to put forth an analysis that endeavours to answer the research questions raised in the work and locate these answers in the current social context.

## V. Limitations of the study:

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. The primary limitation to the generalisation of these results is the selection of translations. Using a translated work as the primary text brings forth a translation bias as works of translation can be interpretive and may be ground for potential bias by the translator. Although I have attempted to use the most literal translations of the Mahabharata and other texts available, the ones that are most used by scholars, there are other versions of the Mahabharata available that recount the story differently. Hence, reaching the findings of this research had to be done after excluding many other translations available. The second limitation concerns the methods used for reaching the findings. Since there is a lack of resources that outline the queer politics in the Mahabharata, the research conducted is based mostly on my own reading of the Mahabharata with respect to prevalent theories of queer studies. Finally, due to the vastness of my primary text, it was necessary to be selective about the characters chosen for study. Characters who do not have their stories enumerated in the Mahabharata, or are not a part of the principal story had to be eliminated from the study. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, mapping all the characters would have been an enormous task which

would have made this an impossible work to accomplish; and secondly, it was necessary to keep the narrative restricted only to the principal story of the Mahabharata as has been depicted in *Amar Chitra Katha,* for a fair comparison. With all these constraints, the thesis tries its best to maintain its objectivity and articulate the arguments through the comparative analysis of its primary texts.

## VI. Brief Outline of the Chapters:

The thesis comprises of five chapters, inclusive of the introduction and the conclusion. The first is the introductory chapter that lays down the theoretical background for my study, they key arguments, located the relevance of my study in the social context, and enumerates on the methodological considerations that ground my work. It also outlines the questions the research tries to address and the significance of the research by identifying the gap in the existing literature.

The second chapter titled *Queer in Ancient Indian Literature* tries to establish a framework of accepted Hindu norms for the queer community in ancient India. It begins with a theoretical understanding of what constitutes the term 'queer' in the ancient Indian context. It sets the stage by outlining about the lives and lifestyle of queer communities in that time as described in the various literatures. The chapter then embarks on a detailed explanation of the different categories of queer as described in these literatures. It then moves on to description of saints, demigods, and even gods transcending gender norms and manifesting multiple combinations of sex and gender. Finally, the chapter ends by developing a trajectory of how queer norms transitioned from being an accepted norm to being a socially condemned community in post-colonial India.

The third chapter titled *Reading the Amar Chitra Katha in India* picks up from the previous chapter and enumerates on how literature, especially children's literature and comics distort adaptations of these mythological works. The first part of the chapter begins by establishing the relevance of *Amar Chitra Katha* in the field of literature, and among children and adults alike. It then introduces the biasness of the series by introducing the man behind the series—Anant Pai. The second part of the chapter talks about Pai's involvement with *Amar Chitra Katha* and how that shaped the comic that is read and loved today. The final part of the chapter maps the legacy of the *Amar*

*Chitra Katha* series and why it is important to study it today. The chapter is interspersed with explorations of how and why the *Amar Chitra Katha* distorts queer narratives.

The fourth chapter titled *Locating Misrepresentation: A Comparative Analysis of Amar Chitra Katha's Mahabharata and Kisari Mohan Ganguli's The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa* draws on my findings from the previous chapters and attempts to show how different queer characters in the Mahabharata have been misrepresented and their narratives distorted in the mythological comic books taught to children in India. The analysis is conducted on the six major characters of Krishna, Shikhandi/Shikhandini, Brihannala, Mohini, Chitrangada, and Bhishma Pitamaha. Each section enumerates on how such distortions can affect the person or child reading the text. The chapter ends with a rumination on the universality of the Mahabharata and its impact.

The final chapter, the Conclusion, presents the interplay between religion and comics. It enumerates on how people, through comics, are influenced by religion, encounter the religious, and finally make a religious narrative of their own. This leads to the creation of an imagined faith—a fictional religion for them that is vastly different from the original. The chapter also provides a summary of the thesis, key findings and observations from the same, and also elaborates on avenues for future research in the field.

## Bibliography

(ed.), A. Kazin. 1946. *The Portable Blake.* New York: Viking Press.

Bose, Avinandan. 1917. *The Bhavishya Purana.* Shri Venkateshwara Steam Press. Mumbai.

1951. *The Kurma Purana.* Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. Delhi.

Shashtri, J.L. Bhatt, G.P. Tagare, G. V. 1958. *The Brahmanda Purana.* Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. Delhi.

1984. *MahaPadma Puranam*. Shri Venkateswara Steam Press. Bombay.

950, Ca. 1987. *Bhagvata Mahapuranam.* Shri Venkateshwara Steam Press. Mumbai.

Anant Pai, Ram Waeerkar. 1997. *Krishna- Retold From The Bhagawat Puran.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Anonymous. June, 1990. *"Queers Read This."*.

Arondekar, A. 2009. *For the record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*, Durham: Duke University Press

Ballhatchet, K. 1980. *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson

Berger, Peter L. 1991. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion.* New York: Anchor Books.

Bhaskaran, S. 2002. *'The Politics of Pentration: Section 377 and the Indian Penal Code,'* in Ruth Vanita (ed) Queering India: Same Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society, London: Routledge, pp. 15-29

Bhattacharya, Chandrodaya Vidyavinod. 1914. *Sachitra Krittivasi Saptakanda Ramayana.* Hitavadi Pustakalaya. Calcutta.

Buhler, G. 1886. *The Laws of Manu.* Motilal Banarsidass. Delhi.

Burton, R. 1994. *The Kama Sutra*, London: Penguin

Burton, Sir Richard F. 1883. *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*. Penguin. Delhi.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 2007. *Gender Trouble.* United Kingdom. Routledge.

Campbell, Joseph with Bill Moyers. 1988. *The Power of Myth.* Edited by Betty Sue Flowers. New York: Doubleday.

Campbell, Joseph. 2017. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New World Library.

Campbell, Joseph.1991. *Masks of God.* Penguin Books.

Choudhuri, S M. 2009. *Transgressive Territories: Queer Space in Indian Fiction and Film*, Unpublished Thesis, University of Iowa

Danielou, Alain. 1994. *The Complete Kama Sutra.* Park Street Press. Rochester.

Debroy, Bibek. 2019. *The Bhagavad Gita.* Penguin. Manipal.

Drisko, James and Tina Maschi. 2015. *Content Analysis*. Oxford Scholarship Online.

Eck, Diana L. 1998. *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India.* Colombia University Press. New York. 3rd ed.

Ellwood, Robert S. 1994. *"Why Are Mythologists Political Reactionaries? An Investigation of C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell."* In Religion and the Social Order: What Kinds of Lessons Does History Teach? Edited by Jacob Neusner, 199-225. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Erikson, E. H. 1969. *Gandhi's Truth.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Flowers, Betty Sue. 1988. *Editor's Note to The Power of Myth,* by Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, xi-xii. Edited by Betty Sue Flowers. New York: Doubleday.

Foster, Thomas C. 2003. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines.* New York: HarperCollins.

Foucault, Michel. 1976. *The History of Sexuality (3 volumes).* Vintage.

Ganguli, Kisari Mohan. 1883. *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa.* Kolkata. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.

Goswami, Danavir. 2008. *Garga Samhita*. Rupanuga Vedic College. Kansas.

Griffith, Ralph T. H. 1920. *The Hymns of the Rigveda*. Vol. 1. E.J. Lazarus & Co.

Hawley, John Stratton. 2001. *Modern India and the Question of Middle-Class Religion.* International Journal of Hindu Studies 5, no. 3. 217-25.

Jaffrelot. Christophe. 2007. *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader.* Princeton University Press. Princeton, N.J.

James, William. 1987. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature.* Edited with an Introduction by Martin E. Marty. New York: Penguin Books.

Kakkar, Sudhir. 2012. *The Inner World.* New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks.

Kamala Chandrakant, H S Chavan & Sanjana, Anant Pai. 1977. *Bhanumati: Granddaughter of Krishna.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Kamala Chandrakant, M.N.Nangare, Anant Pai. 1978. *Krishna and Narakasura: Confidence Versus Arrogance.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Kamala Chandrakant, Prabhakar Khanolkar, Anant Pai. 1972. *Sudama: The True Power of Friendship.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Kamala Chandrakant, Pratap Mulick, Anant Pai. 1974. *Aniruddha: Beloved Grandson Of Krishna.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Kamala Chandrakant, Pratap Mulik, Anant Pai. 1977. *Krishna and Jarasandha: Krishna Outsmarts His Fierce Adversary*. Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Kamala Chandrakant, Ram Waeerkar, Anant Pai. 1978. *Krishna and Shishupala: He Was Forgiven A Hundred Times.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Kamala Chandrakant, V. B. Halbe, Anant Pai. 1978. *Krishna and The False Vaasudeva: Pride Meets Its Doom.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Kane, P. V. 1930. *Dharmashastra.* Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Kasbekar, Asha. 2006. *Pop Culture India! Media, Arts and Lifestyle.* ABC Clio Inc.

Kavi, Ashok Row. 1999. *"The Contract of Silence."* In Hoshang Merchant, ed., Yaraana: Gay Writings from India. Delhi: Penguin.

Krippendorff, Klaus. 1980. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its methodology.* SAGE Publications.

Kugle, S. 2002. *'Sultan Mahmud's Makeover: Colonial Homophobia and the Persian-Urdu Literary Tradition,'* Ruth Vanita (ed) Queering India: Same Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society, London: Routledge, pp. 30-46

Kumar, Arvind. July 1996. *"Interview with Jim Gilman."* Trikone, 11(3).

*Mahabharat*. Dir. B. R. Chopra. 1988-1990. Hindi.

Malik, Rajiv. October−December 2004. *"Discussions on Dharma."* Hinduism Today.

Margie Sastry, Dilip Kadam, Anant Pai. 2000. *Bhagawat- The Krishna Avatar*. Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

McLain, Karline. 2009. *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes.* Indiana University Press. Bloomington.

Moyers, Bill. 1988. *Introduction to The Power of Myth*, by Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers. Edited by Betty Sue Flowers. New York: Doubleday.

Nandy, A. 1983. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

Narrain, A and Eldridge, M. 2009. *The Right That Dares to Speak its Name*: Naz Foundation vs. Union of India and Others, Bangalore: Alternative Law Forum

O'Flaherty, W. 1973. *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Olivelle, Patrick. 1993. *The Asram System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution.* Oxford University Press.

Olivelle, Patrick. 2003. *Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Apastambha, Gautama, Baudhayana, and Vasistha.* Motilal Banarsidass. Delhi.

Pai, Anant. 1972. *Bheeshma: Selflessness Personified*. Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Pai, Anant. 1974. *Uloopi: The Naga Princess Who Fell In Love with Arjuna.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd., 2021. Mumbai.

Pai, Anant. 1976. *Pradyumna: Son of Krishna.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Pai, Anant. 1981. *The Pandavas In Hiding: Outwitting a Wily Enemy.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Pai, Anant. 2010. *Amar Chitra Katha's Mahabharata by Ved Vyasa.* Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai.

Pinney, Christopher. 2004. *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India.* Reaktion Books. London.

Prabhu, Pandarinath N. 1954. *Hindu Social Organisation.* Bombay: Popular Book Depot.

Prabhupada, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. 1970. *Krsna: The Supreme Personality of Godhead.* The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. Mumbai.

Prabhupada, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. 1987. *Srimad Bhagavatam.* The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. Mumbai.

Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. 1993. *The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology.* In Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir, and Vivek Dhareshwar. Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India. Seagull. Calcutta. 47-82.

Saleem Kidwai, Ruth Vanita. 2000. *Same-Sex Love In India (Readings from Literature and History).* St. Martin's Press. New York.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. 1991. *The Meaning and End of Religion.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Sreenivas, Deepa. 2010. *Sculpting A Middle Class: History, Masculinity and the Amar Chitra Katha in India.* Routledge India. Noida. First Edition.

Subramaniam, Kamala. 1995. *Mahabharata.* Siddhi Printers. Bombay.

Swidler, Arlene. 1993. *Homosexuality and World Religions.* Trinity Press International. Valley Forge.

Vanita, Ruth, ed. 2001. *Queering India*. New York: Routledge.

Vanita, Ruth. 2005. *Love's Rite.* Penguin Books India.

Wilhelm, Amara Das. 2008. *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex (Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity, and Intersex Conditions Through Hinduism).* GALVA108, Inc. Philadelphia.

Wittig, Monique. 1992. *The Straight Mind and Other Essays.* Beacon Press. Boston.