

## **Sexuality as Stigma in Ira Trivedi's *The Great Indian Love Story***

### **Abstract**

This research is in Ira Trivedi's *The Great Indian Love Story*, from the perspective of stigma and sexuality in the lives of characters like Riya, Serena and Permeet. The main purpose of this study is to reveal the way the characters shatter Indian social norms and values. Indian social orthodoxy strictly disapproves of western way of life. Ira Trivedi accepting western open inspirations in her fictional world, exposes the end of stigma.

The sexuality is taken as a stigma and obscene aspect. So, the people involved in sexuality are socially marginalized and that very marginalization deprives them from the life of dignity and bond. The social biased attitudes lead them to the social marginalization. That's why the social stigmatizing tendency is more than the physical weakness for them because stigma represents a view of life, a set of personal and social constructs, a set of social relations and social relationships, a form of social reality. The society always constructs such stigmas, which help to define the bodies but this very definition is always discriminating. So the stigma is a social issue too. Women with involvement in sexual activities are often treated as if their particular act has affected all their other abilities too, which they can easily perform. The society makes certain kinds of stereotypes regarding those women. Those stereotypical images turn out to be the cultural images. Many of them are deprived of their self-determination, become victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse in institution and workplace. They are denied of family life too. The experience of exclusion, rejection, and alienation that is associated with being different and devalued in society and almost everyone has avoided, excluded and rejected people who are denigrated by members of society. A stigmatizing tendency of the society turns out to be cultural

matter. That's why Ira Trivedi's novel *The Great Indian Love Story* presents such numerous cases of sexual stigma as these are social and cultural constructs.

This research project tries to excavate the social practices which stigmatize sexuality and make it as a matter scandal. Consequently the sexually stigmatized person is marginalized and made alienated. Almost everyone has experienced the exclusion, rejection, and alienation that is associated with being different and devalued in society and almost everyone has avoided, excluded and rejected people who are denigrated by members of society. A stigma in simple terms is a characteristic that makes an individual different and less desirable. Specifically, a stigma can refer to a physical characteristic, group membership, or deviant behavior that serves to disqualify the stigmatized person from membership within groups or even full membership in society. Sometimes sexuality is also taken as a means to stigmatization. Most importantly, the stigma "prevents the individual from having typical social interactions in that those with stigma tend to have disrupted and awkward social relations" (Goffman, 63). In fact, individuals with stigma are often avoided during social interactions and experience greater social distance from others, resulting in feelings of isolation. Stigma is communicated by markers that can be discerned by interactants. During social interactions "especially those involving persons not familiar with each other, the actors use markers that signal the possession of particular attributes (Berger,86). Sexuality is one of the markers to stigmatize an individual. Sexuality is made a discourse to stigmatize the person involved in it. The renowned novel of Ira Trivedi, *The Great Indian Love Story* presents such numerous examples of sexual stigmas in the Indian societies.

Stigma of sexuality is circulated by the power structures of the society. According to Foucault, one of the first, albeit unsuccessful, attempts to liberate

humanity from sexual oppression came from Freud and his introduction of psychoanalysis. However, this liberation was an illusory one because it was “medicalized” and therefore implicitly accepting of the repressive order through relegating the subject of sexuality to a safe discourse--sanitized science. This relegation failed to address the “fundamental link” between power, knowledge, and sexuality. Truth, Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality* suggests, is inextricably tied to politics, and Freud fails to address this in his scientific analysis of sexuality. In Foucault’s words, “the least glimmer of truth is conditioned by politics” (23). Foucault moves quickly to politics by linking the repression of sexuality to capitalism, calling this repression an integral part of capitalism which is asserting its ugly head at the time of the rise of Victorianism. Exploited workers can’t be allowed to have pleasure except in the service of reproduction.

One possible source for the link of sex and power via repression might be the “speaker’s benefit” provided. This is because speaking about the prohibited, i.e., unacceptable sexuality, is a disruption of the established order and challenging the power implied by the repression. An implicit support for the established, repressive order comes from those wishing to have a voice of opposition within it. But Foucault discounts this idea. Instead, he suggests that a discourse on sexuality linked to power via repression is characterized by truth revelation, overturning of global laws, the proclamation of a new day, and a promise of felicity.

Stigma and negative stereotypes are extremely similar with regard to the social construction of the mark and the social recognition of the mark signifying membership in a particular social category. In addition, stigma and stereotypes can both lead to prejudice and discrimination as social consequences. Nevertheless, what stigma and stereotypes have in common does not make the concepts interchangeable.

Stigma refers to a characteristic, or attribute, that makes an individual different and less desirable, whereas a stereotype is a description of a social group that is constructed through faulty and overly rigid beliefs about the group members (Heatherton et al. 2000). In other words, stigma can be understood as the mark that links an individual to undesirable attributes and in many cases stereotypes. The processes of stigmatization and stereotyping are separate although they are also related. The eastern societies take glamorous lives of people with negative markers. Casting the light on the same issue Deepti Kaur discusses about the novel *The Great Indian Love Story* as she says;

Ira's new tone too brings forth the dark side of glamour. The Great Indian Love Story talks about the lavish parties, coke mafia, sexed-up dolls and raunchy extra marital affairs. It also talks about how youngsters fall prey to the glittering web and lose themselves in the world of drug and sex and finally use up their lives. (3)

According to Deepti Kaur, the Indian glamorous life is just a pretendable life and that very life is taken as the stigma when sexuality is attached with it. The life of the glamour is made scandalous and that very scandal is tagged with stigma. In his classic examination of the concept, Goffman developed a definition of stigma that laid the foundation for understanding its effects. He defined stigma as "being a mark or sign that disqualifies individuals from full acceptance of and participation in society" (3). Upon the groundwork laid by Goffman, Jones et al. adopted the view of stigma as a mark that links a person to characteristics that are culturally devalued. Goffman originally classified stigma into three types: abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, and tribal identities. Using this foundation, Jones et al. expanded the classification system to include the categories of conceal ability; course of the

mark, disruptiveness, aesthetics, origin of the mark, and peril. More recent researchers, such as Fife and Wright and Link and Phelan have continued to categorize aspects of stigma in an effort to understand and ultimately address the negative outcomes associated with it.

Categorizing the types of stigma is an important method to help understand its mechanisms and consequences. However, other facets of stigma, such as historical context, social organizations based on power and statuses, and concealability also shape our understanding of the concept. Although stigma is as old as discernable differences, a characteristic that is stigmatizing at one moment in history may not be stigmatizing in another. The visual cue alerting the participants of social interaction to the stigma determines the initial reaction to the person bearing the stigmatized attribute. Those individuals who have visible stigmas are "unable to hide their attributes; this is important because the stigma provides the first characteristic upon which others base their assumptions and expectations about the individual" (Goffman 19). In other words, people who have visible stigma are already "discredited and devalued even before the social interaction has begun" (ibid). In contrast, individuals with concealable stigma, such as religion or sexual orientation, are able to interact with others without the negative association of stigma tainting the expectations and fluidity of the social interaction. Nevertheless, people who possess concealable stigma are cognizant of the fact that the stigmatized characteristic they possess would result in their being stigmatized if it is ever discovered. Those individuals are what Goffman termed as discreditable, as they are in danger of being devalued if their stigma is known. Which groups are stigmatized often depends upon the function that stigmatization serves for the dominant group. Stigma can serve to enhance one's self-esteem through downward comparison e.g. by comparing oneself to those who are

less fortunate, one can increase one's own self-esteem, enhancing self-esteem by intergroup comparisons that favor the non-stigmatized group member. Stigma can also arouse "anxiety and feelings of threat, which may motivate one to reinforce one's world view and cultural norms, and serve to rationalize the status quo within society" (Crocker & Major, 98). Another key aspect of such kind of stigma is attached with morality. The loss of morality is a matter of stigma in the eastern societies.

The stigmatized individuals feel dejected and regretted for being the marginalized. An important criterion of stigma is that meanings about the characteristic must be shared among the members of a particular group. That's why the people feel themselves regretted for doing the act. The same kind of regret is seen in the protagonist of the novel when she talks about her sex with another male counterpart as she says:

One afternoon Sukdev and I had sex. It was inevitable. The attraction had been building up for a while and I knew I could not wait any longer. So I chose a day when SP was away on a business trip. I dismissed the servants and then invited Sukdev over. It was wonderful. He was a strong, passionate lover and he kept telling me how beautiful I was. He said he loved my smooth skin and that I was amazing in bed, unlike his previous girlfriends who would cry out in pain and then kicked him off. I held his supple body close to mine as he told me all this. For the first time in years I felt wanted. However, my relationship with Sukdev was foolish. (Trivedi, 80-81).

The protagonist of the novel realizes that her illicit relation with Sukdev was a foolish act. Later her own relation caused stigma in her psychology. Sex has been treated as a private, practical affair that only properly takes place between a husband and a wife. Sex outside these confines is not simply prohibited, but repressed. That is, there is not

simply an effort to prevent extra-marital sex, but also an effort to make it unspeakable and unthinkable. Discourse on sexuality is confined to marriage. The extra-marital relation is taken as the matter of stigma. So sexuality is repressed.

The repressive hypothesis explains that there have been certain outlets of confession, where "improper" sexual feelings could be released safely. Foucault identifies prostitution and psychiatry as two such outlets. These practices create their own space for discourse on sexuality that freed them from the confines of conventional morality.

The 20th century is no different, according to the repressive hypothesis. Freud may seem to have made open and frank discussions of sexuality possible, but this discourse is still confined to the academic and confessional realm of psychiatry. We cannot free ourselves from this repression simply by means of theory: we must learn to be more open about our sexuality, to talk about it, to enjoy it. Discourse on sexuality, seen as a revolt against a repressive system, becomes a matter of political liberation rather than intellectual analysis.

There is also "no commonly accepted theoretical perspective on stigma that agrees on the types of stigma and the mechanisms involved in the process of stigmatization" (Link & Phelan 20). In fact, many of the theories developed to address stigma agree on little other than the notion that stigma is associated with possessing devalued characteristics or relations. Additionally, the process by which stigma contaminates other relevant status information about the individual stigma spread is also not very well defined across the differing versions of stigma theory. Essentially, the process by which stigma spread occurs is not a matter of consensus. The current theoretical perspectives of stigma seem to overlap with regard to the disadvantage resulting from the process, although they do not exactly detail the mechanism of

status loss or whether there is an extent to which it differs according to the type of stigma involved. The definition of the term status differs very slightly depending upon the area of study to which it is being applied.

Ira Trivedi's *The Great Indian Love Story*, tries to explore the darker side of Delhi and its socialite class. Though her intention to tell a bold and provocative tale on the lives of rich and the mighty is noteworthy its treatment is so bland that the story loses its track right after the first few chapters itself. The characters appear as if they are sleep walking through a Madhur Bhandarkar movie with almost everyone sleeping around with everyone else and there is too much talk about drugs, sex and lacy underwear.

Though the story is narrated by Riya, a U.S. educated twenty years old girl who befriends Serena Sharma at a high end Delhi gym. *The Great Indian Love Story* is more of a story of Serena and her sexual escapades. Serena herself is having a troubled life, her father has died recently and her mother has happily married a guy who is half her age. There is also a sub plot involving Parmeet (Serena's mother) and her extramarital affairs. The story goes and on with nothing really happening in the narrative except Serena, who also gets pregnant in between and her mother having sex with multiple partners. Her extra-marital and illicit relation makes her a figure of stigma later. The society labels her as a prostitute and she is stigmatized.

*The Great Indian Love Story* is set in a world where appearances mean everything and nothing is as it seems. There's no time for love in a world that revolves around the latest Ferraris, the hottest nightclub, diamonds, single malts, cocaine and ecstasy. In this whirl of wild parties, sex and drugs we meet Serena Sharma who lives her life one debauched night at a time, always falling for the wrong men. Her life is a roller-coaster ride: her father's death followed by her mother's



remarriage, a broken heart and a lost love. Adding to this is her torrid affair with Amar Khanna, a trophy husband, coke addict and serial adulterer. Riya, jaded by her unsuccessful attempt to find a job in America, returns to Delhi to find the city of her childhood changed beyond recognition. Striking an unlikely friendship with Serena, Riya finds her complacent torpor shattered. *The Great Indian Love Story* is also the story of Parmeet, Serena's mother, who looks for passion outside her marriage with disastrous consequences, and S.P Sharma, Parmeet's husband, who is driven to violence by her infidelity. Ira Trivedi weaves together sex, revenge, glitz, friendship and a chilling murder to create a potent concoction in this gripping novel on the treacherous nature of love and power.

*Marriage and Sexuality in the 21st Century* is a ground-breaking look at the sexual revolution that is beginning to sweep through urban India. Best selling author Ira Trivedi travelled from Shillong in the northeast to Chennai in the south, Konark in the east to Mumbai in the west, and over a dozen other cities and towns, in order to gain unprecedented insights into changing sexual mores, marriage and love in the 21st century. The novel explores the mating habits of young Indians on college campuses and in offices; examines the changing face of Indian pornography and prostitution and delves into history, economics and sociology to try and understand how the nation that gave the world the Kamasutra could have become a closed, repressed society with a shockingly high incidence of rape and violence against women the dark underside to the greater sexual freedom that men and women in present cities have begun to enjoy today.

Trivedi goes deep into one of the most enduring institutions of Indian society-marriage and investigates how it is faring in modern times. She interviews marriage brokers, astrologers, lawyers, relationship counselors, love commandos, parents and

nervous young brides and grooms, amongst others, to present a nuanced picture of the state of marriage in the country. She discovers that love marriages are skyrocketing and even the age-old arranged marriage is undergoing a transformation. Also on the rise are divorces, extra-marital affairs, open marriages, live-in relationships and the like. Supporting her eye-opening reportage with hundreds of interviews, detailed research, authoritative published surveys and discussions with experts on various aspects of sexuality and marriage, Trivedi has written a book that is often startling, sometimes controversial, but is always entertaining and original. *India in love* will change the way urban Indians view themselves and one another. Interesting facts an eye-opening look at how marriage and sexuality are changing in 21st-century India. They are supported by analysis from psychologists, activists, experts on religion, history, marriage, law, gay rights. Further highlighted by interviews with hundreds of people in cities and towns across India, the central character looks at a gamut of issues from love marriage, divorce, violence against women, same sex relationships, live-in relationships and open marriage, prostitution and more. The sexuality has been termed as the stigma still.

The sexuality is taken as stigma and so called prestigious people take the sexuality as the obscene aspect. So, the people involved in sexuality are socially marginalized and that very marginalization deprives them from the life of dignity. That's why Riya, the central female character of Ira Trivedi's novel, *The Great Indian Love Story* states that "I was not his wife, I was not his girlfriend. What was I to him?" She does not find any relation in sexuality with Amar, with whom she had kept sexual relation. She does not find any dignity, nor does she find any bond either. Supporting this claim Ruchi, Ramesh and Sudhir Kumar Singh in the introduction of their book, *Disability Towards Inclusive India*, opine that,

Poverty itself is a great facilitator of stigma and deprives the people with disability and sexually marginalized people from the aspirations of a dignified life. The social biased attitudes lead those people towards the social marginalization and poverty, which turns out to be the main hindrance for them to get the rightful life. People with disabilities and sexual marginalization have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group. (Introduction, xv).

That's why the social stigmatizing tendency is more than the physical weakness for them because stigma represents a view of life, a set of personal and social constructs set of social relations and social relationships; a form of social reality. Stigma has been a "difficult concept to conceptualize because it reflects a property, a process, a form of social categorization, and an affective state" (Coleman 141). The society always constructs such stigmas, which help to define the bodies but this very definition is always discriminating. As stated earlier sexuality is not only a case of bodily needs but the social issue too.

The situation of the people with sexually marginalized remained marginalized from the evolution of human history. In the past, the society was discriminatory and sexually exposed people had to remain as the burden for the family and society as a whole. Such a person would be considered as a sign of loss of prestige in a family and society too. Even in the classical democratic societies too, the people with sexual activities were not taken as citizens of the state. But the societies have been changing gradually and the people have been getting a few chances in the process of inclusion.

Those attempts are not sufficient. There is still problem in society in terms of gender differences also in terms of sexuality.

The situation of a male is not considered so bad but the condition of female involvement in sexual activities is even worse. How a female feels when she realizes that sexual relation was not good as Riya says "Amar was married, he had a wife and a newborn son, and he loved them. To him our relationship was only about sex... though he did not tell me once that he loved me" (23). Riya wishes love from her sexual partner but does not get. She is in fact sexually exploited. Such women have to face the discrimination in double way; because of being women and being involved in sexuality. Their condition are varies according to the circumstances and the communities, where they live. Such women are "forced to stay indoors and pass their time without much provision for education and social interaction" (Rahul & Sinha, 190). The society shows the gender discrimination in the matter of sexuality also. Women do not have access to resources, education and other opportunities. Despite their significant numbers, women and girls with sexuality remain hidden and silent, their concerns are unknown and their rights are overlooked.

Throughout the society, in urban and rural communities alike, women with sexuality have to face multiple discriminations from the society. Not only because of their desires, but also because they are female and poor. Casting the light on the same issue McClain Charlotte argues, "In many countries, especially developing on there is a feminization within an already marginalized group; of women in poverty, those with sexual involvement are frequently the poorest" (18). Most women are more likely to be extremely poor, have little or no schooling, without vocational skills, unemployed, less access to public services, unmarried or childless and physically, or psychologically abused. They make up, without any doubt, one of the most excluded

and isolated groups of people in every society, being triply dis-advantaged, by their sex and by poverty. The apt example of that sort of exclusion is seen when Serena says, "They did not approve our relationship, he was their only son, and I was an orphan- the daughter of a fallen mother and a dead father" (Trivedi, 49). She had sexual relation with her boy friend Vik but Vik's family did not accept their relationship because she was poor. So, poverty and sexuality are related with each other.

Women with involvement in sexual activities are often treated as if their particular act has affected all their other abilities too, which they can easily perform. The society makes certain kinds of stereotypes regarding those women. Those stereotypical images turn out to be the cultural images. Many of them are deprived of their self-determination, become victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse in institution and workplace. They are denied of family life. Until not so long ago, it was not so uncommon to hear of forced sterilization of them, and not given any reproductive care. The women involved in sexual activities are stigmatized as a burden for the family and society. Another shocking fact of sexual exploitation is that the girls are sexually exploited by their family members too. Casting on the same theme Serena, the another main female character states, "It made me sad when I saw them together, father and daughter. It reminded me of Papa" (Trivedi, 26). Serena was also sexually exploited by her father earlier as she sees others.

Sex work is an umbrella term for the exchange of sexual services, performances, and products; it is not to be confused solely with prostitution. Often regarded as the 'down below' in society, sex workers have to overcome the inherently negative labels that our society has continuously justified through the years. The stigma attached to the sex work industry as a whole creates an often dangerous

environment for those that choose to do exactly what sex work is. Whorephobia, best described as the fear or the hate of sex workers, is something that affects all women in the hatred and violence it brings. That's why Randeep talks about the maltreatment of his beloved Parmeet as he says, "She had written to me about her divorce and the shameful treatment her family was meting out to her" (Trivedi, 132). Here Parmeet was badly treated after her divorce. Her divorce was the main cause of violence upon her. She was the matter of public nuisance.

The article by Thierry Schaffauser, "Whorephobia Affects All Women" describes how women who engage in sex work are often perceived to be "a public nuisance, spreaders of disease, offenders against decency or unskilled victims who don't know what is good for them and who need to be rescued" (45). People often grow up with all these negative assumptions of sex workers because it is what they've been taught. This stigma that sex workers carry around with them is fatally dangerous as "sex workers are far more likely to be murdered than the rest of the population" (47). This however does not only affect sex workers as it further perpetuates these negative images of women as prey in the minds of murderous men. In most aspects of our society, we are brought up to believe that sex workers are bad people, often accused to be spreading diseases and high on drugs. As these allegations are often untrue, the negative image of them has yet to change. The article explains how whorephobia (fear of being a whore) "operates as a way of controlling and policing women's behavior" (49) because women are expected to act and behave a certain way, and anything outside of that 'norm' is considered to be deviant. In essence, a mechanism used to force women into a role that has been predetermined for them. This is fundamentally wrong as people in our modern-day society should not be policed into acting or behaving a certain way, especially when unjustified. Once

people are educated to understand that sex workers should not be associated with all this negativity, and once sex work is recognized simply as work, perhaps the stigma can begin to lift.

Part of the stigmatization of sex work includes the notion that sex workers are trafficking victims, or maybe just victims in general, as women who are able to make their own decisions would and could not possibly choose to be a sex worker. It is unfathomable that women with free agency over their body would voluntarily choose this type of work. But why? It should not matter whether a woman derives pleasure from, or simply chooses sex work as their source of income. Part of Melissa Gira Grant's article "Let's Call Sex Work What It Is: Work" describes the ideologies of those opponents of sex work, who characterize sex work as fundamentally lesser than that of their work as "sex work does not" and cannot "resemble their work" (42). They argue that the real hard workers are those lobbying against sex work, because they are the ones "elevating womanhood, while the tramps loll about down below" (42). Whether a person works as a driver or is the CEO of a large corporation, what they do from a day-to-day basis is considered to be work. So, why then would a woman providing a service, albeit one that involves sex, not considered to be working the same way everyone else is? I believe that if a woman chooses to be a sex worker, they deserve every right to be considered a worker and not be stigmatized for what they do.

The concept of stigma has been an important topic in social science research encompassing the interest of psychology, sociology, and related disciplines. The study on stigma has grown noticeably over the last few decades, and it has generated extensive theoretical and empirical research. Erving Goffman's book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* represents one of the first elaborations on the topic and one of them most referred pieces of work in the study of stigma; since his

articulation of the topic, many other researchers have applied the concept of stigma to a variety of circumstances, ranging from medical conditions (e.g.: mental illness, cancer, HIV/AIDS), to different groups of people (e.g. African Americans, single parents, LGBT people), and to many other instances of life. The concept of stigma is presented and articulated, starting from the different definitions and conceptualizations found in the literature, and the critiques and limits associated with them. The characteristics of stigma are also elaborated referring mainly to the work of Goffman and Link and Phelan. Lastly, the consequences of stigma and the coping techniques that stigmatized individuals can employ to deal with the difficulties associated to their stigma are also no less important aspects in the analysis of stigma.

According Erving Goffman society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the attributes that belong normally to the members of each of these categories. The appearances of someone enable other individuals to anticipate their category and characteristics, that is their “virtual social identity”, based on individuals’ assumptions on others’ attributes. On the other hand, the attributes that someone can prove to possess will be called his “actual social identity” (Goffman,63). When someone shows to possess characteristics that make them different from others in the category we assumed they would be in, that person is reduced in our minds from a whole to attainted, discounted one: such an attribute is stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive, and it represents "a discrepancy between virtual and social identity" (Goffman, 63).

The attitudes that people in society (at least people who do not depart negatively from the particular expectations at issue, and that Goffman calls the “normal” have toward an individual with a stigma are linked to a variety of discrimination, through which they effectively reduce their life chances. Goffman



sustains that a process based on the social construction of identity is central to stigma creation: a person that is linked to a stigmatized condition does not possess a "normal" social status anymore, but they will be considered to have a "discredited" or "discreditable" one. In fact, the author defines stigma as "a special kind of relationship between an attribute and a stereotype" (Goffman, 64). A further definition was proposed by Crocker et. al. "who sustain that stigma arises when a person possesses or they are believed to possess, some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context" (505). Similar to Goffman, their view on social stigma implies that the stigmatized individuals have or are believed to have a characteristic that makes them different, and that lead them to a devalued status in their social context. That's why Riya feels aloof as she says, "he had given me a sad look" (Trivedi, 51). She finds herself devalued by him.

Moreover, starting from Goffman's consideration that stigma can be viewed as a relationship between an "attribute and a stereotype" (Goffman,4). Jones et al. introduced the term "mark" to indicate a certain characteristic possessed by an individual that other people can link to a discrediting disposition. The mark causes a mechanism through which other people see and interpret other features of the person in terms of this mark, behaving towards the stigmatized one according to their stigma, ignoring therefore their individuality. As Major and O'Brien consider, these marks could be "visible or invisible, controllable or uncontrollable, and linked to appearance (e.g.: a physical deformity), behaviour (e.g. child abuser), or a group membership (e.g. African American)" (395). Other authors have introduced new aspects to the study of stigma. Link and Phelan have proposed a wider concept of stigma as characterized of five interrelated components: labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination. Moreover, they specified that "stigma arises when

these components occur in a power situation that allows them to unfold” (Link & Phelan, 2). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in the literature there are some variations in the definition of stigma depending on the scholar who analyzed it and the context in which stigma is studied.

In fact, as Link and Phelan consider, this is due to the fact that the concept of stigma has been applied to a wide array of circumstances that can be different to each other, and also that the study of stigma is multi-disciplinary, capturing the interest of different professionals, such as psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists etc. These authors identify two main challenges to the concept of stigma. The first one is linked to the fact that many scholars who analyze stigma, do not belong to a stigmatized group or, in general, are not stigmatized themselves; this implicates that their point of view does not include a lived experience of the topic and that as Schneider considers scholars may risk to focus all their attention on scientific theories rather than the way in which the people have experience of the topic. The second challenge identified concerning the study of stigma is that it has been "primarily focused on an individualistic level” (Link & Phelan, 11). As Sayce considers, "the study of stigma proposed by Goffman is mainly focused on an individual self-perception and micro level interpersonal interactions; what it seems to be missing is a dimension that explores a wide spread and patterned exclusion from economic and social life, in order to provide elements for the definition of collective strategies for inclusion and to fight prejudice (Sayce, 19). This challenge is also linked to the use of a certain terminology: some scholars have argued that “stigma” or “mark” is perceived as something in the person instead of a designation that other people attach to that individual.

In fact, the term “stigma” directs the attention in a different way than the term “discrimination”, which focuses more on those who produce the discrimination toward someone rather than those who are discriminated. This is important in the way we talk about a topic and in the way research can open and influence a dialogue around certain aspects of life. Sayce refers to an example about racism: if researchers talk about it in terms of “racism” or “discrimination” the attention is focused on the perpetrators of a behavior, and this can lead to solutions that are oriented toward the fight against the power of racist ideas and actions. On the other hand, if they face the problem in terms of the “stigma of being black”, the attention is shifted towards the self perceptions of the individual of color; this can lead to solutions that are more focused on “boosting the self confidence and self image of the individuals who experience a sense of inferiority because of the stigma” (Sayce, 18). Even though this latter type of solution is certainly important too, so mechanisms of racism as well as other kinds of discrimination, e.g. “homophobia are so embedded in societies that cannot be overcome only by a change in the self-image of the victims” (Sayce, 19). Moreover, a solution that is based primarily on the expectation that the discriminated individuals need to change their self-perception can be seen as a victim blaming approach. As claimed above, Serena blames Mrs. Bhatia, as a whore for corrupting her father, as she further says “Mrs. Bhatia was a conniving, disgusting woman. She slowly made herself a part of our lives. She came over every day and stayed till late at night drinking whisky with Papa in the study” (67). Mrs. Bhatia is an example of victim blaming.

For the reasons so far listed, even though there will be a great deal of reference to the original work of Goffman, this work mostly refer to the concept of stigma developed by Link and Phelan, who articulate this concept attaching multiple

components, considering both cognitive and behavioral aspects. As Link and Phelan consider, for the vast majority human differences are not really socially relevant. Some of these such as eye color are often overlooked and do not link necessarily an individual to an experience of stigma. However, many other differences are somehow much more salient and matter socially in many societies such as skin color, sexual orientation, sexual identity. This labeling of differences carries a taken-for-granted nature. These differences are seen as just the way things are e.g.: there are people of color and white people, disabled people and non-disabled people. It seems, therefore, that what are displayed by a social selection of human differences that identifies what are the differences that possess social relevance. Two considerations can be made on this process of social selection: first, the creation of such groups is made possible by an oversimplification of reality. This means that, for instance, when assigning individuals to the categories of “straight” and “non-straight” the end result contains certain variability and a no clear line of demarcation between groups that is universally shared, e.g.: a straight individual who had a homosexual experience in the past.

The second aspect of it is that the differences that are considered socially relevant vary tremendously according to time and place. Following the example of homosexuality, it can be considered that the categories of “straight” and “non-straight” even though are still important nowadays were much more socially relevant in the past, when there was much less literature and research on the topic, and homosexuality was recognized as a mental illness in many western societies. Moreover, even in the same age, different societies recognize such categories more salient than others. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Goffman, sustained too, that society has his way to establish the means to categorize individuals and to

decide which characteristics are to be considered ordinary and natural for the members of such groups. However, when human differences are associated to negative attributes, a process of stereotyping is taking place, which is also a component of stigma.

The component of stereotyping has been central in Goffman's work, as the author defines stigma as a “special kind of relationship between an attribute and a stereotype” (4). As for labeling, the process of stereotyping requires an oversimplification of reality. In fact, considering the influential work of Lippmann, stereotype has been defined as an oversimplified picture of the world, in a way that it is more understandable and manageable than it is in reality. While Lippmann sustained that stereotypes are generalizations, illogical in origin, and resistant to new information, Brigham does not entirely agree. The author defined stereotype as a generalization that concerns trait attribution, which is considered to be unjustified by an observer. Stereotypes are not incorrect or illogical by definition; rather they are generalizations that appear to be less verifiable when they are about a class of people than other categories such as animals or objects. Categories and stereotypes are considered too often to be automatic and to facilitate “cognitive efficiency”, as they allow individuals to make split-second judgments and they operate pre-consciously. (Link & Phelan, 21). In fact, the search on stereotypes has been part of a wider literature that is concerned about understanding human predictions about categories. This aspect of prediction is strongly connected to the concept of stigma, as we can retrace it in Goffman's concept of “normative expectation”, that is linked to our anticipations of someone else's category based on their appearances when we first meet them. These anticipations guide our actions toward those people based on the stereotypes associated with their categories and this, in turn, is associated to a variety

of discriminating behaviors, that can have an important impact in the lives of those who experience them. e.g.: violence, unemployment, being refused tenancy, etc.

The components of stigmas of presented become the rationale for considering the individuals that are labeled negatively as essentially different from those people who do not share the same characteristics; moreover, when this belief is established, the process of stereo typing can be carried out very smoothly, because it is felt like there is no real harm to attribute bad characteristics to “them” sustain that, when this is taken to the extreme, the individuals that are stigmatized are considered to be so different than “us” to be perceived as not really human, and this can potentially make possible an inhumane treatment of “them”. Goffman considers this aspect in his work on stigma in a similar way. The author distinguishes those who carry the stigma “them” from the people who do not depart negatively from the particular expectations at issue, and that he calls the “normals” “us”. He sustains that by definition, the normal believes that those who carry a stigma are not quite human, and that on this assumption it is easier for them to decide to employ discriminatory behaviors toward stigmatized ones. This tendency is also shown by a particular use of terminologies. For instance, talking about diseases that carry stigma, such as schizophrenia and epilepsy, quite often people speak about those who face such diseases as “schizophrenic” and “epileptics” rather than individuals that have schizophrenia or epilepsy; while for other instances we talk about people that have cancer, or heart disease, or allergies as individuals that happen to face an illness and therefore are part of “us”, when it comes to certain diseases which are associated to a stigma, individuals are somehow identified in the disease itself and therefore are part of “them”.

On the other hand beyond the distinction of “us” from “them”, Goffman presents a further classification of individuals around the one that carries the stigma, focusing also on those who are sympathetic to others that are willing to consider the stigmatized individual as human and essentially normal, in spite of differences, he distinguishes the “own” and the “wise”. The “own” are represented by those who share the same stigma as the person in question; since they know from their own experience what it is like to carry that specific stigma, they often provide a guide and moral support to the individual an example of that would be the associations that provide members with moral support. The “wise” are those persons that are “normal” but that a personal experience has made them intimately privy to the life of the stigmatized individual and they are sympathetic with them; therefore, once the wise has made themselves available to the stigmatized, they might be accepted as a courtesy member, someone towards whom the stigmatized does not feel ashamed, as they will be "conceived as an ordinary individual an example of wise individuals can be those who work in an environment in which they are in contact with the stigmatized, such as straight bartenders in homo sexual clubs" (Goffman, 19).

One of the first consequences of being targeted as possessor of stigma is a down ward placement in a status hierarchy: when an individual is linked to negative characteristics "their status is reduced in the eyes of those who stigmatize them" (Link & Phelan, 20). The woman in sexuality has to face such situation frequently. Parmeet fears for having sex with two persons simultaneously.

Over the next few weeks Jaspal and I became friends. He was a gentleman and time passed quickly when I was with him. We didn't have much in common, but somehow we always found things to talk about. He was funny and made me laugh and I was impressed that he wasn't afraid of SP. But soon I got the

feeling that Jaspal was falling in love with me. I was flattered of course. I even toyed with the idea of sleeping with him but every time I thought about it, I pictured Randeep's face. That's when I knew I was hopelessly in love with Randeep. SP thought Randeep and my relationship was only about sex, but there was so much more to it, though I couldn't let him get a whiff of it. I knew he wouldn't hesitate in killing Randeep if he knew we were in love. He could be quite ruthless when he wanted. So, I pretended to flirt with Jaspal to divert SP's attention away from Randeep. (Trivedi, 98)

Permeet realizes that she might be the cause of the death of her boyfriend Randeep. In order to avoid the fear of stigma of being the murderer of her boyfriend, Permeet keeps sexual relation with SP. She feels loss of status if her relations with others are revealed. This has been highlighted also by Goffman regarding status loss, saying that an individual who is been stigmatized is reduced “from a whole and usual person to attainted and discounted one” (Goffman, 3). Having a devalued status can lead to forms of inequalities in the context of social interactions within small groups; even though these inequalities can be not related to direct forms of discrimination, they may occur consequently there inference to external statuses such gender and race that originates performance expectations (Link & Phelan, 20). For instance, Mullen et. al. considered that gender and race shape status hierarchies in context so small groups of unacquainted people, in that some and whites are more likely than women and people of color to talk more frequently and being recognized as group leaders. Link and Phelan, sustain that this aspect is important to be considered in the study of stigma, since important difference in outcome can take place in these contexts even when it is hard to identify a single event that caused it.



The interaction between stigmatized and normal has been a central point for Goffman's work, as he talks about the "mixed contacts" in which they are in the same social situation, that is in one another's immediate physical presence. Since the "status of the stigmatized is conceived as inferior, these mixed contacts can represent very stressful events: the stigmatized may feel that he has to be self-conscious and careful about the impression that they make, since even minor failings might be interpreted as a direct expression of their stigmatized differentness" (Goffman, 63). This can of course lead to experience of anxiety, hostility, and stress. Moreover, the lower placement in a status hierarchy can in general lead to a significant decrease of one's life chances, as it can become the basis for discrimination. For instance, low status can make a person less likely to participate in community activities, socialize or being involved in business venture, limiting a whole range of opportunities for the stigmatized person. The attitudes that people in society (at least the people that Goffman calls the "normals" ) have toward an individual with a stigma are linked to a variety of discrimination, through which they effectively reduce their life chances (Goffman, 69). In fact, discrimination can directly reduce access of stigmatized individuals to main life domains such as workplace, healthcare, education system, affecting their social status, psychological and physical health (Major & O'Brien, 25).

When talking about discrimination related to stigma, individual and structural discrimination can be differentiated. Individual discrimination has been conceptualized with a relatively simplistic formula: the focus in recognizing this type of discrimination has been on whether the behavior and beliefs in the way in which person A is labeling and stereotyping person B leads person A to employ discriminating actions against person B, such as denying a job opportunity or denying access to a service (Link & Phelan, 21).

Eventhoughthisstraightforwardapproachisundoubtedlyusefultoconsiderwideinstancesofdiscrimination,it has been considered to be not fully adequate in order to better understand the ways in which discriminatory actions can lead to social inequalities and the full consequences of the stigma process (Link & Phelan, 21). Therefore the research on stigma needs to be focused not only on individual discrimination but also on structural types of discrimination. In fact, the interest in structural discrimination begins with the understanding that discrimination affects certain categories in ways not explained by the direct psychological effects of an individual's discriminatory behavior (Corrigan, 24). Structural types of discrimination refer to institutional practices that lead to the deprivation of opportunities and rights for certain categories; it can be represented by the laws, policies and procedures.

Prostitutes, open marriages, sex toys, expensive *lahengas* costing a crore, somewhere even these are all factors relating to love and sexuality in 21st century Indian society. In *The Great Indian Love Story*, Ira Trivedi sets out to explore the new Indian sexual revolution, because she has no doubt that India is in the middle of one. Young people everywhere are exploring their sexuality and coming into conflict with the older generation which believed in the virtues of Sita and Ram. While the older generation is again in conflict with Vatsayana's *Kama Sutra* which states explicitly that women have a right to sexual pleasure in their marriage. Despite facing the stigma of open sexuality, the Indian new generations are being open up in terms of sex.

*The Great Indian Love Story* is at its best in the personal bits, when a nervous girl ventures into very unfamiliar territory and her hesitation comes through. Trivedi finds a toddler with a teddy bear in a brothel in the notorious GB Road and ends up giving her last hundred rupee note to the child. The book's timeframe covers the

ancient past and immediate present the watershed being the Nirbhaya episode which Trivedi says showcases not the strength, but the weakness of Indian men who feel themselves threatened by successful women.

The concept of stigma has been an important issue encompassing the interest of psychology, sociology, and related disciplines. The study on stigma has been developed noticeably over the last few decades, and it has generated extensive theoretical and empirical research. The concept of stigma is presented and articulated, starting from the different definitions and conceptualizations found in the literature, and the critiques and limits associated with them. The characteristics of stigma are also elaborated referring mainly to the work of Goffman and Link and Phelan. The cost of stigma and the coping techniques that stigmatized persons can use to deal with the difficulties connected to their disgrace are also no less important aspects in the analysis of stigma.

The society establishes theme and so for categorizing persons and the attributes that belong normally to the members of each of these categories. The appearances of someone enable other individuals to anticipate their category and characteristics. The attributes that someone can prove to possess will be called his actual social identity. When someone shows to possess characteristics that make them different from others in the category we assumed they would be in, that person is reduced in our minds from a whole to attainted, discounted one: such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive.

The attitudes that people in society have toward an individual with a stigma are linked to a variety of discrimination, through which they effectively reduce their dignity despite so Indian youth have been challenging to those stigma. India's women, in fact, are the ones who are changing and changing faster than Indian men are.

Women today are demanding their rights and coming up against stumbling blocks like *khap panchayats* who feel that jeans and mobile phones in feminine hands are a threat to traditional values. On the other hand, women have their own set of blues as they try to run households against the will of alcoholic husbands.

There is a general assumption that sexual freedom is the result of Westernization but this, Trivedi points out, *is a* misconception given the existence of the Indian societies. She also cites the *ghotuls* of the Muria tribe of Bastar which are a kind of sexual laboratory where young boys and girls experiment with sex under given rules. The Murias have no incidents of rape or abuse, proving that the experiment works.

Trivedi backs her interviews with statistics and facts. She also points out that there is no Hindi word for ‘divorce’ but given the fast spiraling divorce rates in urban India, she has no doubt that a word will be coined sometime in the near future. Despite everything that she sees, she remains a staunch believer in love – an attempt to go through an arranged marriage type meeting leaves her thinking that it was more pressure on the heart than she had ever imagined.

This is due to the fact that the concept of stigma has been applied to a wide array of circumstances that can be different to each other, and also that the study of stigma is multidisciplinary, capturing the interest of different professionals, such as psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists etc. These authors identify two main challenges to the concept of stigma. The first one is linked to the fact that many scholars who analyze stigma do not belong to a stigmatized group or, in general, are not stigmatized themselves; this implicates that their point of view does not include a lived experience of the topic and the scholars may risk to focus all their attention on scientific theories rather than the way in which the people they study have experience

of the topic. The second challenge identified concerning the study of stigma is that it has been primarily focused on an individualistic level. As we know the study of stigma mainly focuses on an individual self perception and micro-level inter personal interactions; what it seems to be missing is a dimension that explores a widespread and patterned exclusion from economic and social life, in order to provide elements for the definition of collective strategies for inclusion and to fight prejudice. This challenge is also linked to the use of a certain terminology: some scholars have argued that “stigma” or “mark” is perceived as something in the person instead of a designation that other people attach to that individual. In fact, the term “stigma” directs the attention in a different way than the term “discrimination”, which focuses more on those who produce the discrimination to ward someone rather than those who are discriminated as minutely presented in Ira Trivedi's novel *The Great Indian Love Story*. The novel has ample instances of sexual stigmas employed in the characters and the stigma of sexuality is a social and cultural construct. In order to find out this theme the researcher has used stigma theory as a methodological tool. While finding stigma as social construct, the researcher has not violated the crux of the novel and has maintained a kind of balance between novel and methodological tool.

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Sexuality as Stigma in Ira Trivedi's *The Great Indian Love Story*

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Degree of Master of Arts in English

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**Letter of Recommendations**

Naveen Shah has completed this thesis entitled, “Sexuality as Stigma in Ira Trivedi's *The Great Indian Love Story*” under my supervision. He carried out this thesis from June, 2018–April 2019. I, hereby, recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voice.

.....

Khem Raj Khanal

Supervisor

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Tribhuvan University**  
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**Central Department of English**

**Letter of Approval**

This is to certify that the thesis, “Sexuality as Stigma in Ira Trivedi's *The Great Indian Love Story*” by Naveen Shah, is submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, and has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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