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Queer Sensibility in Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

Ms. Babina Sapkota has completed her thesis, “Queer Sensibility in Devdutt Pattanaik’s *The Pregnant King*” under my supervision. She has completed her research in April 2019. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Queer Sensibility in Devdutt Pattanaik’s *The Pregnant King*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Babina Sapkota, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

The present thesis entitled queer sensibility in Devdutt Pattanaik's 'The Pregnant King' presents the story of Yuvanashva, a childless king, who accidentally drinks the magic potion meant to make his queens pregnant. It is set in the backdrop of the Mahabharata and makes references to characters and incidents in the Kurukshetra. The irony of the whole story is that the king who is supposed to be the epitome of manhood and upholder of Dharma longs till his last breath to be called 'mother' just once by Mandhata (The child who is conceived in and delivered from his body). The conflict between desire and social obligation/destiny is a major theme in the book. It also speaks about questions around the idea of gender.

We have normally seen that women are fertile and they are meant to be pregnant and carry the babies but here we see completely a different thing which led us to think that is it possible? Can this happen in real world? Is mythical world making us fool by presenting such story? Here it is shown that a male king becomes pregnant by drinking magic potion and he carries the baby in his inner thigh and gives birth to a baby boy by some surgical operation and feed the milk too. A complete male body is doing all that which is impossible to think or even imagine in reality so I want to find out why our mythical world is so different how could it be possible? What were the gender roles of that time? Can really a male be pregnant? I want to solve these queries in my research paper? And I will be applying queer theory for interpreting the text. What happens if one desires to experience life regardless of his gender? Should a capable woman be denied the throne because of her sex? Could society accept a man, who willingly converts himself into a woman? What happen to men, who emotionally feel more like women? How does society respond to such deviations from the normal? Are they accepted, acknowledged or punished?

Key Words: Queer sensibility, dharma, desire, gender role, mythical world

Queer Sensibility in Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King*

Being brought up in a family strongly bound by Hindu values and morals, my affair with *Mahabharata* is a lengthy one. Right from childhood, my curiosity about this epic has made me read multiple versions of it from the simple yet colorful illustrations of Amar Chitra Katha to Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya*. I have always felt that no matter how many versions you read, there is always something new that you learn with every version. Myths are usually considered as fairy tales or beautifully narrated flights of imagination created by old people for their entertainment or consolation in the face of mysterious natural phenomena. Myths have a profound impact on human lives even as they are formed by, the way human beings live. Anthropological researches in modern times have awakened a new interest in the old myths. Myths have acquired significance as man's tragic vision of the universe has been intensified with the advancement of science and intellectualism, dethroning the old certainties of life. Modern literature is suffused with myths adding a new dimension to literature.

Pattanaik has tried to demonstrate Yuvanshava's predicament by sharing examples of many other mythological characters, who experienced both man and womanhood in their bodies. Many of these were part of *Mahabharata* and other popular folklore, such as Arjun, who was cursed to become a eunuch for a year, Nar and Narayana, who produced a nymph from their thighs, Ila-Ileshwara a God on full moon days and Goddess on new moon nights, Shikhandi, a man who was born woman and changes his gender on his wedding night, etc. All of them had experienced dual sexuality at some point of time in their lives. Myth and literature are taken analogous as they both are enmeshed in the socio-religious fabric of a community. Myths are considered as those platforms which give the narrator privilege to modify personal ideologies with a wider, acceptable frame of thought.

Devdutt Pattanaik's intriguing novel *The Pregnant King* is based on rich and complex Hindu mythology, in which the lines are often blurred between men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. Extracted from great Indian epic Mahabharata, the story revolves around Yuvanashva, the childless king who accidentally impregnates himself after drinking the potion made for his wives, and his mother Shilavati, who is born with the desire to rule. Throughout his fictional work the author emphasizes the enigmas and inversions of gender, highlighting the story of struggles of contradicting forces, rendering Yuvanashva, body of man and heart of woman bearing maternal instincts and Shilavati with a body of woman and heart of man bearing desire to rule. The present paper aims to accentuate the social and individual reaction when gender roles are topsy-turvy in the royal family of Vallabhi. Shilavati, the queen sidelines her role as a mother and wants to be on throne as a ruler controlling the kingdom and her son; on the other hand, Yuvanashva animated by his maternal instincts forgets to be a king and yearns to be called mother. Very competently Pattanaik makes the reader face to face with the fundamental conflicts of human psyche between what one wants to do and what one should do.

Human beings perceive the world in deuce of binary paradoxes like: good/bad, white/black, man/woman and so on. These binary components, especially in gender, are deemed natural but anything that strays on the loose lines are deemed unnatural and is dexterously obliterated. It is common to either deny the existence of such unnaturalness, but they appear repeatedly in different myths and stories. There are instances mentioned of men who became women, women who transformed to men, two men creating children without women, two women creating children without men, and of beings who are neither this nor that, but a bit of both suggesting long recognition with queer notions and attitudes. Queerness could be understood

necessarily through different cultural filters, yet these filters can sometimes choke voices.

The Pregnant King offers a unique re-telling of selective episodes of Mahabharata with a fictional tweak to produce a counter discourse to the heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality, which reduces human beings to mere social performers of the pre-defined set of rules and expectations. Pattanaik in author's note mentions, "The story of the pregnant king is recounted twice in the Mahabharata, once by the sage Lomasha during the exile of the Pandavas. And the second time by the poet Vyasa during the war with the Kauravas. This book is a deliberate distortion of tales in the epics. History has been folded, geography crumpled... my intention is not to recreate reality but to represent thought process." (Pattanaik, vi-vii) This paper argues how the dialogic voices within the novel bring forth a more subjective and fluid understanding of human bodies through its re-engagement with Mahabharata.

Through its various characters, the novel depicts how Manavas struggle all their lives negotiating between sex and gender, duty and desire, and personal and social truths. Pattanaik takes the readers on a mythological journey to reveal myriad possibilities of human forms, subjectivities, and imaginations; to show the "confining nature of words" (287); to remind that "the human way is not the only way in this world" (Pattanaik, 33); to reinstate that truth is polymorphous, "it all depends on one's point of view" (Pattanaik, 2008, p. 144); and to present a wisdom that must look beyond the flesh to understand human existence. The characters of Yuvanashva, Shikandi, Sumedha and Somavat(i), the unnamed prince, Nabhaka, Prasenjit, Uttara and Uttari, Nara and Narayana, Aruni, Ila, Arjuna and Krishna in the novel (and Mahabharata depicted in the novel) portray the fluid nature of human body and desire,

and demands wider perspective to accommodate multiple human subjectivities. Now let's talk about the writer in nutshell.

Devdutt Pattanaik (born on Dec 11, 1970) an Indian author and mythologist known for fictional work and interpretations of ancient Indian scriptures. He has incorporated Vedic knowledge into human resource management. He opines that “no society can exist without myth as it creates notions of right and wrong, good and bad, heaven and hell, rights and duties”. To him, mythology "tells people how they should see the world. Different people will have their own mythology, reframing old ones or creating new ones. For Devdutt Pattanaik, a medical doctor, marketing consultant and mythologist deeply interested in the relevance of old myths in modern times, this was an instantly intriguing story. Pattanaik has written several books on myths and rituals already, but *The Pregnant King* is his first work of fiction, a retelling of the Yuvanashva tale to examine gender roles, the blurring of lines between parental duties and the malleability of Dharma to fit a given situation. The result is a sporadically successful book that tells an engrossing, subversive story but meanders a little too much. After having coming out as homosexual, Devdutt has been frank about the LGBTQ revolution in India. Pattanaik commented on how, while he never had any issues with being gay, he was aware that other people in society hold prejudices and judgements against people who do not confirm to the norm. It was this knowledge that made him keep his sexuality hidden from the public, and that it was never because he felt guilty. He was always a proponent of free-thought and individualism, as made plain by his views on the criminalization of homosexuality in India. “The validation of law is an important element for removing prejudice from the minds of people, especially friends and family members.” He has written about the presence, and at several instances, the celebration, of the queer within the Indian mythos.

Elucidating those karmic faiths can be used to affirm the dignity of queer people, he speaks of how when one discovers love and appreciation for the world as it is, not the way one wants it to be, and one develops wisdom. While answering the question asked about gender and sexuality in a manner that goes against the conventional grain about LGBTQ as well as heteronormative communities he says that, “The right-wing manipulates Hindu mythology to show that Indian culture had no room for anything queer. In this, they mimic the Muslim and Christian fundamentalists. The left-wing manipulates Hindu mythology to show how *Ramayana* is patriarchal and Hindu gods are misogynists. This is very disturbing since both cloak their language as if presenting objective facts. So this had to be done. Pattanaik in one interview has expressed that,

As a gay person, this is my personal politics. No historian writes about LGBTQ history in India. Why? Did Gandhi and Ambedkar and Nehru and Savarkar support gay people they encountered or were they silenced or rendered invisible? Western writers make Indian queer people exotic by focusing only on highly feudal, marginalized, and exploitative groups. We don’t want to admit the homophobia embedded in the “Idea of India” or the constitution.”

This was the background of the writer which has direct impact on this text. While returning to the story, there is Pruthalashva, who must be father because he is a man, and Shilavati, who cannot be king because she is a woman. There is Sthunakarna, a Yaksha, who forsakes his manhood to make Shikhandi a husband and then reclaims it to make Somavat a wife. There is Arjun, a great warrior with many wives, who is forced to masquerade as a woman after being castrated by a nymph. There is Ileshwar Mahadev, god on full moon days and goddess of new moon nights and Adi-Natha, the teacher of teachers, worshipped as a hermit by Yaja and an

enchantress by Upayaja. And finally there is Yuvanashva, the hero, king of Vallabhi, who after marrying three times to three very different women, creates a life within him, as mothers do, and then a life outside him, as fathers do, and wonders if he is either, neither or both. If biology is destiny, if gender is a cornerstone of dharma, then how does Yuvanashva make room for such disruptions in order? For a good king, who wants to be great, must be fair to all those here, those there and all those in between. Now let's go with Queer theory.

Queer is often used as an umbrella term by and for persons who identify as gay, lesbian, and bisexual, intersex, or transgender, or by and for individuals who use the term as an alternative to LGBT labels. Some find the term derogatory depending upon their race, class, personal experience, and also their generation. Recently, heterosexuals whose gender or sexuality does not confirm to popular expectations have used the term "queer" to define themselves. Thus, queer theory is a framework of ideas that suggests identities are not stable or deterministic, particularly in regard to an individual's gender, sex, and/or sexuality. Queer theory is committed to critiquing and problematizing previous ways of theorizing identity. While heteronormativity assumes that heterosexuality and the relations of the binary masculine and feminine genders expected within it are secure and constant, queer theory is a discourse model that destabilizes the assumptions and privileges of secure heteronormative models of study and everyday life and politicizes and acknowledges the fluidity and instability of identities.

Queer theory is a part of the field of queer studies whose roots can be found in women's studies, feminist theory, and gay and lesbian studies, as well as postmodern and poststructuralist theories. In 1991, Teresa de Lauretis used the words "queer theory" to describe a way of thinking that did not use heterosexuality or binary

gender constructs as its starting point, but instead argued for a more fluid concept of identity. The works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler are often considered the founding texts of queer theory. Michael Foucault's work on sexuality said that it was a discursive production rather than an essential part of a human, which came from his larger idea of power not being repressive and negative as productive and generative. In other words, power acts to make sexuality seem like a hidden truth that must be dug out and be made specific.

Foucault refuses to accept that sexuality can be clearly defined, and instead focuses on the expansive production of sexuality within governments of power and knowledge. Another theorist Gayle Rubin in his essay "*Thinking Sex*" is often identified as one of the fundamental texts, and it continues Foucault's rejection of biological explanations of sexuality by thinking about the way that sexual identities as well as behaviors are hierarchically organized through systems of sexual classifications. She demonstrates in her essay the way that certain sexual expressions are made more valuable than others, and by doing that, allowing those who are outside of these parameters to be oppressed. Rubin also argued against the feminist belief that through gender, sexuality was obtained or the belief that gender and sexuality are the same. Rubin laying the groundwork to start discussion about making a distinction between gender and sexuality led the way for Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's pioneering book *Epistemology of the Closet*. In this book, she argues that the homo-hetero difference in the modern sexual definition is vitally disjointed for two reasons: that homosexuality is thought to be part of a minority group, and how homosexuality is gendered to be either masculine or feminine. She points out that the definitions of sexuality depend a lot on the gender of the romantic partner one makes, making the assumption that the gender one has and the gender of the person one is attracted to

make up the most important element of sexuality. Sedgwick's examples of sexual variations that cannot be put into the discrete locations created by the binary set between heterosexuality and homosexuality give room to further analyze the way sex-gender identities are shaped and thought about.

The another theorist most commonly identified with studying the prevailing understandings of gender and sex is Judith Butler, who draws much from Foucault's ideas but with a focus on gender. She argues in her book *Gender Trouble* that gender, like sexuality, is not an essential truth obtained from one's body but something that is acted out and portrayed as "reality". She argues that the strict belief that there is a "truth" of sex makes heterosexuality as the only proper outcome because of the coherent binary created of "feminine" and "masculine" and thus creating the only logical outcome of either being a "male" or "female." Butler makes the case that gender performativity could be a strategy of resistance with examples such as drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual nonrealistic depiction of butch and femme identities that poke fun at the laid out gender norms in society. In her later book, *Undoing Gender*, Butler makes it clear that performativity is not the same as performance. She explains that gender performativity is a repeated process that ultimately creates the subject as a subject. Butler's work brings to light the creation of gender contesting the rigidity of the hierarchical binaries that exist and is what makes her work invaluable in queer theory.

Analyzing with a queer perspective has the potential to undermine the base structure on which any identity relies on the theory has been understood to be just about questions of sexuality. This perception that queer theory is solely about sexuality has been opposed by having an intersectional approach that starts off with the hypothesis that sexuality cannot be disconnected from the other categories of

social status and identity. This allows queer theory to become interdisciplinary and thus create new ways of thinking in how sexuality shapes and is shaped by other factors.

As whole, queer theorists disagree about many things, but the one thing they do not disagree on is that if queer theory is to be understood as a way to test the established and stable categories of identity, then it should not be defined too early because of the possibility of it becoming too limited. Queer theorists believe that the human body may not be essentially male or female. C'mon, bodies are weird, and when you take a step back from all the cultural trappings of gender, bodies can be hard to categorize on a purely empirical basis. One definition of "queer" is someone who moves *between* the identities defined by patriarchy and essentialist categories of femininity someone who always questions who gets to define what the facts are in any argument.

Numerous critics have made a significant contribution to the novel in different perspectives. This novel is seen from queer theory. A reader called Namrata Sharma in medium.com (an international online publishing platform) has responded:

I was not surprised by the possibility of a King giving birth; but was definitely curious to explore the different shades of such a possibility. Pattanaik has developed this story as a novel originating from a passing tale in Mahabharata. In this book, Pattanaik also explores the social and political landscape of that time and how important it was for the kings and queens to abide by the dharma, the law of the land which guides individuals' behaviors in society. This rigidity created a dilemma about how to express and acknowledge the truth that contradicts dharma. (1)

Along with dharma, another intriguing aspect he has explored in the book is sexuality.

He presents sex in an objective way, limiting the act of making love to bodily attractions. His characters do not use sex to express their love or emotions; for them it is more a requisite to continue their lineage. But more than this, Pattanaik explores a rather difficult emotion connected to sexuality a person's discomfort in accepting gender based restrictions imposed by the society.

Moreover, Neha Banerjee in her blog 'storywala' says that:

The book is a fictional sketch of our mythological characters. They are humans bound by dilemmas of social vs. personal needs, evil vs. good, man vs. woman, mother vs. father, stages of life, desire vs. death, stability vs. momentum, death & afterlife, heaven vs. hell, Brahmin vs. Kshatriya. Devdutt has a knack of creating a vibrant story with all curves & twists of an engaging plot. The idea of a book though based in ancient century is as fresh as today, the question of sexual identity, the burdens of bearing children especially male heirs for men & women, the questions of virility, and social barriers.

By mentioning all those characters, the novel clearly depicts how Manavas struggle all their lives negotiating between sex and gender, duty and desire, and personal and social truths. The writer has tried to demonstrate Yuvanshava's predicament by sharing examples of many other mythological characters, who experienced both man and womanhood in their bodies.

Similarly, Krupa Joseph in his blog 'Gaysifamily' writes that:

The Pregnant King is story of men and women who are oppressed by a society founded on an unbending code of ethics, something that is extremely relevant even today. He uses several characters who do not find into the binary mold of gender to prove his point.' The book very aptly points out that gender and sexuality are non-binary, something which people seem to constantly forget. It

makes us question certain rules that the society seems to have set for us, and we seem to accept without questions. (1)

Here krupa claims that we shouldn't necessarily follow all the codes of dharma or all the man-made laws which sometimes goes against personal/ human will. If we always go on following the societal norms and values so blindly we may forget our own existence, so we should maintain the balance between personal will and social will.

Srinivas in his blog 'booksreviewwala' raises some important questions about this book which are as follows:

What is more euphoric – being called as a mother or as a father or as both?

What is meant to be a man or a woman? What is more difficult - being a man or being a woman? Can a man have a heart of woman and a body of a man?

Can a woman have a heart of a man and a body of a woman? Is sexual identity so necessary to be considered as a person in a society? Are we ready to accept the truth that a male can show womanhood and a female can show manhood?

What is truth? Why can't people accept truth? What is poisonous truth or our inability to handle the truth? (2)

It is Pattanaik who uses the tool of complementary subplots to the primary one about King Yuvanashva to strengthen this notion of the shared experiences of embodiment. The ancestral history of gender fluidity has already been referred to. To Yuvanashva's incessant worry "Has there ever been a man such as me?" (214), the bards bring to him the stories of Urvashi, with two male parents, Aruni, who could transform into a woman and was forced into mothering the King of Gods, Indra and Sun-God Surya's child and the priestess of Bahugami, whose "flesh is that of a man and but hearts are that of a woman" (214). Then, the legendary warrior Arjun, of ideal masculinity, who leaved as a eunuch for a year, recounts his tale, along with that of

Krishna, who was a bride for a night and a widow for eternity to the sacrificial Iravan, which also works as a support system to Yuvanashava. There is also Shikhandi, brought up as a male in spite of a female body, to please the father and who acquired male genitalia for the sake of his wife. Finally, Yuvanashva acknowledges them who he had once as the king declaimed as ‘unnatural’ and had them burnt to death, as it posed a challenge to his ‘dharma’: Somvat (i), the man who became a woman and Sumedha, her husband reveals their truth about invoking the trans-condition in the King’s body to make him “part of” their “truth” (323) about their bodies. The turn of phrase, the narratological implications and the communicability to the reader in these narratives, which deal with the free-play of gender boundaries, are all very emphatically accommodated in the comprehension of physicality that forms the basis of shared memories, experiences and anticipations.

The “body” as the space of the dissociation between the socially imposed and the individually aspired is also explored through the tale of Somvat(i) whose tribulation begin at the ceremony of cow-giving to Brahmana couples; there he was merely posing as a woman, the wife of Sumedha. The author avoids clarifying the motive (the king’s wrath or the desire to be Sumedha’s wife though dwelling upon both) behind Somvat (i)’s complete forsaking of manhood. Later, as King Yuvanshava questions Somvat (i)’s “aberrant womanhood” and orders him to live as a man, Somvat (i) denies the same, having “the body of a woman” and the capacity to “feel like a woman” (158) and the trans-woman and her husband proclaim “not to live a lie because it is convenient to your dharma” (158-160). The performative capacity of the gender is either fueled by or repelled through the somatic comprehension of sexuality. Sentenced to death by Yuvanashva, they are later enshrined by the king as he begins to understand the turmoil of the flesh and the heart. Later, when

Yuvanshava feels the need to be Mandhata's mother and not his father, the narrative refers to not only performative capacity of gender but the recognizing of the bodily connection with the child which is different for a father and a mother.

The king who has lived his whole life by the code of Dharma now finds himself in a dilemma. "I am not sure that I am a man...I have created life outside me as men do. But I have also created life inside me, as women do. What does that make me? Will a body such as mine fetter or free me?" (185)

The situation addresses performativity in the sense that motherhood is attributed to the woman who bears the child; the biological acts do not bear any actual connection to the psychosocial concept. Yuvanashva as a man who wants to be a mother and on one occasion also dresses up as a woman reveals the performative capacity of gender. On the other hand, as a person who gave birth and nursed a child, Yuvanashava is urged by these somatic capacities to choose one gendered role over the other and prefers motherhood to fatherhood of that child.

The above specific references to the modes of inscribing the 'body' as a mode of trespassing gender boundaries is not always in tandem with the queer discourses or the modes of trespassing gender boundaries, therein, which leads towards the possibility of an alternative comprehension of queer.

The effect of this bodily pronouncement of gendered realities through the narratives is that it becomes possible to interrogate the appeal to negation and the constant pertinence of resistance and disruption as the sole means of characterizing the theoretical discourses on queer. These narratives that pertain to queer or gender fluidity are, however, not used as a means to disavow the resistive conceptualization of the queer. Instead, the study seeks to explore gender destabilizations in other capacities, here, specifically about how bodily experiences respond to the gender

boundaries. The narratives as ‘new’ actors in the popular consciousness trying to keep pace with the proliferating effects of globalized uniformity, articulate negativity as only situational among other comprehensive elements of gender destabilization like the somatic urges and practices. The comparative juxtaposition of the narratives also helped explore the pressing need to challenge gender system and the ominous gender binaries, which try to categorize bodies into diseased. However, the narratives also put forth the idea the bodily comprehension of the self, on the other hand, often pertain to a gendered reality of choice which does not put the individual but the society at dis-ease.

In that sense, the gender boundaries are made functional not based on social expectations of the individual but the self’s expectations as an individual and in a society. The narratives, therefore, do not follow the strategies of denaturalizing the gender boundaries but attributes to the same a sense of choice and changeability. The queer in the narratives, is therefore, more than ‘defiance’ to the ‘normal’. Rather than resistance, here, the queer-self-body comprehension, through the narratives, depends upon the modes of interaction and appropriation as also subsequent fulfillment of desire. An alternative queer that derives not from the newer binary of resistance and normalcy but that understands resistance as situational and subsequent to corporeal and other quotidian realities can be anticipated, especially based on three tropes of writing the body explored above. Pattanaik in his interview express his views on queer theory saying that:

The book wonders why Queer tales exist in Hindu lore. What does it say about the Hindu understanding of the world? I was convinced that while the Hindu worldview accepts Queer behavior, be it cross dressing or homosexual intercourse, as perfectly natural, it leaves its social acceptance or rejection to

culture, which is an artificial dynamic artificial construct. Societies, depending on their requirements, may choose to condemn, condone, or celebrate sexual and gender plurality. Rejection or acceptance of society does not render any sexual or gender expression invalid in the cosmos. In the Hindu world, everything is a manifestation of the divine. Everything. (Pattanaik, 1)

According to Devdutt, while social expression and acceptance of romantic/sexual desires/feelings matter, more important for every individual, gay or straight, is to appreciate the meaning behind the madness of emotions and thoughts. Why am I the way I am? Why is the world the way it is? Why do I need love, approval, and acknowledgement? What can be changed myself, the world or the objects of my affection? And why should anything change? These answers will take us away from the need to dominate and actualize in the external world, to a more private and inner world of self-realization, self-containment and eventually, contentment. Which according to ancient Hindu seers is the ultimate purpose of life.

The first part of the book is a critical discussion on queer behavior across the world. “The celebration of queer ideas in Hindu stories, symbols and rituals is in stark contrast to the ignorance and rigidity that we see in Indian society,” Pattanaik states. He talks about how much of the discomfort that surrounds sexual activity and homosexuality came up as a result of “valorization of celibacy and the rise of monastic orders in all cultures.” He also places the credit of sparking the debate for equality on Marx who spoke in favor of a classless society. An important point that he makes is that the soul has no gender, and he uses this point to explain that feminism has its roots in Hinduism. He explains that gender comes from the flesh and it is the unenlightened who value flesh over the soul. It is only an unenlightened who is capable of valuing “male flesh over the female flesh, the young flesh over the old

flesh, flesh encased in fair skin rather than dark skin, the property owned by that flesh, the family to which that flesh belongs, the stature of that flesh in society.” The enlightened, on the other hand, see the body merely as a vessel for the soul and give equal importance to both.

This present thesis is based on personal interest, library and internet research. During the completion of my thesis I came to the university met my respected professors visited library and read or consulted various other stuffs by devdutt pattanaik I also read sikhandi and other queer tales which were completely related with my research topic and I went via internet where I went through so many interviews and writings of pattanaik and I also went the reviewers and their opinion on pattanaik’s book. While talking about the people involved in my research procedure I talked with my grandpa who is so much familiar with this myth Mahabharata and the characters of this he helped me in telling the story of yuvasva and the case of this story and my fiends too helped me in the discussion of this topic at first they were completely shocked by seeing a man became pregnant and they too had raised the same queries like me and then we discussed on the possible reasons. And I consulted with other scholars of Mahabharata and the writer himself via email, most of the people whom I talked with were not the supporter of myth the said that it’s just like an allusion nothing is real in myth but these days it’s almost proven that Mahabharata is a history which actually existed not a myth that’s why the things happened with the characters are also real it’s complete a hind history in which we are deeply connected. While going back to the text,

The author stresses upon the importance of the social norms that are to be followed for a well-balanced society and the price we have to pay many a times in the due course. He has depicted the constant turmoil one faces between the heart and the

mind, the fundamental conflict between what one desires and what is duty-bound to be done, and the compromise one has to make to do what is so called "right". He puts light on the Varna dharma system of Hinduism. The inequality between men and women is classically portrayed by the fact that Shilavati being the perfect ruler cannot become a King just because she is a female. The author finally talks about how neither is the man or the woman more superior and there is both Shiva and Shakti in everyone. Throughout the book, the author has exhibited and debated the concept of Dharma, gender roles in the society and the thin line between parental duties and kingship.

Yuvanashva submits to his dharma and accepts his duty as a king over his motherly affections for Mandhata. Yuvanashva was forced to live a dual life, one as he knew himself (a man who is a mother), and other as the world knew him (as a son, husband, king, a man). His mother, wives, friends, no one ever accepted him for his present reality. He had to sacrifice his personal self for the collective purpose of kingdom, to maintain the order of dharma. Even Mandhata did not accept Yuvanashva as his mother. This truth was too bitter and complicated for Mandhata to accept, as it would make him also an aberration, a boy born out of a man! He refuses to acknowledge such a truth, as for him "social truths matter over personal truths." (Pattanaik, 293) Throughout, Yuvanashva is incessantly tormented to know the truth of his body, to validate his personal experience, and to disprove the social knowledge as the final truth. All his life, he "yearned for accommodation and validation" asking "When my son Mandhata will accept that I am his mother. When will my family accept the truth of my life? When will Vallabhi stop laughing? (Pattanaik, 341)

The centrality of this narrative also refers to gender as more than surface reality. Rather, the choice of gendered reality is sustained through the somatic

experiences. The narrative tension is created through how the bodies are made incumbent to the self through the social injunctions about gender. In resolving this tension, the narratives pertain to how the bodies become necessary as means and site of self-comprehension that appropriates gender categories to create idiosyncratic gender realities. Thus, the juxtaposed readings of the narratives contribute to specifically three positions pertaining to the supposed conflict between performativity and embodiment. Firstly, there need not be a conflict with gender being an assumed interiority, produced through stylizations and repetitions of gestures and the psychosomatic urges of choosing one mode of gestures over another.

Annemarie Jagose writes that 'performativity' (in Butler's sense) is misunderstood as being presence and therefore "less real than some underlying gender truth" (88). It can, thus, be added that the possibility of some "underlying gender truth" only propels an individual towards one mode of producing gender over another and need not delegitimize the reified nature of gender. Instead, it often entails a performativity that pertains to a sense of intermingling of conformity and choices. Secondly, and this follows from the first, that the sensitization to performativity of gender renders the possibility of being queer not merely through the subversion to the heteronormative modes of existences, but also by appropriating and modifying the same. When all the characters as described above, in one way or the other resist the gender assigned at birth, they are also choosing to produce either the other gender or an intermingling of both. In fact, the resistance is subsequent to this new, self-chosen articulation of sexuality. Finally, queer performativity may in terms of theory be associated with "shame" and "stigma", but the narratives pertain to a content-related parallelism with the necessities of existence, certain senses of attachment and responsibilities which cannot be disassociated from gendered realities.

That's unnatural. Some would call it a miracle. Careful of the word unnatural. It reeks of arrogance. You are assuming you know the boundaries of nature. You don't. There is more to life than your eyes can see. More than you can ever imagine. Nature comes from the mind of God. It is infinite. (190)

The king who has lived his whole life by the code of Dharma now finds himself in a dilemma. "I am not sure that I am a man. I have created life outside me as men do. But I have also created life inside me, as women do.

What does that make me? Will a body such as mine fetter or free me?" (197)

The same king who sentenced Somvati to death because of her initial gender was ironically reveling in his pregnancy. Soon he gives birth to a baby boy, Mandhata. Previous to Mandhata's birth, the king's family was trying to keep the news of his pregnancy from the world, but it was the king that they tried to keep away after the birth. Yuvanashva was overwhelmed by strong maternal feelings, something which he couldn't comprehend yet avoid either. "I feel strangely content and fulfilled. I feel happy. I feel like crying. I cannot explain it. I feel a strange feeling in my heart. A longing, a yearning". (201)

He felt every single heartbeat, every wail of the child who was forcefully kept away from him. He endured the same pain a mother goes through when separated from her child, and the child too wailed constantly for its 'mother'. Adding more to the royal family's pile of worries, Yuvanashva began displaying several biological changes as well. "What is this? He asked. He wiped his chest with his hand and smelt the fluid. 'It smells like milk, it is milk. Asanga what is happening? Why is my body producing milk?'" (203)

In spite of this strangeness he was suffering from, Mandhata's hungry cry was enough to drive away all the fear of his strangeness. Ignoring the mocking stares and

comments from the servants, he demanded to be taken to son and to feed him. All too soon he was forced to part from Mandhata to keep up the royal facade. Yuvanashva was still confused as of what he should do; the irresistible lust for power was on one side while the irresistible love and yearning for his son stood on the other.

Yuvanashva had another son with his wife Pulomi, but the son he created outside his body never felt as special to him as the one created inside him. He desired to display all his 'maternal' feelings for Mandhata, but the young prince was strictly cocooned from the truth by other members of the family. Yuvanashva began gathering more knowledge about his condition, or this bizarre existence. Bards narrated the stories of Krishna who lived as a wife and Arjuna who lived as a woman, but nothing satisfied him for he wanted to know the reason behind the euphoria of being called a mother. No one could answer him because nobody in existence was known to have experienced both. And those who knew decided to forsake it, for it was a more convenient option. The societal codes of behavior kept Yuvanashva from caring for his child as it was, according to them, a woman's job. The alternate was an unthinkable option, even in the modern world where gender based discrimination still rules high. His arduous desire to be called mother by his son was heavily rebuked by his family, who scoffed his newfound weakness a resultant of 'motherhood'.

"If it is a child, as you say it is, and then what will Yuvnashva be after he gives birth to it, that is if he survives the childbirth? A woman? A half-woman? What? Who will accept such a man as a king? Everybody will consider it as a monster."(195)

They threw on to his face, his duty, his position as the king, which will topple off with his decision. "Motherhood is a disease when it springs in a man's body, like kingship is in a woman's."(196) in one hand, everyone used to stare him like bizarre and with queer and on the other hand, he was so afraid to tell his son Mandhata ,the

reality of his birth But when Mandhata rejects the marriage proposal of Shikhandi's daughter Amba because of Shikhandi's gender, Yuvanashva decides to intervene and disclose his own truth to his son. Though he feared that Mandhata would reject him as a mother, he decided that it was better to face his fate rather than be befuddled by it. To his dismay, Mandhata refused to accept Yuvanashva as his mother, for a son always has to follow his father's path, and in that way, Mandhata will be refused his right to rule. He shoved aside his Yuvanashva's pleas to address him 'mother' at least once. Mandhata chose the social truth, which proclaimed that he was the first queen's son than an aberration. His selfishness stood as a contrast to the girl whom he rejected to be born of a woman. At least Amba proudly acknowledged Shikhandi to be a man, the existence which he chose. Though everything was revealed, Yuvanashva never felt more gagged about his abnormal existence than then. He couldn't continue to suffer through his inner struggles and still go through the facade for nothing. He decides to renounce the kingdom and the worldly life. But the unanswered questions of his existence haunted him and he sets out on a quest to find out the meaning of his existence.

In the forest where there are no rules of codes of dharma, Yuvanashva was free to accept his identity as Mandhata's mother. In the forest all that mattered was whether he was a predator or prey. Through his encounters with many learned people, he finally understood that the wrappings of flesh did not matter. Only the physical body had gender, the soul was genderless and thus was free from all the humane complications. The learned worshipped him, the greatest riddle of the world. He reminded the world that what is impossible for a man's mind to comprehend is also possible. They worshipped him as the Neelkantha Bhairavi, for like Shiva, in him embedded a truth that threatens the societal sense of order. And like Bhairavi, his

existence terrifies them with the infinite possibilities of the world. Yuvanashva was finally able to come into terms with his condition. He was the father to Jayanta, the son whom he created outside his body; also he was the mother of Mandhata, the son whom he carried within his body. He strived his entire life to fit into a particular identity, more clearly, a particular gender, never understanding that the world is never as we perceive it to be. Yuvanashva's search for the truth of self-reached its final stage when he met Agnirasa, who offered to worship him as Nilakhantha Bhairavi. They tell him,

You are the pregnant king. The greatest of the sixty-four Yoginis. You confound us. You confuse us. You remind us that what is impossible in the mind of man is possible in the mind of God. You terrify us with the infinite possibilities of the world. Tell us there is always something that we do not know. You demand that we widen our vision and our vocabulary, so that we make room for all, and are frightened of nothing.” (343)

Becoming Yuvaneshwar, the pregnant king realizes, “I am both. I am the terrifying embodiment of society's unspoken truth. I am also yet another of nature's delightful surprises. I am the soul. I am also the flesh. This is who I am.” (343)

The academic grappling with 'gender' as a notional entity rather than an extension of physical reality has led to the exploration of masculinities and femininities as social decisions. Judith Butler's celebration of gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 33) has proved to be a seminal concept to anthropology, social sciences, gender studies alike. The idea that “bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self”

(Butler 519) has provided a huge impetus to the growth of Queer Theories.

Some of the influential texts on Queer Theories have successfully deconstructed 'normalcy' as preordained and construed being queer as the "messiness of identity, the fact that desire and thus desiring subjects cannot be placed into discrete identity categories, which remain static for the duration of people's lives marking a misidentification from the rigidity with which identity categories continue to be enforced and from beliefs that such categories are immovable" and hence "to designate a political persuasion, which aggressively challenges hegemonies, exclusions, norms and assumptions (Giffney 2-3). Others like Michael Warner (1994) David Haperlin (1995), and Annamarie Jagose (1996) have persisted on queer as "refusing to crystallize in any specific form" and hence "maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal" (99). Therefore, the conceptualization of 'body' has been solely in terms of social injunctions determining bodily practices and being Queer through acts of subversion to these social injunctions.

The story largely seems obsessed with the definition of gender, man? Or women? Does the flesh matter? What about the soul? It also talks about marriage and child birth. There are multiple references to bulls, fields, soil and seeds as euphemisms for sex and conception, and to illuminate the vexing question of "ownership" that arises when a woman is made pregnant by someone other than her husband. And then there are those troublesome dead ancestors, the "pitrs", waiting for the arrival of a child so they can be reborn in the land of the living. Taking the form of crows, they perch outside bedchambers, waiting for quick results, flapping their wings impatiently when foreplay goes on for too long. ("Does it not bother you that your son's seed is weak?" one of them indelicately asks Shilavati.)

This study not so much disavows the conceptualization of queer as

destabilizing gender boundaries, as tries to juxtapose the theoretical development with every-day and affective issues and find alternative means of trespassing gender boundaries. This leads to contesting and also expanding the scope of the queer. Mostly, the necessity to explore the agency of transsexuals and intersexed, here specifically, corporeal, is enabled; instead of using conditions of cross-gendering or miss-gendering to validate certain theoretical positions. The comprehension of physicality as distinctive from the requisite of negation in theorizing 'queer' will also contribute towards a certain trend of critical thinking that seeks to move away from the binary understanding of consolidation and deconstruction, in this case, of sexual identities. Instead of focusing on the binaries of 'toleration/acceptance' and 'resistance and the lack of it', the possibilities of 'manipulation' and 'appropriation' and 'modification' as applicable in the processes of existences are also opened up as newer avenues of research.

Thus, Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King* problematizes the essentialized notions of human body and desire and unsettles the socio-culturally constructed truths (myths) about human existence. It addresses the current debates on gender and sexuality in queer studies and other disciplines, and asserts, "There is a world beyond the flesh, a vision greater than anything that is shown and seen." *The Pregnant King* takes its readers through a journey of realism and contemporary ideologies that haunts the mankind, not just in the present, when the world tends to forget that these 'unnatural' existences, as they tag them existed even in the time of Gods. Such Instances have been tolerated only in meager regions in historic tales, and the queer plots and subplots portray a kind of repression of choices that reflects the differences in nature and culture. Beyond the sexual politics, time-honored metaphysical metaphors and allegories, the tales retain a mythical yet relevant notion that though

they are socially inappropriate, nothing is unnatural.

At the end of the novel the main character called Yuvanashva goes to the forest where he finds himself free from all the gender and sexual boundaries he can be the way he wants, he can celebrate his queerness, his uniqueness. He realizes that our soul has no gender. Gender roles were so strict at that time; people were extremely guided by dharma there is shown that how greater price a person had to pay for maintaining the balance in the society. After the completion of this thesis I happened to realize that we should respect every people who are beyond the heterosexual normativity. In the process of conducting my thesis I have found so many issues which can be researched on and which I couldn't include in my research such as, archetypal myth, power of symbols in Hindu rituals, subversion of gender and so on. So I want upcoming researchers to work on these issues so that our Hindu myth will flourish more and will be accessible among the new generation.

In conclusion Dr. Pattanaik has shown the queerness in his novel to challenge the gender boundaries and to take the limitation of sexuality to the broad level as he himself is a gay he has internalized the feeling of being someone queer he has placed himself in the re-presentation of queerness. By portraying the character like Yuvanashva he has shown the inner state of queer people that they are always forced to accept the laws imposed by the society. This approach of Pattanaik highlights the need for acceptance. Human desires shall never be buried under socially invented laws. Finally, queer performativity may in terms of theory be associated with "shame" and "stigma", but the narratives pertain to a content-related parallelism with the necessities of existence, certain senses of attachment and responsibilities which cannot be disassociated from gendered realities.

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