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Subversion of Heterosexual Normativity in Armistead Maupin's *Michael Tolliver*

Lives

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Dammer Bahadur Ayer has completed his thesis entitled " Subversion of Heterosexual Normativity in Armistead Maupin's *Michael Tolliver Lives*" under my supervision. He carried out his research from Aug 2009 to May, 2010. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Subversion of Heterosexual Normativity in Armistead Maupin's *Michael Tolliver Lives*", submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University Kirtipur by Dammer Bahadur Ayer, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

Armistead Maupin in the novel *Michael Tolliver Lives* demonstrates his bold acceptance and victory of the queer life through the protagonist Michael Tolliver. Maupin's dealings with the issues of queer sexuality in the novel subverts and deconstructs the binary oppositions between compulsory heterosexuality and homosexuality and presents that such norms of binary divisions are ideologically and historically conditioned. By presenting the major characters who celebrate homosexuality by performing outside the traditional divisions of sexualities of homosexuality and heterosexuality, the novelist demonstrates the subversion of heterosexual normativity in the novel.

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I. Victory of Michael Tolliver as a Queer Hero in *Michael Tolliver Lives*

The present dissertation is a study of Armistead Maupin's novel *Michael Tolliver Lives*, which raises the issues of queers and their identity from the perspective of queer characters. In other words, the novel through its characters exposes the queer sensibility. The main character Michael Tolliver, his acceptance of his homosexuality, his feelings towards heterosexual and homosexual communities, and his rebellious act of marrying a male and subversion of societal norms are the basic focus of the research. As the writer himself is a homosexual and got married to a male so, in a way this novel is a kind of autobiographical confession of the writer and his plead for the equality of the queers in the mainstream society. In a way the writer has tried to show the way how a queer, whether it is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual, should raise their voice and struggle in the heterosexual society. Through the protagonist Michael Tolliver, the novel not only becomes the way to confess his homosexuality but also seems to accept it daringly and celebrates it without thinking the consequences. Despite being discriminated and stigmatized in the heterosexual society, the protagonist stands still, declares his homosexuality, marries a male against the consent of his family without having a little bit of complain for not falling into the model of heterosexual society.

Through the projection of happy and successful gay protagonist, Maupin, the novelist questions all the notions of sex and lives as a queer to subvert the traditional normalcy of heterosexual sexuality and posits sexuality as a matter of performance rather than naturally given. The novel mainly presents the conflict between heterosexual people and non-heterosexual people. It also presents the queers facing homophobia on the one hand and some liberal heterosexuals on the other are ready to

accept the queer sexual identity ultimately, signifying gradual change of the society. The protagonist of the novel Michael Tolliver does not hesitate to accept his queer sexuality which is homosexuality. He represents the queer community and raises his voice for the equality. But his family is heterosexual that consists of his mother and brother where both of them represent the heterosexual world. Similarly, Lenore, sister-in-law of Michael, is a straight lady. She deals with Michael and his husband Ben unhesitantly and never shows her homophobia for them though she is a fundamentalist Christian. On the other hand Michael's mother is a conservative fundamentalist Christian who is against Michael's homosexuality and his marriage in the beginning but later in the ending phase of her life she realizes her mistake and gradually accepts her son's sexuality.

For the queers, whether they are homos, bisexuals, transgenders, gays, lesbians etc, who think themselves to be mistakenly created or something abnormal, Michael is an idol of inspiration of loving one's self as normal and natural. Likewise the novel dismantles the idea of the heterosexual majority that the child raised by the heterosexual couple should always be a heterosexual, which is disapproved by the Michael's own family. Michael is born to straight Mother and Father. And Sumter is also a gay child who is under the upbringing of his grandparents Irwin and Lenore. This evidence also satirizes the heterosexual family institutions to curb homosexuality and blame them as queers. Mama Tolliver's unhappy conjugal life with Papa Tolliver, Irwin's break up with Lenore, Brian Hawkins' break up with Marry Ann also portrays the irony. Whereas, the successful conjugal life of the homosexual couples Michael and Ben is presented with more love, trust and devotion. Not even a small misunderstanding occurs between them. By showing the flaws in the traditional

heterosexual family institutions, the novel also tries to raise the voice for the queers and in a way tries to normalize the stigma against the queers in the mainstream society.

Queers are still stigmatized as lunatic, deviant, unhealthy and unacceptable in society. Louis Tyson says about the myth of queer sexuality created in the society:

[...] gay people are sick, evil, or both and that it is therefore in their “nature” to be insatiable sexual predators, to molest children, and to corrupt youths by “recruiting” them to become homosexual. Another myth portrays gay men and lesbians as a very small population of deviants [...] Other common misconceptions include the belief that children raised by gay men and lesbians will grow up to be gay, that unchecked homosexuality will result in the extinction of the human race, and that gay people are responsible for the decline in the US foreign power. (320)

There is privilege of homophobic sentiments in most part of the society where it is horrible to find one as a queer (homosexual) and people are sympathetic toward these minorities only in the sense that they feel these non straights as sinners of past lives. However, in the novel the queer experience is seen from inside out. Michael and his queer circle are the excellent example of the human beings. Moreover, Michael is an excellent and kind human being at his heart and in his behaviours. He is able to win the heart of his partner Ben and his biological family, treats with non-straight very nicely but rather he finds the hostility of the heterosexual society towards queers. Even if he faces homophobia, he is always hopeful for the positive changes of the society. It can be clearly seen the optimistic tone throughout the novel where there is

no extreme radical opinion against the heterosexual people and the society, but a plea for the understanding of the reality of queers and their acceptance in the mainstream society.

The novel neither attacks the heterosexual people, nor is presented with a radical view about homosexual commitment because Michael nowhere attacks to the heterosexual people for their sexuality by language or actions. This is a celebration of the reality, and belongingness with the victimized minorities who are misunderstood by the society, that's why he leaves his biological family and lives among other queers. The privileging of the queer (homosexual) sentiments to break the false wall between homosexuals and heterosexuals in particular and between all queers and non-queers is the basic focus in this novel. It is a revelation of what it is to live a gay life in heterosexist society. It also shows the changes in the attitude of people about the homosexuals. The naturalization of Michael's queerness shows that it is not unnatural to find oneself a homosexual. Michael's humanity pleads his sexuality and that should not be made an issue to dominate his existence. His queerness does not stop him from being perfect human neither his attitude corrupts the society. He always posits positive attitudes, full of emotions and love toward others whether they are homosexuals like him or heterosexuals like his family. Regarding this view the novel critic Walter Kendrick says, "from the start, the novel has sought to portray a microcosm in which every sexual bent-homo-, bi-, trans-, and undecided- coexists amid compressive love and respect" (9). His only flaw for the conservative heterosexist society is that he proudly announces his queerness and believes in being oneself.

The novel mainly presents the homophobic condition of the heterosexual community against the queer community and ultimate victory of the queers like

Michael. After knowing about his homosexuality, he accepts the truth about his queerness and come out of the closet. When homosexuality is still a taboo even among the intellectual circle, this act of coming out of the closet, is a courageous one. Louis Tyson in her *Critical Theory Today* writes about the homophobia which a student faced during her research about gay identity, though she was not a lesbian. In Tyson's words:

Unfortunately, the stigma attached to being thought gay or lesbian is still quite strong in America today, and some students may be unwilling to express anything on the subject until they see how the rest of the group responds. As one student told me after signing a number of books on lesbian and gay theory from the university library for a paper she was writing [...] she wondered if the student who waited on her at the circulation desk thought she were gay, and to her embarrassment she found herself wanting to shout, "Hey, wait a minute; I'm not a lesbian!". (317)

This shows the horrible situation even among the university students of American metropolitan areas and we can easily imagine what would be the situation in the suburbs. Similarly another novel critic Karl Woelz writes:

The thinly-veiled autobiographical and/or metafictional novel appears to be de rigueur these days among the most celebrated of contemporary gay writers. David Leavitt's done it (*Martin Bauman*), Edmund White and Felice Picano have done it (*The Married Man*, *The Book of Lies*), and now Armistead Maupin's done it, in his latest, much-anticipated novel, *Michael Tolliver Lives*. (2)

Woelz compares Armistead Maupin to his contemporary writers and their writings. He takes this novel as a landmark in the field of queer literature and paves the way and gives strength to the closeted homosexuals to come out of it. Mark Benjamin, in “Ex-Gay Agenda”, focuses on reparative or “aversion therapy” (Tyson 319), which tries to stop queers (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual) people to stop leading their lives around the gay lifestyle periphery. The legal victory of Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX) in a Maryland school district is significant because the group claims that homosexuality is a chosen and unhealthy lifestyle. PFOX is a branch of a national network of ‘ministries’ that believes conversion therapy can change homosexuals to non homosexuals. Such believes among people are parodied by the situations presented in the novel. This novel also subverts the view that homosexuality is a disease rather it takes homosexuality as a matter of reality and fact and a possibility of human sexuality just as heterosexuality. Here in the text, Michael stands fearless with the people and does not want to create a ghetto life for the minor homosexuals.

The present dissertation shows that this novel is not only a part of gay literature but also it is like an open declaration and victory of queer sexuality which is still considered as a taboo and unhealthy, not only in US but also all over the world. As said earlier this novel is an autobiographical confession of the writer himself.

Jameson Currier says:

Written in the first person-from Michael’s point of view –Michael Tolliver Lives at times feels more like a memoir than novel to me [...]
It is this personal perspective that gives the novel it’s richness, power, sentiment and distinction. Maupin’s talent as a social historian, glancing both backwards and forwards, is exhilarating. [...] Michael in

fact, is a historical bridge between the older generation and the younger one, recalling life as it was to life as it is today. (5)

In the novel, Michael proudly declares his homosexuality without any guilt of not being straight. Donahue Dick writes that Maupin has hardly ghettoized himself and quotes Maupin's words that, "I am very proud of the fact that I've been out of the closet for all these years, and that I've been popularizing subject matter that has heretofore been considered taboo. I would say that that's the single great joy of my writing life" (1). Whether Currier or Dick, while commenting on the book, focuses upon the rhetorical pattern, storytelling pattern which is obviously a good part behind the success of the novel, but this overlaps the real message that novel tries to give. The acceptance of the queerness and the postmodern trend of welcoming the differences and celebrating it is one of the important issues presented in the text.

Maupin has almost depicted his real life experience in his series of *Tales of the City*, *The Night Listener*, *Maybe The Moon*, and *Michael Tolliver Lives*. Steven A. Katz commenting on latter three novels writes:

Maupin's long-term domestic partnership with an HIV survivor and AIDS activist is reflected in the novels' sensitive depiction of a community coming together to live with the disease in love and dignity. Finding a national audience through the publication [...] Maupin has since gone on to other media, including Broadway and television, to promulgate understanding of gay concerns and human rights issues. (1)

The issues which Katz raises are very important and relevant in this novel, where we can see the HIV diseased people and their trauma of losing their loved ones. In the novel the details about the death of the characters due to HIV most of the Michael's

friends are dead of HIV and his feelings towards them is detail presented. This scenario is very much relevant in the gay community even in the present time.

Armistead Maupin has mainly written his novels by placing gay characters as his subject matter in the context of the world at large. Before his writing time only few details used to be presented in literature and that was also with very limited perspective. Maupin in an interview with Bill Goldstein of *New York Times* says:

Most gay fiction that I was reading when I was coming out in the early 70s made me claustrophobic because it only dealt with the life of the gay bar and everybody in it was gay. Often gay and male and there weren't even any lesbians in the picture. That didn't make me feel the way I wanted to feel about life and it didn't correspond with the life that I was living in San Francisco which was wonderfully mixed up in terms of the people that came and went in my life and that was part of the enormous exhilaration of it. It felt revolutionary. (3)

With the sense of inclusion of the issues of all sexuality, Maupin set the strong foundation and established himself as a well known gay writer. He in a way rebelled against the mainstream writing tendency and stand still with the subject matter of queers. He further says:

It's possible to write a novel now which has gay themes, which has any truth you want to speak, that can be sold to a mainstream publisher and sold in a mainstream bookstore, so the notion of people who've narrowed their focus to only write books for a gay audience for gay people about gay people is stifling to me; in some ways, it's another form of the closet, as far as I'm concerned [...] little cubby-holes at the back of book stores that say 'gay and lesbian' - it's a warning sign, they

can keep their kids away from that section. I'd like people to stumble on my works in the literature section of Barnes and Noble and have their lives changed because of it. (4)

So Maupin holds the view that society should change their heterosexist view against queers without whom the society can't achieve the wholeness. Maupin, along with his contemporary writers who tried to deal with issues of homosexuality, is labeled as 'gay writer'. But here Maupin shows his dissatisfaction towards this view. He says:

I cringe when I get 'gay writer' each time. Why the modifier? I'm a writer [...] We're all discussing the human condition. Some of us have revolutionized writing by bringing in subject-matter that nobody's heard about before. But we don't want that to narrow the definition of who we are as an artist. [...] I don't mind being cross-shelved. I'm very proud of being in the gay and lesbian section, but I don't want to be told that I can't sit up in the front of the book store with the straight, white writers. (5)

Here Maupin is seen in the side of change in attitudes of the heterosexual society and urges for equality. Maupin is adamant in his declaration of his sexuality so is his character Michael in the novel. In a way Michael represents the writer himself in the novel.

The present research tries to capture and highlight the issues of queer sexuality, their respective inclusion and acceptance in the mainstream society. So queers are also the part of this society and their sexuality should not be taken as deviant and unhealthy as queer sexuality is as normal as heterosexuality. This view subverts all the false myths about queers , all the anti-humanitarian activities against

them and which collapses the unhealthy boundary between heterosexual people and queer minorities.

To sum up, this work is divided into four chapters altogether. In the first section, there is an introduction chapter. This chapter introduces the topic, issues and purpose of the research which gives a clue to the readers about the main issue of this research. The second section is about the methodology for the textual analysis. Here in methodology there is a discussion about the queer theory as the major tool by drawing ideas from Michael Foucault, Judith Butler and Sedgwick. Third section is the textual analysis of the novel. In this section, there is analysis of the text to prove the issues through the textual evidences and through the opinions of critics. There is other supporting as well as critical opinions of the critics too included in this section. And the fourth and the last section is the conclusive part where there is summary of the findings.

II. Queer Theory

The term “queer” originally meant odd or unusual. It was just like to be different. It was a derogatory term used to stigmatize same sex love as unusual, unnatural and deviant from the established norm. But now days, it is used in reference to the issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. Usually it is concerned with ‘third genders’ which includes homosexual (gay and lesbian), bisexual, transgender, intersex people and cultures as well as those perceived to be the members of these communities. The term has been increasingly adopted by the third genders as a non-invidious term to embrace a way of life and an arena for the scholarly inquiry. It has become the representational term for the peoples who are in sexual minorities, generally understood as ‘third gender’ and their representation in the mainstream culture. It has largely replaced the traditional meaning, definition and application. So in order to address the issues related to those who are in sexual minorities and their representation in the arts, literature, academia and every sectors of the mainstream society, Queer theory came into existence.

At the present the term queer addresses to a wide range of sexualities of different peoples who are in sexual minority and who are stigmatized and not considered normal just only because of their sexuality. This wide domain of sexuality includes homosexuality (gay and lesbian), bisexuality, transvestitism, fetishism, transgender, and intersex people. The mainstream society considers these sexualities to be deviant just because they perform their sexualities beyond the confinement of

heterosexual norms and values. Society always tries to impose its heteronormative values and norms upon those who do not act accordingly and stigmatize them to be deviant. So queer becomes a signifier of attitude, of a refusal to accept conventional sexual and gendered categories, of a defiant desire beyond the regular confinement of heteronormativity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her *Tendency* says: “that queer can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and accesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (8). This figure of passion and desire is considered as aberrant simply because it is uncontainable and doesn’t fit into the models of heteronormativity.

Earlier in the 1960-1970s, both gay and lesbian community thought to be separatist zone but later at around in 1990s, both gay and lesbian community realized that they all shared the same marginality and repression and to address the wide range of sexuality, they adopted the term ‘queer’. M. H. Abrams says:

Through the 1970s, the two moments were primarily separatist: often thought of themselves as quintessential male, while many lesbians aligning themselves with the feminist movement characterized the gay movement as sharing the anti-female attitudes of the reigning patriarchal culture. Recently, however, there has been a growing recognition (signalized by the adoption of the joint term “queer”) of the degree to which the two groups share a history as a despised and suppressed minority and possessed common political and social ends.

(263)

The term Queer addresses wide range of human sexualities. The societal system in which we live in and follow, has always enchained us in/to one dimensional

identification. One of the underlying thrust of the drive to categories and fix securely is to delineate normality from abject abnormality in clear and powerful ways. Societal systems of identification always convey social values as they chart people. Individuals are always bound with norms of heterosexual society and they fear it. The fear is always that the 'queer' will spread its queerness, convert others, awaken discontent, and undermine the systems. Mariaane La France, the former chairperson of the "Larry Kranner Initiative for Lesbian and Gay Studies" says, "now we are asking not just what causes homosexuality" [but also] what causes heterosexuality?" and "why is sexuality so central in some peoples perspectives?" (9). Queer theory turns this emphasis on its head by deconstructing these binaries of hetro/homo, foregrounding the constructed nature of the sex, gender, and sexuality classification systems and resisting the tendency to congeal these categories into social identities. Because the binaries are revealed to be cultural constructions or ideological fictions, the reality of sexed bodies and gender and sexual identities are fraught with incoherence and instability. In other words, these binaries incompletely or imperfectly represent a broad range of complicated social processes surrounding the meaning of bodies and the social cues, practices, and subjectivities associated with gender and sexuality. So, queer as a broad term addresses the different spectrum of sexualities such as gay, lesbianism, bisexuality, homosexuality etc. For queer theory, sexual categories cannot be addressed by such a simple binary oppositions such as heterosexual/homosexual. For the better and deep understanding of the Queer theory, its basic components such as "sex", "gender", "identity", and "sexuality" are to be addressed.

In gender and sexuality studies, sex, gender, identity and sexuality are highly interconnected terms. We generally understand 'sex' as the state of being male or female. Biology has divided 'sex' into 'male' and 'female', according to the function

in the process of reproducing the offspring. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Gender Criticism* says:

Sex has had the meaning of certain group of irreducible biological differentiations between members of species, Homo sapiens, who have XX chromosomes and those who have XY chromosomes. Sex in this sense as "chromosomal sex" is seen as relatively minimal raw material based on the social construction of gender. (302)

Sex not only refers to what Sedgwick calls "chromosomal sex" but to the cultural expectations of male and female, named after masculinity and femininity. Masculinity is considered as brave, active and penetrator where as femininity is considered as weak, fragile, passive and receptive. 'Chromosomal definition of 'sex' says that only one pair of chromosome out of Twenty-three determines 'sex' of a person and based on this definition 'sex' is a "natural biological coupling" (Cranny-Francis et al. 4). So 'sex' establishes 'male' and 'female' as different and binary opposite existence and identity. Joseph Bristow says in the introductory part of his *Sexuality*; "sex refers not only to sexual activity; it also makes the distinction between male and female" (1). From the above definition it is clear that 'sex' establishes 'male' and 'female' as different and binary opposite existence and identity.

'Sex', in general understanding is considered to be the natural biological difference of Homo sapiens, then 'gender' is a social construction of binary divisions of human beings into two categories in which certain identities and behaviours are attached to the biological and anatomical structure of human sex, i.e. male and female. Through the analysis mentioned above, we can say that 'sex is a natural phenomenon' where as 'gender' is a social and cultural phenomenon'. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also believes that 'sex' is beyond what she calls 'chromosomal sex'. Her

opinion is that the history of uses of sex often overlaps with what might now more properly called 'gender'. There are two genders and are defined in juxtaposition to each other. They may be said to be different and opposite. But Sedgwick questions and elaborates:

But in what sense is XX the opposite of XY? Beyond chromosomes, however, the association of sex, precisely through the physical body with reproduction and with genital activity and sensation keeps offering new challenges to the conceptual clarity or even possibility of sex-gender differentiation [. . .] [these] usages involve [...] sex-gender only to delineate a problematical space, rather than a crisp distinction.
(271-72)

Sedgwick uses 'gender' in order to analyze men and women relationship under the physical and cultural role and she uses 'sex' in order to analyze male and female difference. 'Sex' has its binary quality for the psychoanalyst like Sigmund Freud. He believes that human beings are divided into two spheres: either they want to the replacement of the father or the replacement of the mother. However, due to the excessive domination and repression in the society, Freud shows the possibility of 'sexual perverts' (Cranny-Francis et al. 5). The norm of heteronormativity i.e. male has to marry female and vice versa, must be followed to remain in the societal harmony so heteronormativity and incest prohibition on 'sex' are the determining factors of one's identity. Kinship systems in the society make all same-sex practice a taboo and that is why heterosexual practice is made natural and must by culture. Gayle Rubin in *Sex/Gender System*, (1974) explains the various ways that kinship organizations produce gendered beings out of bodies. According to her view all societies have sex gender system, and that system produces social conventions on

gender from the biological and anatomical raw material of human sex and procreation.

In traditional view 'identity' was considered to be fixed, rigid and unchangeable. The very post modern concept replaced the traditional notion of identity as fixed with a supplementary of changeable and flux. There are multiple identities rather than having a single 'Identity'. Because of the very dynamism of identity as fluid and flux, it is strong and powerful method for the inclusion and respect of the minority groups such as ethnical, racial, sexual etc, in the mainstream culture and tradition. Therefore, the concept of identity as 'unified' and regulatory is thus brought under the domain of deconstruction and viewed as identity is viable to change. Michael Foucault has also drawn the history of sexuality in which the change in identity can be easily traced out. In *The History of Sexuality*, he explains that two hundred years ago there was no linguistic category for gay male. Instead the term applied to sex between two men was 'sodomy' (13). Later on the concept of homosexual was created. What is conventionally understood to be the same practice was gradually transformed from a sinful life style into an issue of sexual orientation. Foucault argues that prior to this discursive creation there was no such thing as a person who could think of himself as essentially gay. He says that once who was called 'sodomist' was addressed with different names like 'sexual pervert' and later 'homosexual' and finally 'gay'. Along with the change in time, identity also changes. Foucault views that identity is culturally constructed by the authority in power channelizing different discourses in the society. So whenever there is change in the power position, discourse channelized in the society also gets changed and with the virtue of same change, the identity of an individual also gets changed. This very idea of discourse and power of Foucault give rise to the notion of fluidity of identity.

Judith Butler also tends "to replace the notion of set identity with the claimer that reveals identity as a fiction" (qtd. in Beasley 105). Similarly Judith Butler also believes that identity is the 'product of power', as Foucault attacks upon identity as ahistorical thing. So Foucault's profound understanding and attack upon the fixed nature of identity, which he says vary across time and space. His arguments have been proven very influential in gay and lesbian theorization in general and queer theory in particular. So there is no natural identity and all meaning of identity is constructed through discourse and there is no subject other than the creation of meaning for social theory. It is not proper to take gays or lesbians as subjects with objective reality; rather they must be understood in terms of their social context, in how genealogy creates these terms through history.

As said above, 'gender' is cultural construct and 'identity' is fluid and flux. 'Gender Identity' is not necessarily based on biological fact, either real or perceived, nor it is always based on sexual orientation. Social factors are responsible in the construction of gender identity. Social factors, which influence gender identity, include gender messages conveyed by family, mass media and other institutions. In some cases, a person's gender identity may be inconsistent with his/her biological sex characteristics, resulting in an individual dressing in/or behaving in a way which is perceived by others as being outside cultural gender norms: these gender expressions may be described as gender variant. Gender identity does not refer to the placing of a person into one of the categories 'male' or 'female', but without including the concept of interaction with society at large the term has no meaning. People who identify as 'homosexual' or 'transsexual' may strongly desire that other people consider them to belong to a gender opposite to that of their kind, but often they simply try to modify

their bodies and behaviour and activities to match how they feel inside, which may not have anything to do with be either 'male' or 'female'.

If the question is asked "what is sexuality?" and the answer would be simple enough that sexuality is connected with sex. Regarding the issue of sexuality, Joseph Bristow, in the introductory part of his *Sexuality* says: "... sexuality occupies a place where sexed bodies (in all their shapes and sizes) and sexual desires (in all their multifariousness) intersect only to separate " (1). If we look from this perspective of sexuality, there are different kinds of sexed bodies and sexual desires inhibiting sexuality. Bristow further explains that sexuality covers wide range and says:

Some would argue that sexuality articulates a fundamental human need; others would recommend that we examine closely how such an assumption arose in the first place. Concluding arguments have been made that sexuality needs to be understood in relation to widely varying phenomena, from psychological desires to structures of language. (2)

Sexuality is a set of social processes which organizes and produces the expression and structure of desires. Earlier sexuality was defined as the condition of human eroticism and when later the term was marked by the prefix-such as 'bi', 'hetero', or 'homo'- the word comes to describe types of person who embodies particular desires (Bristow 2). Bristow opines that sexuality covers a wide range of domains.

Sedgwick uses 'gender' in order to analyze the men and women relationship under the physical and cultural rubric and 'sex' to analyze biological male and female relationship, she views 'sexuality' in the similar domain. She says:

[...] the whole realm of what modern culture refers to as 'sexuality' and also calls 'sex' – the array of acts, expectations narratives, pleasures,

identity- formations and knowledge in both women and men that tends to cluster most densely around certain genitals sensations but it is not adequately defined by them-that realm is virtually impossible to situate on a map delimited by the feminist defined sex/gender distinction. (29)

Sedgwick here agrees with the line of Foucault and Freud that sexuality might be the very opposite of what was previously called as 'chromosomal sex' rather sexuality can be more relational, the representational, and socially constructed and matter of performance. Thus sexuality can be seen in the domain of fluidity, which encompasses real and concrete activities but also the fantasies, feelings etc. It is very difficult to confine sexuality in a precise boundary due to the variation in individuality. Drawing the history of sex and sexuality, Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) associates sexuality in the domain of discourse and power. He sees that the earlier understanding of sexuality, which included psychoanalysis as well, was heavily depended on what he calls “repressive hypothesis” (82). Repressive hypothesis states that our society and culture repress our sexual desires by ignoring or controlling sex through various discourses, resulting in the concealment of human sexuality. According to 'repressive hypothesis' the history of sexuality could only be that of 'negative relation between power and sex', 'the cycle of prohibition' (82-86). Challenging the repressive hypothesis Foucault argues that society in modern culture attributes more and more discourses of codes and writes:

The multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself is an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more, a determination of part of agencies of power to hear

it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated details. (18)

Power is always exercised from higher strata of society to the lower part channelizing downward in traditional definition of it. Same thing happened with the domain of sexuality as well. Power was used against sexuality in order to restrain it. But Foucault describes that both power and sexuality possess deep relationship and both factors affects each other. In visioning the entire history, Foucault says 'discourse/knowledge' is not a separate domain of sexuality rather the very history constitutes that sexuality (20). Sexuality was considered as fixed, unified and heteronormative but Foucault challenges this very notion of unified sexuality. In the name of maintaining morality, society prescribes a set of limitations by constructing a parameter of normalcy. By writing the history of sex and sexuality from the perspective of power and discourse, Foucault denaturalizes the heteronormative domain of sexuality and welcomes the possibilities of multiple sexualities. He says; "after the turn of the century if regular sexuality domain to be questioned, it was through a reflux moment originating in [...] peripheral sexualities" (39).

For the understanding of the claim that whether sexuality is socially constructed or given by nature, there are two views: 'essentialist view' and 'social constructivist view'. According to essentialist view, our sexuality has biological basis i.e. parental harmonic factor, genetic factor, environmental factor, innate bisexuality have determined our sexual orientation. Human sexual orientation is set early in the life. Sexual orientation refers to the pattern of emotional or sexual attractions to men, women or both gender.

The view of "social constructivism" in determining sexual orientation says that events on the environment make us who we are. Our sexual orientation and desires

are based on social and cultural factors. The emotional and sexual activities associated with sexual orientation terms such as gay and straight change significantly over time and across cultural boundaries. Sexuality is a set of social processes which produces and organizes the structure and expression of desires. The 'social constructivist' claims that there is 'no natural sexuality' rather all sexual understandings are constructed within and mediated by cultural understandings.

Just as sexuality is a matter of social construction, similarly it is matter of performance. The construction of the sexuality modulates the performance. Human subjectivity (self) is built in the periphery of the societal rules and norms so that subjectivity cannot perform according to its free will but acts only by subjugating itself, because the performance begins right from the moment of birth with the remarks "it's a girl" or "it's a boy". Judith Butler in her introduction to *Bodies that Matters: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, says:

In the first stance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act" but, rather as the reiterative and citation practice by which discourses produces the effects that it names. [...] the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative. (2)

Such endemic impact of performance, though replicated in many forms, can be denaturalized by bringing it into the forefront as a configuration of society. Societal norms and systems have always created binaries such as good/bad, homosexual/heterosexual, gay/straight, masculine/feminine in order to exercise its discourse of systems of codes but in the era of post-modernity, such binary view is

denaturalized. So not only performances such as 'male femininity' or 'female masculinity' but also a number of other, to and fro and overlapping in variations are possible in the field of heterogeneous domain of sexuality. In other words, the binaries of homosexuality/heterosexuality, masculinity/femininity, gay/straight, lesbian/straight, first gender/third gender break and collapse into one another in order to liberate an infinite possibilities of other "sexualities". Marjorie Garber in *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* argues that the concept of male and female or masculinity and femininity or hetero/homo and by extension, sexuality must be viewed as an unstable historical and political construct in our societies and such as awkward issue has continually to be revisited, rediscovered, disavowed and affirmed (20).

Modern society has created a parameter of normalcy and judges everything, every human activity on the basis of this "normalcy", whereas this very concept has been shown as a matter of social and historical construction rather than the condition of human nature. The boundary of 'normalcy' which we think is 'natural' seems to have constructed just one and a half century ago. Before, there was no concept of normalcy pervasively prevalent. Lennard J. Davis in his essay "Constructing Normalcy" in *The Disability Studies Reader* says:

The word 'normal' as constituting, conforming to, not deviating or different from the common type or standard, regular, usual only enters the English language around 1840. (Previously the word had meant 'perpendicular; the carpenter's square, called a 'norm' provided the root meaning). Likewise, the word 'norm' in the modern sense, has only been in use since around 1855, and normality and 'normalcy' appeared in 1849 and 1857, respectively. If the lexicographical information is

relevant, it is possible to date the coming into consciousness in English of an idea of 'the norm' over the period 1840-1860. (10)

If any domain of human activity did not fall within the requirement of 'norm' it became inevitably a deviant. There was the prevailing concept of the 'ideal' even before the construction of the concept of the norm. After the construction of 'norms', rules and regulations were created in each and every domain of human spheres. And the same thing happened to the domain of 'sexuality' as well. It is not that there were no rules and regulations on sexuality before the modern times. The earliest law regarding sexuality is recorded back from second millennium BC. What was new following the construction of normalcy was the clear cut difference between legal and illegal, norms and so on. Once this demarcation came into existence then the series of domination, torture, marginalization started towards the 'other' sexualities. Such a stigmatization of what Foucault calls "peripheral sexualities" (40) was endorsed through a definition of the norm of sexual development, and through a simultaneous descriptions of the possible deviations. Many parameters came into existence in order to restrain the domain of sexuality which in turn only consolidated the heteronormativity. The construction of normalcy thus can be seen as giving a firm background to the production of 'sexuality'.

Sexuality is to be understood as a broad category to understand human behaviour and practices. In the domain of sex, it is developed as a mode of research or study in academia. Thus sexuality can be seen in major areas like feminist studies, gender studies, and queer studies in particular. The category of sex is from the beginning phase normative and this is what Foucault called 'regulatory ideal'. Relating with the issue of regulatory norm, Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matters: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* writes: "sex not only functions as a norm, but is part of

regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power to produce- demarcate circulate, differentiate the bodies it controls” (1). So sex and sexuality is a regulatory ideal whose exercise is compulsorily imposed and this exercise comes into effect or fails to be so through certain regulated parameters/norms. She further views:

It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. (2)

Socio-political analysis of sex, gender and sexuality is critiqued upon under queer studies. Sex is politically associated with social subordination and domination. So the thinkers of these studies are concerned with how power is exercised and perpetuated in the construction of 'sexed' and sexual differences. It critiques and challenges and reevaluates the mainstream tradition of knowledge, rules, and cultures and secures the position for the minority groups or for those who are in minority.

Homosexuality is one of the main focus of queer studies. In other words homosexual’s sexual position is mostly addressed in this discipline. Overall queer studies analyses agendas of both gay and lesbian, as well as transgender issues, so queer studies covers a wide range of human domain and addresses their issues. However, in sexuality gender cannot be altered from power relations and its practices. Though sexuality studies have debated over times but it is mainly concerned with "whether sexuality can positively disrupt oppressive power relations" (Beasley 18). But precisely thinkers of gender and sexuality studies, queer studies in particular have

increasingly adopted more positive attitude towards sexuality and power within the domain of queer studies.

An individual should be seen in relation to their level of performance. For example, queers are taken as mad, aggressive, lunatic, unfriendly, and effeminate earlier. This doesn't mean that queers are necessarily having such qualities. This is what society makes the stereotype of their kind. Without observing their performance, their nature, society imposes the label of stereotype, just because they stand at the different line from the expectation of the society. So rather than making queers stereotype, they should be viewed under the degree of their performance. Male can appear as feminine and female as masculine as far as their performances of sexuality is concerned. Moreover the same person can switch back and forth in the continuum. Rather than labeling an unalterable tag of either masculine or feminine upon an individual, there should be an open space to affirm all the variances of performances in full fledged manner. Instead of categorizing sexuality in various sub groups such as masculine/feminine, heterosexuality/homosexuality, the present dissertation analyses all of the possibilities according to the degree of that various people's experience and the degree of inclination they are tilted towards. As well as their experience manifested in different ways towards the so-called two poles of binaries, i.e. heterosexuality and homosexuality.

It is a political theory through which all the non straight groups get united and ask for their rights as any other people. This is questioning back to traditional so called universal, biological notion of sexuality which is based on binary opposites, i.e. male or female. This is a weapon of all non heterosexuals to fight against the discriminations they have been facing in the history and to come out of the closet with their dignified identity. Queer theory tries to reunite the diversities among the non

straight minorities as this theory primarily emerged from the white middle class roots of gay liberation and lesbian feminist movements of the early 1970s. It minimizes the gap among working class, non-white, non-European gay and lesbians who feel again twice marginalized from the middle class white gay and lesbian groups. Lois Tyson in "Lesbian Gay and Queer Criticism" defines queer "as an inclusive category for referring to a common political or cultural ground shared by gay men, lesbian women, bisexuals and all people who consider themselves for whatever reason, non straight" (336). Similarly, Steven Seidman views queer theory as a social liberating theory. She says:

Queer theory is not just about making a new space for non-heterosexual, for the non-conformists it is about the reform of the society. In this usage, "Queer" is a verb not an identity, and the aim is to Queer society by fully recognizing differences to the point of declaring war on all norms, all authorities. This socialized Queering strategy serves as a model for new radical democracy. (132-3)

Seidman explains that such queer thinking would also remove moral assessment from a number of areas related to bodies, desires, and close relationships to allow for a development of a society where there is no binary of the normal or abnormal, homosexual or heterosexual.

To wrap up, queer theory tries to develop respect and reciprocity amidst heterosexist and homosexual. Not only that, queer theory discard the practices of exclusion of the third genders (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) and raises the voice for the development of an inclusive society.

III. Subversion of Heterosexual Normativity in Armistead Maupin's *Michael Tolliver Lives*

Gendered sexuality is a hot debated issue among the different intellectuals in the field of academia. As mentioned earlier in the methodological parts, gendered sexuality is a vast field that incorporates the queer sexuality also. So as a part of societal thinking of sexuality, queer sexuality especially homosexuality was not accepted in the course of human history till now. Sexual minorities such as queers are still forced to be excluded from the mainstream cultures and are imposed with the category of 'OTHER'. They are imposed with the heterocentric values and norms and pushed aside to inside the closet; as a result they suffer from the inferiority complex. We can see such maltreatment and marginalization of queers even in the developed countries like America, Europe and others. It can be easily traced the homophobic tendency of heterosexuals towards the queers (gays, lesbians, bisexuals or transgenders) even in such developed societies.

So in such critical background, *Michael Tolliver Lives*, tries to unfold the stories of queers (whether it is the gay protagonist, or lesbians, or transgenders), their personal problems and marginalization along with their bitter experience of homophobia from the heterocentric society. So the present novel is a kind of

confession of the writer himself and his gay protagonist Michael, his identity, his sentiments, his view towards the world and against the discrimination of heterocentric society towards the whole queer community.

Through its sexually queer characters: Michael Tolliver, Ben, Anna Madrigal, Sumter, Shawna, Patresse etc, the novel denaturalizes and subverts the binary divisions like masculinity/femininity, and heterosexuality/homosexuality. The queerness of the characters and their easy acceptance of their sexual orientation, their coherence with the mainstream society, and their feelings towards their sexual identities reveal the queer sensibility in the novel. We can easily trace out how homophobia affects the lives of the characters directly or indirectly in the novel. Not only the lives of the queer characters are deeply influenced by the societal norms and stigma created on the basis of such norms but the lives of other characters are also at times endangered by the same perspective. So before the direct plunging into the textual interpretation a brief description of characters and plot seems essential.

The plot of the novel mainly revolves around the story of the two couples, the homosexual couple of Michael and Ben, Michael's heterosexual family members such as mother, brother Irwin and Lenore, sister-in-law. Michael and Ben are openly gay characters and perform homosexuality openly with their friends as well. Mama Tolliver lives with her junior son Irwin and daughter-in-law Lenore with her Christian beliefs in California and on the other hand Michael though an eldest son of Tolliver family lives with his husband Ben in Sanfransico away from his biological family. Michael works as gardener in Sanfransico in the circles of queer friends like Jake, his assistant in gardening, Anna Madrigal, Shawna, Mona and others. Anna Madrigal is an octogenarian transgender figure in the novel and she is considered as the motherly figure, best friend around the place she lives and the protagonist

considers his queer circle the logical family and gives more importance than his biological family. The story is set in America in the 1980s against a backdrop of the greed, conservation, sexual politics, and the discovery of an awful situation created by the AIDS.

Michael on the one hand suffers from HIV ^{+ve} and on the other faces difficulty in the act of ‘coming out of the closet’ earlier but ultimately discloses his sexual reality to his mother and brother Irwin. Yet it is very difficult for his mother to accept his sexuality due to the existing norms of heterosexuality. Here, the protagonist does not seem to put aside the reality of his sexuality and the life he leads and he confesses openly to his mother and to his circle openly about his homosexuality. His sensibilities prove that he has no hesitation and guilt of being a homosexual, neither he is radical nor does he question the norms of heterosexual society. He wants to lead a happy and peaceful life with his husband and with his circle and with his best friend Anna Madrigal, overall with his “logical family” (309) than his biological family. He says, “Anna and Mona and Brian and Mary Ann –my “logical” family at 28 Barbary Lane” (305). He accepts the existence of the heterosexual people and has the understanding about the normality of his sexuality just as other people’s sexuality too is normal.

Though the protagonist has his own biological mother but he is not happy with that existence rather gives more importance to a queer, a transgender lady, Anna Madrigal, whom he considers as his logical mother. He has a great attachment with her and shares each and every problem about his life. Michael is not considered as a normal son by his own biological mother and brother at first and becomes the subject of stigma so he secludes himself from his home and goes away to live around. Somehow, he can be seen as an abused son by his own parents and has a traumatic

past but now by being in the company of the Anna Madrigal, his husband Ben, he feels relieved and is happy about it. He respects his family but couldn't get the same respect back from his biological family because of homophobia. Such is the irony presented in the novel about the family and its bitter reality and it questions and challenges the so called concept of family based on the heterocentric norms and suggests that family is not only a matter of social norms but also of feelings, acceptance, emotional attachment towards each other and feeling of being at home.

The heterocentric practice states that only male and female constitutes a family and only such pair leads to a happy and successful life. But this very concept has been subverted here in this novel and presents that 'man marrying a man' can also form a happy family. The protagonist Michael marries a man Ben and forms a family and they share the experiences and truths of their lives and trust each other. This background challenges the concept of myth created by heterosexual society about the queers, according to which queers are sick, lunatic, and evil by their nature and are instable sexual predators. These myths about the queers have been playing a stigmatic role and have become the way to blame queers for molesting children and corrupting people. This conservative perspective is challenged back by the irony showing Michael's own father and sister-in-law are sexually corrupted in front of his own wife. Michael's wish to give the teenage boy Sumter, who lives with Irwin and Lenore as their grandson the freedom he wants and the right guidance, support to him can be sensed in the following lines.

“He's holding up. He's a tough little soldier underneath.”

“I know” I said, bristling at his implication. “He's also a sweet gay kid who needs your support.”

“That's not funny Mikey.”

“I’m not trying –“

“How could you possibly know that anyway?”

“How could you possibly not know it?” (309-310)

Well, this conversation between Michael and Irwin makes Irwin know about his grandson’s sexuality who needs the proper support and the guidance from his heterosexual grandparents. Lenore and Irwin wear the glass of heterosexual norms so they couldn’t figure out what their child want. From this example also it is clear that it is not necessary that a child who is reared up by heterosexual parents turns out to be straight. The sense of positive attitude about heterosexuality and the sense of negative attitude about homosexuality is always imposed by the societal norms and made the hetero desire always a compulsion. That’s why Irwin being a heterosexual man could not digest the reality about queerness of his child and tried to link this truth with stigma in a light way and replies “That’s not funny, Mikey” (309). Heterosexual world finds it hard to digest the reality about the queer world. Queers have always feared about their Othering and stigmatization and fear to come out of the closet. As Sumter plays with the puppets and says, “This one here’s a lion who’s scared all the time,” the kid announced. “And this one’s a witch, even though her dress is way too pretty for a witch, if you ask me” (108). This remark clearly reveals the reality of heterosexual world. The puppets of “lion” and “witch” stand for Irwin and Lenore respectively. Both are heterosexual male and female and would not allow the third sexuality under their very nose and due to the fear the kid utters such bitter remark. This very fear makes the queer hard to come out of the closet and make them suffer from the inferiority complex.

Michael Tolliver remaining a gay throughout his life behaves as normal as

other people do, probably even better than the ordinary person. He lives through the deadly reality of HIV AIDS among his partners. All his friends, partners, his husband, accepts his condition without hesitation and loves him a lot. He is important to all of them. He is a true figure throughout the novel and never lies about his disease to anybody. While dating Ben, Michael tells him "I'm positive." (26) But instead of giving a surprised response, "Ben looked in my eyes and smiled" (26). This line shows that the other party despite of being told about the deadly disease easily digests it. Such kind of easy response can hardly be seen in heterosexual world. They rather stigmatize HIV positives but queers by being so cool about that challenged notion of stigmatizing them by heterosexuals. Similarly in another sequence of the plot Michael and Ben met Mr. Johnson in a party and decides to have sex with him but Michael being a true figure doesn't hide his condition of HIV. He asks to Ben:

"Did you tell him I'm positive?"

"Yep."

"And he's cool about ... both of us?"

"More than cool. Said he wouldn't dream of breaking up the set."

(157)

Here Michael expects Ben to tell the truth about his disease to Mr. Johnson. Here also Mr. Johnson even after knowing the truth of such dangerous disease takes in an easy manner. Whether it is Michael, Ben or Mr. Johnson, they all are queers and they have shown the sense of understanding which heterosexuals may lack.

The contrast between a straight heterosexual couples and queer couple is artistically presented and it challenges the notion of family that only the union of heterosexual male and female leads to a happy life. A straight male and head of the Tolliver family, Michael's father is unable to fulfill his familial duty towards his wife

and his sons. That fatherly figure never thought about his family and was self-centered. In this sense neither his wife remains happy nor were his sons. As Michael says, "... I'd known the sting of the old man's narcissism for decades [...]. He did it because he could – because everything revolved around him. He didn't think about anyone else. He took what he wanted" (275). The remark of Michael about his father shows that his father was not good and responsible man so his parents conjugal life was not happy. Similarly marital life of Irwin and Lenore seems to be in harmony but actually it was not so. Lenore seems to be sexually crippled lady. She is unfaithful to her husband Irwin. She indulged herself in sexual intercourse with her father-in-law. And when Irwin comes to know this truth from his own mother, he breaks down his marriage with Lenore. Lenore, who seemed to follow Christianity so blindly, appears to be a hypocrite. As Michael and Irwin converses:

"It took me a moment. About Mama wanting to leave Papa?" [...]

"It's the same reason, Mikey."

"The same reason as what?" [...]

"The same reason I threw Lenore out. Her and Papa ... they were having a ... I mean, you know, they'd been ..." [...]

How do you know this?

"Mama told me last week."

"Papa and Lenore?" (286)

In this way we see extra marital relation of Lenore and her father in law. They keep the incestuous relationship. They are all heterosexual couples and do not have the understandings that results in unhappy marital life. Michael and Ben as a queer couple have the good level of understanding and harmony between them. We see the extra marital relation between them as well but it doesn't matter to them. In different times

they keep sexual relations with different queer people, whether it is with Mr. Johnson, Jake or Patresee. But what matters is, they share their feelings, emotions, needs, ask for suggestion to each other, travel together and standby each other's side. So despite being homosexual, they are perfect couple. So their happy and healthy relationship subverts the notions of heterosexual norms of family which constitutes of only heterosexual male and female. The failure of Mama Tolliver, Papa Tolliver, Lenore and Irwin's marital relation and the success of homosexual queer couple's marital life supports that subversion.

The homosexual couple breaks the traditional notion about family. Michael and his queer friends such as Anna Madrigal, Jake all are different from each other, still they are alike. Moreover they love each other even if they stay apart. Michael considers that Anna Madrigal is his logical mother and family. Here the concept of male and female sexuality is viewed as an unstable historical and political construct of our society and such construction should continually be revisited, disavowed, rediscovered and affirmed. Michael here plays the role of a husband in Ben's life, even if both of them are male, which is strictly against the traditional concept of sexuality that is a construct of heterosexual ideology.

The novel consists of multiple characters having multiple sexual orientations. The protagonist Michael himself has got multiple sexual orientation. So it seems difficult for him to stick into one sexual orientation. He got married with Ben late at the age of fifty-one. He says, "Ben and I were married at City Hall." (225). He assumes Ben as his "prince" (30). He explains how he got stucked with the company of Ben:

A Sunday trip to the Headlands, where we lay all day on an army blanket, comrades-in-arms, without having sex at all. Little doubt

remained, in fact, when “Hughs, Ben” became “Love, Ben” and the flood gates finally opened inundating our emails with reckless Victorian endearments:

My Darling Boy

My Handsome Man

My Wonderful One

My Own. (30)

Similarly he has got feelings and sense of love for Mona. He talks about Mona to his husband. “I wish you’d known Mona” (238). He further expresses his feelings about Mona “Just joy, I guess. You take me back to my best times. I feel connected to them again. (This was true enough, but not the whole truth. I was also dwelling on the pain of impermanence, the way love is always on loan, never the nest egg we want it to be.)” (238-39).

Despite being a homosexual, he is attracted to a female and feels the deep attachment with her. He says: “She just knew me, you know? There was no bullshiting that woman. When she gave you hell about something, it felt like the deepest kind of love.” (239) But when ultimately, Michael gets married with a man who could give perfect love and pleasure to him. We come to know that his dominant sexual orientation was homoerotic. However, he had also assumed that his lover would be Mona. So Michael practices various kinds of sexuality like “hetero”, “homo”, “bi”. In practice he is queer who embraces all streams of sexuality practices as natural but in thought he took the heteronormative homophobic position. Because of this split in his personality he could not overcome the homophobic conception he was imposed by the social discourse.

The novel through its sexually ambiguous characters whether it is Michael himself, Jake, Shawna or Anna Madrigal, denaturalizes identity categories like masculinity/femininity, gender/sex, homosexual/heterosexual, by revealing that heterosexuality, which is the base of these identities, is itself a construct. This denaturalization of the identities mentioned above creates a situation in which the identity of an individual is ambiguous, fluid and fragmented rather than naturally fixed and unitary. Just as mentioned earlier in the methodological part, gender and sex are different streams and yet related as Sedgwick says. For instance, in the novel Jake is biologically a male but his gender doesn't act accordingly. During the conversation with Michael we come to know that, "He used to be a girl" (72). Jake himself is not comfortable with his gender, i.e. male.

Here the conditions and feelings of Jake subvert the idea that male should only like female and masculinity always falls for femininity. He says, "I have always felt male. And I've always wanted to be with men [. . .] I don't feel very gay most of the time." (83). His very ideas tend to subvert the traditional notion of masculinity and femininity. They are the matter of performance rather than naturally fixed. Similarly, while Michael and Jake converses about Buck Angel, we came to know about the similar situation as Jake. Jake says about Buck Angel that "He is real proud of his pussy [. . .] He calls himself a real nab with a real pussy. It's part of his whole macho image" (198). In traditional view point 'he' is the pronoun used to address male and male is someone who possess penis but here the situation is reversive. Pussy is informal meaning of vagina and it is something associated with female but here 'he' is associated with the term 'pussy'. It is further cleared from the statement Michael said "Buck Angel, at least in part, because of his vagina and the immense pride he took in it (199). In the case of Jake, he feels like male and still wants to be with male.

Similarly Buck Angel who is 'he' associates with 'she'. Whether it is Jake or Buck Angel, their fluctuating identity 'he' as 'she' reveals that the compulsory heterosexuality as well as categories like male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, masculinity/femininity as such are discursive constructions, matter of performance rather than essential core identity categories. This view gets further shot in the arm with Jake's view expressed by his close friend/boss Michael. He says, "Jake says he can't relate to his vagina, that it's basically ... a foreign object to him. To use it having sex with his boyfriend would be like ...denying his essential masculinity" (205). So just as Foucault says identity is viable to change. It's not fixed and unitary. Likewise Anna Madrigal, is also a manly figure having male sexual organ i.e. penis but Anna felt possessing it. In gender terms Anna is 'he' but rather wants to be called 'she' and that's what the fellows who live around Anna considers the feminine figure. Anna never feels comfortable with her biological body organs. Michael asks her, "Did you feel that way about your penis?" (207). Though Anna possess 'penis' still he thinks himself 'she'. Anna about her male sexual organ says; "let's just say I wasn't especially attached to it" (205) reinforces her ideas about embracing the identity of a female. Anna's fluctuating identity 'he' and 'she' also focuses on the nature of identity as fragmented and fluid. Anna is biologically given with male sexuality but she embraces the female sexuality. So sexuality seems to be the matter of performance rather than naturally given. Anna says:

Gender is mostly in the head anyway, so why tamper with the parts that are specifically designed for pleasure? Why not let your head have the last word and leave your groin to enjoy itself? That way ... if you were born female, say like Jake... you don't end up with ... you know, unfortunate, unfeeling." (206).

Anna embraces the female identity. She could go for the surgery to remove her male genitals as suggested by Michael but she refused. The major problem with Anna, gender identity was that she assumed, 'identity' as pure and single as Anna herself was the product of heteronormative society, which believed in single unitary identity. But 'identity' is never fixed rather fragmented and fluid. The identity categories like masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, straight/gay, are all constructed through various process like stereotyping, masquerade and performance. So with the virtue of this idea, Anna doesn't want to go through the surgery to remove his 'penis'. Sexuality is a matter of performance, which is formulated in the periphery of the societal rules and norms and its regulations right from the birth and due to which the individual self is subjugated (Butler 2). Anna Madrigal biologically possess the male sexual organ, who is supposed to be male in regulated societal point of view but later she breaks down the chain of regulatory ideal as opposed to his supposed position of male. Ultimately Anna embraces the feminine identity despite possessing a penis and likes to be called a female, a mother. Michael reveals about the performance of Anna and her sexuality, "she had some practice that she had been a woman for over forty years, almost as long as she'd not been a woman" (28). So ultimately she proves herself to be a queer figure who is supposed to be someone else in the regulatory locus of society.

Similarly in the novel, lesbians are also portrayed as a married one. Here also the concept of marriage between heterosexual male and female is subverted. Queers can also be well known in the society and also can be in the leading position. As Michael says; "a socialite named D'oreathe (the apostrophe was added during her modeling days) who ran a stylish restaurant here in the late eighties" (196). "She and her wife, DeDe" (196) are portrayed as a successful, well-known and happy couple.

Similarly homophobia affects the life of the protagonist Michael very deeply in the novel. He could not disclose about his queer sexuality to his mother, brother and to his family till the age of 26, as he finds the act of 'coming out of the closet' as Sedgwick says, very difficult to perform. As a Christian, he tries to live the life of normalcy as he can. He wanted to become a good son of the Tolliver family and in the eyes of the society. Despite his efforts to be a good son his mother feels something wrong with him. Michael also wanted to come out of the closet yet it was very hard for him to talk about his homosexuality directly to his family due to the existing norms concerning heterosexuality. Eventually he exposes about his homosexuality to his mother and brother by writing a letter far away from home. "At twenty-six, I finally told my folks I was a gay" (100). To talk frankly, if there were no such watertight norms of society concerning heterosexuality, Michael might have been able to come out of the closet early. He could talk directly face to face about his homosexuality rather than disclosing his queerness by writing a letter. "I wrote a letter to my mother in 1977" (39). Here even Michael himself could not write a letter of his own. He dictated it and his then, lover John wrote it. He himself didn't get the courage to do it. All these effects on Michael are due to the harsh imposition of the heterosexual principles and norms that proved to be the obstacles in the way to discuss the reality of Michael's queer sexuality with his biological family. But ultimately with the great courage, Michael reveals about his homosexuality. He sends "a silver framed snapshot taken just after the wedding, standing beside a waterfall, at Big Sur" (36), as a birthday present to his mother. But to his great dismay he gets the bitter stigmatized experience. His family was not ready to accept his marriage with a male. Irwin couldn't digest it and still tried to ignore this reality of his brother's marriage with Ben, a male. He is not ready to call Ben, Michael's husband. He rather

calls Ben “a friend or something” (36). Irwin wears a glass of heterosexual society and responds accordingly. He responds bitterly on phone, “c’mon bro. You send us this picture of . . . dunno . . . Huckleberry Finn or something . . . and you tell us he’s your husband . . .” (37). It’s just because Irwin possess homophobic conception. He couldn’t go beyond the thinking of heteronormativity, i.e. husband should always be male and wife should always be female. But he finds just opposite of that law and responds accordingly.

Similarly Michael’s mother is also the product of this very heterosexual society and she also possesses the homophobic conception. She seems much more homophobic. She even “joined Anita Bryant’s Save Our Children campaign, hoping against hope to save her two sons from recruitment by homosexuals” (39). She wants to save her sons from going into the company of queers just because of the compulsory heterosexual conception and the negative myths, it creates about queers. When his mother, got to know that, her apple cart turned upside down and responds bitterly. He says, “ the news that I was beyond saving [. . .] was met first by silence, then by a lone pound cake that I chose to regard as an awkward step toward enlightenment “ (39). The root cause behind all the bitter treatment of Michael’s family and their dreary consequences arises from the norms of heterosexuality that defines homosexuality as a matter of stigma and deviant form of sexuality and due to which, “they’ve torn up his picture” (67).

Trying to be seen normal is the one of the dire effects of homophobia and stigmatizing conception of society. Here, Michael despite being known about his homosexuality tries to ‘act normally’ according to the mores of the heterosexual normativity. He was worried about his life and his willingness to act accordingly. This can be clearly sensed from his views:

I tallied the score of our ancient rivalry and realized that I envied nothing about my brother's life. Not the boat or the four thousand plus square feet or the wife or the grandkid, either- none of the things I once worried I might be missing if I committed fully to a life of homosexuality". (101)

When Michael goes home in the pretext of his mother's illness, with his husband Ben, he tries to act normally in front of his mother. Due the homophobic conception his mother couldn't welcome and accept Ben as her son's husband. The following conversation makes it clear:

"Where's your friend?" Mama asked, meaning, Ben [. . .].

"He's my husband, Mama."

She scowled at me.

"Irwin told you that didn't he? That we got married a few years ago."

A long brooding silence and then: "Don't be like that, Mikey."

All I could do was smile. Mama had been telling me not to be like that as long as I could remember.

"All right I won't be like anything." (183-184)

Although Michael tells his family that Ben is his husband but due to that homophobic conception his family calls Ben as "friend" of Michael. Due to the homophobia, which Michael faces in his family, he deserts and lives far away from it. The disintegration of Michael from his biological family is caused by the ultimate effects of homophobia, and in a consequence of stigmatization of homosexuality.

The novel dismantles the idea that sex predetermines the gender identity. As it is said in the methodological part "sex" is natural and 'gender' is a cultural construct, therefore gender which suggests dressings, way of speaking, body language, set of

behaviors, use of make ups, all comes later. But through the set of behavior and nature, Michael and Ben's relation, parodies this very notion. It is 'sex' that follows gender in the case of Michael. So Michael's relation to Ben helps blur the boundary of gender identity and sex. For instance Michael is biologically male and his 'gender identity' which is a societal construct, has taught him to be slicked to the parameters of maleness. He is supposed to get married with female, play active role in sexual intercourse. He is supposed to be the penetrator but his activities blur the boundary of these parameters. Just opposite of his gender identity, he embraces the passive role. "I returned to my passive state and took the rest of my cues from Jake" (80). Instead of playing active role in sexual intercourse, he enjoys playing passive role. Similarly Jake and Ben enjoy being a penetrator with male, rather with female. The heteronormative idea of gender that they were stucked was false. Jake's uncomfortability with his biological sex and its role, and the amazement of Michael, Anna proves that gender as well as compulsory heterosexuality is just a matter of performance. Michael's level of amazement about Anna's, Jake's, Brian Hawkins, Patresse's sex and gender, parodies the notion of homophobic society that always prescribed only heterosexuality as natural and compulsory and homosexuality as deviant. And due to this homophobic concept queers are always stigmatized and forced to stay inside the closet.

The protagonist in this novel doesn't internalize homophobia, and accepts the reality of his sexuality easily without any sense of guilt. He considers his queerness as normal, as others. He says, "... sex, I was learning, is a place where all of us go, regardless of gender or sexuality. No matter where we begin, it's just one big steamy locker room in the end" (78). Sexual pleasure as stated in psychoanalysis is not like to a specific activity like heterosexual genital relations, but to the satisfactions associated

with particular functions and bodily zones but this is not accepted in our society. People regard heterosexuality as the only right kind of sexuality, Therefore most of the homosexuals in general have self hatred because in their growth through adolescence to adulthood, they internalize the homophobia pressed upon them by the heterosexual world. They even are afraid to confess the reality about their sexuality and live the double life of closeted queer. There is an intuitional discrimination in the society and privilege of heterosexuality. Society enforces “Compulsory Heterosexuality,” as Adrienne Rich calls; “on young people through the medium of family, educational institutions, religions, medical professions, and all forms of media” (239). In contrast to this situation, Michael represents a strong confessor without a spot of internalized homophobia in his personality. He doesn't even feels uneasy in the hetero community but wants to cooperate with them. So are the other characters like Ben, Anna Madrigal, Brian, Shawana, etc. They don't confuse the difference of sexuality to the discriminations. We can see the straights that are homophobic and also the straights that really don't have this instinct. Likewise we see characters like Michael, Ben, Anna, Jake etc. who are not afraid to confess the reality about their sexuality and also other minor characters who live a life of closeted homo. Such closeted homos live a double lives: they live a life of heterosexual family style outwardly but, inside they also enjoy the homosexual activities. These people don't understand that like heterosexuality, homosexuality is just a natural possibility of human sexuality and the social construction of this binary is to discriminate the homosexual minorities. There are evidences of other closeted homos living a double life like Brian Hawkins, the one whom Michael meets in San Francisco. These characters are minor but they show the contemporary social reality where people are not ready to show their reality because society is not liberal to them. In this situation

Michael is presented as a hero never afraid of the society and courageous enough to accept his sexuality happily.

In this novel, we can also see the details of being affected by AIDS among homosexuals and queers in general. In other words this novel can be taken as an AIDS literature and the description of the consequences of this dreary disease in 1960s to late 20th century. During that time most of the AIDS stricken people died. They were the subject of hatred and stigmatization. The representative figure of the then era of American society, Michael suffers from AIDS. His most of the friends died but he survives throughout the novel. His acquaintance's Bruce's remark "You're supposed to be dead." (11) clearly describes the dreadful situation queers faced. He further says, "After thirty years in the city, it's nice to be reminded that I'm still glad to be here, still glad to belong to this sweet confederacy of survivors, where men meet in front of the hardware store and talk of love and death and circle jerks as if they're discussing the weather" (15). Queers have always become the subject of stigma and domination from the straight people so somehow queers have also internalized the fear of being stigmatized and domination because of their social circumstance. For instance in Castro street where Michael and other queers live, "the F-streetcar the one bearing the straight tourists from Fisherman's Wharf" (15) tries to open a new shop there and along with Michael other queers fear the situation to be dominated and stigmatized and responses, "they just can't do this, this is the center of our spirituality" (16). Due this very internalized fear Michael's friend who is also a queer, feels that the new shop will attract many straight people and they will also show their heterosexual attitude towards the queers who live there. But Michael becomes bold to face that situation. He readily accepts the existence of the straight people and says "My spirituality would survive"(16).

There are also the cruel details about the discriminations towards the queers in the American society in present novel. Just as Blacks in America were discriminated, queers have also become the subject of discrimination. This view can be clearly seen from the brief conversation between Lenore and Michael. As they converses:

“You know what I mean.”

I did know what she meant. She meant there were good homosexuals and bad homosexuals, and she would never think of me as a bad one . My parents, I remembered, had once categorized black folks in much the same way. They didn't disapprove of *all* Negroes. Just the uppity ones. The ones who insisted on *special rights*. (114)

This remark figures out the hypocrite nature of heterosexual people represented by Michael's family. They would consider good queers to those who would not raise their voice against the domination they face and who would go for their rights; they are the subject to severe criticism. Yet those who were considered to be good are also dominated by the same society for being a queer. He says, “The list of what we *couldn't* talk about grew larger all the time. Phony Florida elections. Secret American torture camps. “Intelligent design” (114). These are some of the hints of torture and discriminations against the homosexual people. So against this view Michael is presented as an activist for the equal rights of the queers as well. He seems to talk about the equality and rights of queer in American Society. He says, “I think of myself as an activist” (114). Michael possess a radical view of making amendments in constitutions for the rights of queers like him if necessary but the people in the decision making positions don't want to do so. He says, “A far-from-intelligent president who wanted to amend the Constitution to insure that wicked folks like Ben and me would never receive equal treatment under the law” (114). The president

avoiding the subject of amending the laws in favor of queers is a crucial detail of discrimination against homosexuals and these details are the are the examples of the problems and struggle of queers who were on the way to demand their rights. It shows that history was always cruel to changes, but the change is unavoidable and today we can see the consequences of this very change. In the novel Michael is positive towards change and very optimistic about the future. This portrays that he is enjoying his status, what he is and he is quite hopeful about the changing attitude of the people. Previously Michael's mother was against him but ultimately she accepts him and his husband. His mother's remark "You have been good company, Michael. You've been a good son. I want you to know that. Here and now" (246-247). This makes the novel realistic and more convincing to the readers and it too makes us aware about the reality which we must accept as queers are also the part of this society, human history, without which the society would never gain the wholeness. There are lots of details about the meaning of love, trust, friendship, kinship etc in the novel. Michael truly loves Ben and marries him. Ben also shows his true love and respect to his husband Michael. They find the meaning of life in the company of each other. Similarly Michael finds Anna his best friend and mother like figure. Jake, Brian, Patressee all are good friends to each other. Ultimately Michael's love for Ben wins Mama Tolliver's heart and her approval shows the change in attitude towards him. So these indications show that love and trust wins ultimately. Therefore this novel is about the love sentiments and feelings mixed with the queer sentiments which all affirm the humanitarian view.

In the novel there are lots of slang words being used which make the conversation between characters more natural and day to day language of the then American society. Words such as "the circle jerk" (12), "gay games" (12), "dick"

(13), “fuck-you-all” (15), “marble ass” (17), “world wide wankers” (17), “daddy hunters” (24), “fucking” (39), “Gay Man with AIDS” (41), “Vagina-free” (55), “queers” (59), “fag-hag” (59), “motherfucker” (136), etc which make the language quite informal, but it seems as if we hear the usual conversation between intimates. Similarly there are some new words from queer communities such as “MTFS” (85), “queersville” (83), “trannies” (28), “testosterone therapy’ (42), “closeted” (128), “LGBT” (298) which makes the reader curious about they are all about. Therefore this kind of vocabulary structure and language makes the plot more associated with queers and r their rebellion against heterosexual norms of the society.

To sum up, the novel besides being a queer (gay) novel by a gay writer, is equally famous among all types of readers. The celebration of own sexuality even being a homosexual creates a distinct image which ties all the readers in one form. This makes us realize that queer sentiment or homosexual sentiment in general, is not a different category but historically created as heterosexual. The feelings and sentiments presented in this novel make us aware that it is our own feelings, our own images, complains, expectations, distrusts and frustrations spoken by the characters. Queer sexuality and homosexuality in particular finds the full justification and celebration by the life of protagonist. Michael is the hero, famous among his circle. He accepts his sexuality and is accepted by his loved ones. The subject matter of the novel is 'queer' sexuality (gay, lesbian, transgender) and suitable in the contemporary time of America. It becomes successful to portray the feeling and sentiments of the sexual minorities living especially in America and in different areas of the world in general. Moreover, it disproves the falsely created myths about the queers and their sexuality and subverts the so called norms and rules about the familial ties. Thus, it is a remarkable work in the history of queer sexuality.

IV. Conclusion

The present research attempts to show the queer sensibility in the novel *Michael Tolliver Lives*, through its characters like Michael Tolliver, Ben, Anna Madrigal, Jake etc. Michael and Ben are the main characters of the novel. The way they lead their lives, their behaviour, their feelings, emotions about each other and their circle, their response towards the society, all are important factors which gain the major attention under the research. Why these queer characters couldn't fit themselves in the identity categories male/female, why their identity is not fixed is the central focus of the research. By taking help of some theoretical perspectives from theorists like Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Foucault, Steven Seidman contributed for the queer theory, the present dissertation attempts to answer the questions raised above. From the textual analysis it is seen that identity categories are simply societal construct due to which the characters couldn't fit themselves into fixed identity categories.

Michael Tolliver, the protagonist of the novel, deliberately exposes his sexuality to his family (mother and brother). Throughout the novel, he hardly regrets about his homosexuality and is not ready to negotiate about his sexuality even if his family in particular and society in general is against him. From the day he comes to

know about his homosexuality, he accepts it, lives with it and dares to tell it to his mother. He doesn't feel sorry about it and celebrates his life as perfect, his bond with his lover truer in comparison to the heterosexual couples like Irwin and Lenore, Mama Tolliver and Papa Tolliver and Mary Ann and Brian Hawkins. Michael enjoys and celebrates his conjugal life with Ben, where there is no confinement of sex and age.

Michael faces homophobia from his own mother. She is a heterosexual female and goes against the protagonist for his queerness i.e. homosexuality and his marriage with a male. Even in this situation Michael becomes fearless of being stigmatized and doesn't hide his sexuality. He stands with his reality in spite of the rejection of his family members and expectation of the heterosexual society. He subverts the norms of heterosexual marriage between male and female and gets married with a male. This act challenges and questions the so called heteronormative society. He accepts the existence of the other sexual minorities like lesbians, transgender, bisexuals etc that's why he accepts Anna Madrigal as his best friend and mother. He readily accepts the heterosexual reality as well as his queerness, that's why he always behaves politely to his brother Irwin and his sister in law Lenore. He understands the feelings of straights and non-straights and nowhere is he seen discriminating between them. He understands the problem of his brother Irwin, when he come to know about the betrayal of Lenore and consoles him and gives suggestion for not breaking up his marriage. Similarly he is not seen using any swear words against Lenore who screws up with his father and becomes the cause of tension in Tolliver family. Rather he always expects the homophobic people to be liberal towards queers like him. Similarly other queer figures like Anna Madrigal always shows her respect to Mama Tolliver, despite being stigmatized by her. Ben is also presented as a liberal character.

Michael accompanies Anna Madrigal even in the hospital in order to see her alive. He becomes a good husband to Ben, good son to his biological mother, good brother to Irwin and is proud of his queer logical family, which he thinks far well than the so called perfect heterosexual ones. These details in the plot describe not only Michael but all the queers to be good and it deconstructs the traditional myths that states queers in a negative way.

Michael and Ben, Jake, Anna Madrigal, all do not fit into the sexuality identity categories that the society has created. Michael finds himself unable to follow the norms of the heterosexual society which assumes that only heterosexuality is natural and other types of sexuality practices are deviant or unnatural. Though Michael's mother wants to save him from homosexuality, he refuses to have his sexuality corrected. He rather chooses to live or die in the world where his desires, his dreams remain intact.

The novel *replaces* the notion of fixed gender identity. As Judith Butler says, identity is a product of power not a means of overcoming it. Michael seems to be a rebellious character. Had he been stucked to a fixed identity, he would have never been able to resist the hegemony of heterosexuality imposed upon him. So the novel is a critique of identity and reveals that gender is performative production, act of compulsory heterosexuality.

Therefore the novel as a whole talks about the queer sensibilities and celebrates and accepts the existence of queers and non-queers. It raises the voice for equality from the side of the queers and their upliftment in the mainstream culture. And the characters like Michael, Ben, Anna Madrigal, Brian, Shawna all became quite successful to fulfill their part. Armistead Maupin, a gay writer himself, imagines a society, which removes all the rigidity of morality with no exclusions of gender and

sexuality and proposes a utopian society where no one is considered abnormal and deviant.

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