



Queering Digital India

Activisms, Identities,
Subjectivities

Edited by Rohit K. Dasgupta
and Debanuj DasGupta

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Introduction: Queering Digital India

Rohit K. Dasgupta and Debanuj DasGupta

This book emerges out of the need for understanding the entanglements between digital technologies, nationalism, neoliberalism and sexual subjectivities in India. The present political conjuncture in India is marked by rise of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The economic policies of liberalisation, the welcoming of global capital and the establishment of technological hubs are interlaced with the promotion of an overtly Hindu, heterosexual, family-oriented vision of India. We will situate the emergence of digital technologies within this emergence of neoliberalisation, nationalistic visions of a digitally productive India and question how diverse Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Kothi, Hijra, Queer (LGBTKHQ) communities navigate the digital/national assemblage. In a word, the book is concerned with how a desire for an economically productive, Hindu India and desire for LGBTKHQ recognition inform each other. Queering is considered as a form of questioning dominant power-knowledge formations that work to construct normative ideas of gender, reproduction and the family. Recent scholars in queer theory have argued that queering (especially in the context of Asia), requires a geopolitical interrogation of the ‘impersonal, structural, and systemic workings of power’ (Liu 2015: 7). We take on diverse strands of queer theory in order to name the ways neoliberalism, nationalism, digital technologies and movements for queer rights converge with each other within present-day India. In this introduction, we will present key theoretical constructs that are being mobilised throughout the book by different authors. Our hope is to present a broad theoretical rubric for our readers, or a suggested road map for understanding how we approach sexuality politics, neoliberalism, Hindu nationalism and queer community formation in and through digital technologies. Queer signifies diverse kinds of

desiring bodies, and regimes of truth that render certain kinds of desires as legible to the law, while some others as illegal or dangerous. Digital in this context indicates the various media networks through which desire circulates and takes on multiple meanings. Simultaneously, digital signifies the dominant desire (or a map) of the contested nation. Our introduction can be read as a genealogy of multiple desires, regimes of truth and how their emergence encodes itself in historically specific moments in India. After all, a truly specific understanding of bodies and desires require an understanding of the ‘context of the interrelationship between historically specific bodies’ (Butler 1987: 238).

The introduction is divided into five major sections in order to present the broad architecture of the edited collection. First, we present what we mean by sexuality politics and enumerate how sexuality is a form of truth-telling regime and biopolitical ordering of bodies. Secondly, we turn to discussing our notions about neoliberalism in India, one marked by the intensification of neoliberal rationalities in multiple domains of social relations including measures such as demonetisation, the push for a paperless economy, and intense political debates over the rights of diverse sexual minority communities. The idea of digital India is also deeply connected with neoliberal Indian nationalism, exemplified in government initiatives such as *India Shining* and *Digital India*. These two governmental guiding principles about a modern Indian nation exemplify the nation’s desire for becoming a major player in the global economy. Glib marketing projects related to *India Shining* and *Digital India* signify a map of India that is territorially bound, yet offering flexible borders for the movement of (digital) capital. The idea that Bangalore (Bengaluru) is the Silicon Valley of India and cities such as Hyderabad, New Delhi and Gurgaon are connected with the global circulation of technological capital puts the ‘digital’ firmly at the centre of what we now imagine as the modern Indian nation state (see also Oza 2006; Legg and Roy 2013). If digital technologies remain inextricably linked to the imaginary of a modern Indian nation-state, then what kinds of sexual-national-digital formations are engendered through demands for state recognition launched by diverse sexual minorities? Who gets to be a part of digital India? What kinds of desires are legitimated through multiple digital formations? And how is the idea of India mapped in and through digital platforms?

In the third section, we outline what we mean by queer desires and how they play in and through digital space. We argue queerness (and queering) is a kind of optics through which certain kinds of transgressive desires are brought within the folds of *Digital*

India, while many others are relegated as dangerous and excluded from the gates of the Indian nation-state. Throughout the book we will present different apparatuses of power that seek to inform and regulate digital spaces and the use of digital technologies in order to discipline transgressive desires. What then are transgressive desires within the present Indian context? We argue that merely identifying oneself as LGBTKHQ does not constitute a transgression in the context of digital India. Multiple kinds of bodies, whose desire does not conform to the national normative desire of a digitally productive Hindu nation-state are rendered abject, and violently relegated to a slow death within present day India. Queering digital India requires interrogating apparatuses of power such as policing online hook-up sites, shutting down the Facebook accounts of Kashmiri activists, and how linguistic, regional and class divisions create contested maps of India on digital spaces. The juridical struggles related to the removal of anti-sodomy provisions in the Indian Penal Code as well as the rights of transgender persons are sites for the juridico-political construction of the rights-bearing homosexual and transgender subject. The rights-bearing homosexual and transgender citizen-subject comes to signify the normative move within present-day sexuality politics in India. The desire for state recognition for queer persons in India remains inextricably intertwined with the neoliberalisation of the Indian economy. The shift from a Nehruvian welfarist state toward an entrepreneurial state (exemplified through ideas such as *India Shining* and *Digital India*) reflects how the relationship between the state and individual has shifted in present-day India (also see Leitner et al. 2007). The good Indian citizen is a consumer citizen, one who is dividend earning and capable of furthering their own economic interest (Nagar and Dasgupta 2015). Many of the authors in this collection suggest that we need to situate the demand for state recognition of sexual minorities within this neoliberalising moment in India. In this section we will highlight how the idea of an economic man remains embedded within sexuality politics in India. Situating the juridico-political activism related to LGBTKHQ rights (Dasgupta 2015, 2017) within the desire to become a digitally productive entrepreneurial nation-state allows us to read how certain kinds of transgressive desires are being accommodated within neoliberal India. We will discuss how Hindu religious imaginaries and ideas about the economic man remain intertwined with the Supreme Court judgement related to the Section 377 and transgender rights in order to map out the move toward normative (Indian) society within certain sections of the LGBTKHQ community.

Our introduction suggests two ways of thinking about queering digital India: (1) queer as diverse forms of sex-gender presentations and how such presentations are sedimented as LGBTKHQ identities within digital spaces; (2) queering as a form of figuration through which certain non-normative bodies are being folded within the nation-state while many others are being relegated as failures, threatening to the nation-state and left to die (both real death and social death). We hope that an elaboration of the three broad concepts – (1) neoliberal-digital India; (2) queer identities and the formation of digital queer spaces; and (3) queer normativity and the formation of monstrous queer bodies – will help our readers situate the broad architecture of the book, and how each author plays with these concepts within their disciplinary frameworks and arguments.

In the fourth section we elaborate the three theoretical traditions that frame the choice of chapters, the major arguments and the broad theoretical contribution that our book wishes to fulfil. We discuss how French continental philosophy, postcolonial theory and Queer of Colour theory provide the bulwark of the book. Finally, we will provide a road map of the different chapters, and highlight how each chapter takes up questions of neoliberal nationalism, queer subjectivities, regulation of bodies and pleasures, and the potentials for undercutting neoliberal regulation and the disciplining of bodies. Thus the introduction is organized as a way of mapping the major concepts, theoretical traditions and chapter organisation for our readers. Let us now turn toward what we mean by queer(ing) and sexuality politics in the context of present-day India.

Sexuality as Operations of Biopower

Substantively speaking the book offers two major ways of conceiving queer and queering: first as a set of identificatory regimes through which certain kinds of non-heteronormative identities are sedimented into what gets broadly termed as LGBTKHQ identities in India; secondly, the book elaborates queering as technologies of power through which certain bodies are marked worthy of life and certain bodies are relegated to death within Indian neoliberalism. In doing so, the book doesn't intend to set up a binary between life and death. Instead, we situate the operations of multiple apparatuses of power that place bodies on a continuum between life and death. Sexuality is defined as the lynchpin for the operations of power through which bodies are remade as subjects of life within Indian neoliberal modernity. We will approach sexuality at the intersection of body, population and enterprise.

Following Michel Foucault, we argue that sexuality is an apparatus of biopower through which power is effected over life and death (Foucault 2003). In his *History of Sexuality Vol. I*, Foucault argues biopower as a modality for the governance of bodies based on their sexual behaviour and reproductive capacity. This form of governance produces population categories such as those at high-risk for HIV/AIDS or those as infertile, impacting population growth and public health negatively. The operations of biopower seek to categorise human beings into a global mass based on vital bodily functions. Sexuality therefore is a dense point of exchange of power through which certain bodies emerge as worthy of rights while others are produced as dangerous contagions that need regulation and discipline. Foucault traces the emergence of biopower as a newer form of power, distinct from sovereign power during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Biopower is interested in managing life and death globally. Building on Foucault's work recent scholars have developed ways of thinking how life is now contingent upon scientific discoveries such as HIV medications, vaccines and treatments for emerging diseases (Dasgupta and Dhall 2017; Sunder Rajan 2006). These scientific breakthroughs seek to enhance life, while certain kinds of bodies are marked as risky, dangerous and therefore sought for systematic regulation or death. We do not suggest that life and death operates as an agonistic binary within biopolitical operations, rather we are arguing that the in-between zones between life and death is rife with potentials for new kinds of social projects (see the chapters by DasGupta and Malik, as well as Rai's responses in the roundtable). Scholars such as Elizabeth Povinelli enumerate that bodies are not merely subjected to death (real or social), but rather are fretted out as 'failures' and abandoned within neoliberal notions of success and enterprise (Povinelli 2011). Thus throughout the book we have highlighted the works of authors who interrogate how different apparatuses of (sexual) regulation, discipline and violent killing are constitutive of the Indian nation-state. We have highlighted authors who interrogate how sexuality rights-based activism is formulated in and through digital spaces. In doing so, this book argues that both sovereign power (one that is based on juridical power, territoriality and ideas of autonomy) and biopower are parallel projects that work to construct a dominant form of Indian (sexual) nationalism. As mentioned in the beginning of the introduction, we situate the biopolitical as well as sovereign apparatuses for regulating sexual desire within the rise of Indian neoliberalism. In the following section we suggest that tracing the liberalisation of India and the development of ideas related to digital entrepreneurship need to be conducted through a longer genealogy of neoliberalism in India.

The (New) Neoliberal Digital India

Since the late 1980s the Indian economy has undergone liberalisation and focused on creating a public culture of consumption-based modernity (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009; Grewal 2005; Oza 2006; Legg and Roy 2013). The movement of Indian workers trained in information technology to information sector hubs such as the Silicon Valley in the US, London and Germany followed by the growth of digital sector hubs in India has enabled the sedimentation of digital capital in India (Ninan Thomas 2012). India remains the leader in software development and client services for the global IT sector, whereas China has emerged as a nodal point in hardware manufacturing. These regional divisions inform how different Indian government(s) over the past three decades have pursued different policies to attract digital capital to India. In this section we will highlight two major representations of modern India that seek to highlight the digital capacities of the Indian people. *India Shining*, launched between 2003 and 2004 by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then prime minister of India, sought to highlight the new economic optimism of India while *Digital India*, the latest governmental initiative related to modern India, was launched by the current prime minister Narendra Modi in 2015. ‘Digital India’ reconnects India with global hubs of technological capital such as the Silicon Valley and represents how the idea of digital excellence and digital literacy remains central to the imagination of modern India. Indeed, to be a good Indian citizen today means finding one’s face reflected through the memes of digital India. Changing one’s Facebook profile picture to that of one’s face at the centre of the *Digital India* frame comes to signify how citizenship, nationalism and digital technology comes together to form a provisional assemblage represented through *Digital India*. Assembling digital India requires an understanding of how carnal and capital constitutes a specific spatio-temporal formation that sets multiple kinds of desires at a rhizomatic scale on digital space.

The concept of *India Shining* as a glib marketing programme launched in 2004 came on the heels of the genocide in Gujarat (2002) and the upcoming parliamentary elections. This came to signify a new India, one that was the leader in medical and information technology-related research. The marketing programme and the desire of becoming a global centre for the purveying of digital capital is not a new nation-building project. Projects such as *Mera Bharat Mahan* (‘My India Is Great’) was popularised by Rajiv Gandhi when he was prime minister between 1984 and 1989. His *Mera Bharat Mahan* represents two crucial breaks from Nehru’s India; firstly, Rajiv Gandhi’s

era marks the liberalisation of the Indian economy (Oza 2006), and secondly, Rajiv Gandhi stressed the need for developing India as a leader in science and technology (especially biotechnology). The move to remove trade barriers and producing consumer goods along with the need for biotech innovation is syncretic to what scholars such as Kaushik Sunder Rajan term as 'biocapital' (Sunder Rajan 2006). Sunder Rajan's multi-sited ethnography in the San Francisco Bay area and New Delhi suggests that the global flow of biotechnological innovation is deeply connected with neoliberal entrepreneurship. Rajiv Gandhi's *Mera Bharat Mahan* pre-dates the period that was studied by Sunder Rajan. However, we argue that Rajiv Gandhi's *Mera Bharat Mahan* is a precursor of what Sunder Rajan calls 'technoscientific capitalism' (Sunder Rajan 2006: 114). Sunder Rajan argues that scientific innovation in the life sciences is seen as an excessive kind of value and ushers in a different kind of capitalism, one that is hyped to be providing unimaginable discoveries related to genomic structures, life-saving medications and breakthroughs in treating life-threatening diseases. Returning to Rajiv Gandhi's vision for a new India, one needs to remember that in 1986 Gandhi established the first Department of Biotechnology (DBT) as a part of the Ministry of Science and Technology. The opening of the DBT suggests that the desire of *Mera Bharat Mahan* ('My India Is Great') was to become a new technologically savvy India, one that broke from India as the land of ancient civilisations and spectacular architectures. *India Shining* continues this desire for a tech savvy India.

The image of *India Shining* (Figure 1.1) conjures a map of India that includes the disputed territories of Kashmir and North-Eastern states. This territorially bound India is open for foreign capital and is evidently tech savvy, exemplified by the capacity of Indians to work in medical and technological innovation. *India Shining* was highly contested in the general elections by the opposition, and as the Congress-led government came to power, the concept was replaced by *Bharat Nirman* ('Constructing India'). However, the idea of excellence in digital literacies, developing centres of excellence in IT education remained central to *Bharat Nirman*. While the *India Shining* campaign died out after the defeat of the Vajpayee-led BJP government in 2004, the idea continues to exist (digitally) as a Facebook page. The *India Shining* Facebook page showcases India's many technological innovations, patriotic songs and most notably updates about border security issues related to the disputed territory of Kashmir. One of the recent posts on the *India Shining* Facebook page includes a YouTube video link to a warning poem by an Indian soldier. The soldier warns Pakistan that Indian soldiers



Figure 1.1 *India Shining*

are not afraid of atomic wars, and throughout the poem the soldier is joined by other soldiers, and together they recite in chorus, 'Kashmir might happen, but Pakistan will not remain.' This post about the contested space of Kashmir between India and Pakistan on the *India Shining* Facebook page signifies how territoriality, technology and capital remains intertwined with ideas about digital India. The digitally excellent India requires spatial security from the risks of terrorist attacks. The new neoliberal (digital) India can flourish only when its borders are secured. In this way, territory-capital-digital remain inextricably intertwined with the desire for a new productive India. Digital technologies are not only effective tools for the Indian economy, but rather are constitutive of the imagined neoliberal Indian nation-state.

The desire for a new digital India has been growing virally and taking on multiple formations. In July 2015 Prime Minister Narendra

Modi met with the owner of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, and spoke at a dinner addressing Indian IT sector leaders in the Silicon Valley which led to their formation of this campaign. *Digital India* seeks to connect rural India to high speed internet. Further, mobile applications such as e-Hospital and the e-Sign Framework promise to allow Indian citizens to register, sign and pay for hospitals and other important services through phone-based apps. *Digital India* not only promises access to high-speed broadband but rather is also an indication of India's leadership potential in technocapitalism. Mark Zuckerberg changed his profile picture on Facebook (Figure 1.2) to show his support for *Digital India*. The changing of the profile picture in support of *Digital India* circulated virally. Many Indians around the world changed their profile pictures in order to display their support for *Digital India*. Adopting the icon of *Digital India* to display one's face on Facebook comes to suggest how this idea takes hold on digital platforms, and gathers speed through viral diffusion. Indeed, showing one's face via the icon comes to exemplify the good Indian citizen, one who wishes to be a part of the modern Indian nation. The imagined digital India is discursively created and virally circulated on digital spaces. The digital, the digital platform and digital capital come to represent a new Indian map, one that is territorialised through the tri-colour of the Indian flag, but connected through a capillary-like (digital) network. You can be an



Figure 1.2 Zuckerberg and Modi change their Facebook profile pictures to support the *Digital India* campaign

Indian anywhere in the world yet remain connected via Facebook (and other social networks) to each other. *Digital India* comes to suggest a de-territorialised map of India (unlike the territorially bound map of *India Shining*), one that is multi-sited, multi-pronged and yet tethered through nodes, hubs and e-apps. Digital India is a provisional shape -shifting assemblage of neoliberal capital, desire for bio and technological excellence and digital nationalisms. Understanding how queer subjects navigate digital (Indian) space requires rethinking a territorially bound India, as an unbounded, virally circulating desire for capital-technology-nation(alism). In the next section, we outline how queer (and queering) is understood in the context of neoliberal digital India.

Another way of thinking about queer digital India leads us to understand how digital spaces are made and re-made through LGBTKHQ activism and desires. As some of our authors have argued, queer people in India, as in other parts of the world, are creating spaces and ‘communities’ using digital and social media. Many members of the LGBTKHQ community navigate their daily existence through their everyday interaction and presence on these sites (see the chapters by Rohit DasGupta, Khubchandani and Krishnan). Queer online spaces in India can be mapped as a vast terrain of digital sites that range from gay blogs (Gajjala and Mitra 2008), to listservs created specifically for queer people (Roy 2003) to social networking sites such as PlanetRomeo and more generic social networking spaces such as Facebook. Since 2010 with the proliferation of smart phones and mobile technology queer locative applications such as Grindr have also become popular, especially in the metropolitan cities such as Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata, for those who can afford such hardware and data connection. Scholarly material focused on digital culture and queer identity in India is scant and at this time we have found only a handful of sources who have written on them, Roy’s (2003) work on South Asian queer lists and queer websites in the 1990s being one of the earliest examples. Gajjala and Mitra (2008) and Mitra (2010) have undertaken research into queer Indian blogging, and finally Shahani (2008) has published an ethnographic study on the GayBombay community. It is important to comment that most of these sites are North American and European in origin. Our research indicates that Grindr was started by an Israeli entrepreneur residing in the US and is now a global phenomenon. Grindr has now initiated a global LGBT human rights project online titled ‘Grindr for Equality’. These formations take on local meanings within a global virtual network. While power inequalities such as ownership and management concentrated in North America mark digital spaces, we engage with digital technologies and platforms not as a

monolithic terrain but rather as a vast landscape of multiple power relations and contestations.

While selecting submissions for the book, we wanted to highlight the utopian potentials of digital spaces providing safe community spaces for LGBTKHQ communities in India as well as gesturing toward the regional, ethnic, religious, class and linguistic conflicts that inform the formation of queer digital communities. In doing so, we agree with Rheingold, Swiss and Hermann who argue that digital spaces hold the potential for bringing in virtual communities. However, as the chapters by Rohit DasGupta, Singh and Nagar will suggest, the formation of virtual communities is marked by exclusions and contestations. Such a layered conceptualisation of digital spaces resonates with the works of Gajjala, Rybas and Altman (2008), who suggest that digital space is not 'a' place, but rather a locus around which modes of social interaction, commercial interests and other discursive and imaginative practices coalesce.

Thus as we (dis)assemble Queer digital India, we knit together a range of scholarship that addresses how queer bodies and desires rhizomatically circulate through digital spaces in order to affect multiple digital-capital-carnal formations. Any discussion on digital queer spaces in India also needs to be contextualised and understood through its complex entanglement with nationalism and even a form of digital nationalism (see Kuntsman 2008). Scholars such as Puar (2005, 2013) have argued that there needs to be a shift from thinking about queer as an identity to queering as an optics through which certain transgressive bodies are folded into the life of the nation, while many others are created as bodies marked for death. In the next section we discuss these entanglements and proffer new ways of thinking about queerness.

LGBTKHQ Normativity and Monstrous Queers

We situate the proliferation of digital technologies within a multiplicity of sexual cultures in India. We argue that the Supreme Court judgements and the antecedent mobilisation of LGBTKHQ activists demanding inclusion within the nation is a slow move toward national normativity. The BJP and its ideological front RSS has made statements against Section 377, and yet strangely accommodates Hijra and transgender bodies through claims to Hindu mythology (the Supreme Court judgement related to transgender and gender identity refers to Hijras and transgender existence in ancient India by mentioning Hindu mythologies, as well as Islamic cultural practices). This is truly

a queer conjuncture. The chapters in this book seek to disentangle these multiple assemblages as they relate to digital platforms. Queering within this context is referred to as a modality through which certain bodies are now emerging as sexual monsters as opposed to the good rights-bearing sexual subject (Banerjea and Dasgupta 2013; Nagar and Dasgupta 2015; Dasgupta and DasGupta forthcoming). The movement for Kashmiriyat, policing of online sexual spaces, and the bodies of young men who are marked as gendered failures and potential rapists, are arguably queer figurations. This book challenges conceptualising sexual rights activism and its very hopeful glorification of digital spaces as sites for liberatory mobilisation.

The creative navigation of digital spaces by LGBTKHQ activists is not merely some kind of pure transgressive desire that stands in opposition to ideas of digital India, but rather as many of our authors suggest, LGBTKHQ online (as well as offline) activism represents a slow move toward normative *Digital India*. LGBTKHQ online formations are complex contested sites. The figure of Laxmi Naryan Tripathi, founder of the first *Hijra Akhara* (Hijra Hindu collective) next to the iconic *Ganga Arati* ritual at Varanasi on the steps of *Dashashwamedh Ghat* has been circulating throughout diverse digital platforms. In the image, Tripathi stands on the steps of this historic Ghat in Varanasi and announces that if Hijras are given a chance by the Indian government, they would help eliminate Pakistan from the world map. Tripathi's call to removing Pakistan from the map of the world is very similar to that of the soldier we discussed earlier in this introduction. In this sense everyone in (digital) India is engaged in a constant war against Pakistan. In the image Tripathi's location is the iconic Hindu city of Varanasi. Tripathi's facial makeup, golden saree and huge *Sindoor Tilak* (red vermilion marking on the forehead) suggest an excessive desire. The spatiality of her excessive desire for a Hindu nation cannot be contained territorially, but rather takes on a deterritorialised proportion through the viral circulation of her image. Prime Minister Narendra Modi fought the parliamentary elections from Varanasi. Soon after his victory, he launched the *Swaccha Bharat* (#MyCleanIndia) project by cleaning the ghats of Varanasi. The image of Narendra Modi sweeping Jaggannath Gali near Assi Ghat (one of the famous ghats of Varanasi) circulated throughout different digital platforms. The image of Laxmi Narayan Tripathi at the steps of Varanasi comes very close to the desire for a clean and productive India, one that stands in opposition to the nation of Pakistan. These images are exemplary of how some LGBTKHQ bodies are being folded into the new nationalist neoliberal India, whereas certain bodies and certain kinds of sexual behaviours are relegated as

dangerous (see also Shah 2014). We map how LGBTKHQ activism for legal recognition hinges around aligning LGBTKHQ formations alongside ideas of a shining, new, clean, Hindu (digital) India. Thus we present queer India as an assemblage of multiple bodies, desires and sensations.

We argue that queering digital India requires disentangling how Hindu nationalism, ideas about economic productivity and visions of a new global India remain entrenched in LGBTKHQ digital activism (also see Anand 2007, 2011). Anand (2007: 261), writing about Hindutva and sexuality, argues:

While the patriarchal nature of Hindutva is undeniable, it is not a replica of conventional models of heterosexual masculinity. For Hindutva organizations such as the RSS and VHP, ideal leaders are celibate while the ideal common Hindu men and women are governed by heteronormativity without being too sexual . . . Sexuality is something that is to be controlled and disciplined for the purpose of procreation.

Our intention is to lay out different manoeuvres for the mobilisation of queer desires on digital platforms while also gesturing to the normative possibilities of digital queer spaces. We outline how queer collectivities provisionally assemble on and through digital queer spaces and how they remain entangled with digital nationalisms. In this sense, LGBTKHQ mobilisations remain ambivalently placed on digital spaces. However, as LGBTKHQ activist formations rally for inclusion into the nation-state thereby mapping a queer inclusive digital India, other kinds of bodies are marked as dangerous to the nation state. We present two kinds of bodies and desires as dangerous to a digitally productive India. The first figure of our discussion is the runaway working-class young man who is depicted as the monstrous rapist, one who is improperly gendered and is a threat to the modern Indian productive, rights-bearing (female) subject. The wide media coverage of the spectacular rape case of Jyoti Singh, dubbed 'India's Daughter' and memorialised through a BBC documentary made by filmmaker Leslee Udwin, gestures toward a new gendered crisis in India. The figure of the runaway working-class young man comes to represent a sexual monster who is in need of discipline and regulation. The young men's desire which cannot be contained casts a dangerous spell on the women of the nation. Similarly, the desire for *Azad Kashmir* (free Kashmir) disrupts the map of digital India. The bodies of Kashmiri activists are vilified as terrorists, bodies that need to be subjugated through military occupation. In this way, the desire for *Azad Kashmir* comes to represent a queer desire, one that remains

in contradiction to the neat territorial demarcations of *Digital India*. We outline the circulation of digital meme's and chat forums that vilify the bodies of Kashmiri people and young working-class men as aberrations to modern India. In this way we contrast the normative move within the LGBTKQ movements for state recognition with the formation of new sexual monsters in and through digital India.

Theoretical Contours

In conceiving this book, the editors decided to bring three diverse theoretical traditions in conversation with each other, namely: (1) French poststructural thinkers (particularly the *oeuvre* of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Georges Bataille and the re-articulation of their work in the scholarship of Judith Butler); (2) postcolonial thinkers such as Achille Mbembe and Libby Meintjes, Gayatri Spivak, Sanjay Srivastava (1998 and 2014), Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel (2009), Srila Roy, Partha Chatterjee and Nivedita Menon (2010); (3) Queer of Color thinkers such as José Esteban Muñoz (1999 and 2009), Gayatri Gopinath (2005) and Jasbir Puar (2005). These traditions are not distinct from each other, but rather remain in conversation with one another; after all, Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' emerges from her critique of 'Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze', and Mbembe extended Foucault's ideas about biopolitics as the governance of life and death through ideas about 'necropolitics', as the works of death in framing the subject (Spivak 1988; Mbembe and Meintjes 2003). Recent scholarship in postcolonial studies emerging from the Indian context has taken up questions of modernity, the emergence of situated cosmopolitanisms and neoliberal social rationalities as they relate to questions of gender and sexuality (Srivastava 1998; Chatterjee and Menon 2010). In their recent introduction to an important collection of articles about area studies and queer studies, Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel mention that queer studies notably invoke '... queer theory (that) mostly speaks to US mappings of queer, rather than transacting across questions from different sites, colluding and colliding along the way' (Arondekar and Patel 2016: 151). Arondekar and Patel remind us that

Area studies emerge out of a Cold War era in the US, with a primary focus on areas that were of strategic military interest for the US, an idea that was also propounded by Spivak earlier. Rey Chow contends that area studies in US academia is the peacetime information-retrieval machinery that complements the United States' self-aggrandising foreign policy. (Chow 2006: 14)

Academic scholarship about India has often been housed within Area Studies departments and conferences. Queer Studies has rarely engaged with area studies that has consequences for how ‘queer theory’ travels transnationally. In this edited volume, we have paid particular attention to the geopolitics of India and Pakistan, particularly the way Kashmir remains precariously situated as a contested territory between India and Pakistan. We take up the question of desire for digitally productive India as a form of nationalistic excess that circulates through digital technologies and frames the ways in which various LGBTHKQ subjects manoeuvre digital spaces. We argue that for queer theory to travel or converse with South Asia studies, postcolonial scholarship and scholarship emerging from India there must be a broader engagement with regional politics and historical contingencies of caste and class in India. Such regional specificities are not merely additives to what queer theory might propose as ‘queer’, but rather form the basis for rethinking of queer subjectivities and politics.

As mentioned earlier, we were particularly drawn to the ‘Queer of Color Critique’ as a project that emerges in the US and remains committed to naming the ways sexualisation and racialisation are constitutive of each other. The Queer of Color Critique emerges from Roderick Ferguson’s rethinking of Marx’s ideas about surplus value (2003). Ferguson argues that queer of colour subjects emerge as racialised remainders within global capitalism (Ferguson 2003). Figures such as African American drag queens and Mexican American female house cleaners are permanent fixtures within commodity capitalism. While Ferguson’s work builds upon the analytical tradition in continental philosophy, scholars such as Jasbir Puar (2005), Juanna Maria Rodriguez (2003), José Esteban Muñoz (2009), and C. Riley Snorton (2014) further the hermeneutic tradition through a thorough engagement with the works of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Judith Butler, Ernst Bloch, Julia Kristeva and Georges Bataille. *Queering Digital India* builds on this extensive body of knowledge by extending the works of many of these critical thinkers within a transnational sexuality studies context. Scholars such as Anjali Arondekar state that ‘the lexicon of racial formation is necessarily linked to multiple lexicons of religion, caste, and even literacy, making it a consideration for any geopolitical reality tour of the sexual cultures of India’ (Arondekar 2004: 240). In *Queering Digital India* we take up this task of extending ideas about racialisation and sexualisation within an Indian context through a thorough analysis of how caste, class and regional and linguistic politics remain interimbriated within queer (digital) cultures.

Our conception of queerness as an optic through which certain bodies are being folded into the life of the Indian nation-state and certain bodies are being relegated to let die, draws upon Jasbir Puar's notion of *homonationalism* (Puar 2005 and 2013) wherein the folding of certain queer subjects within the folds of normative nationalism is an inevitable aspect of sexual modernity. Puar traces racialisation of the Muslim terroristic figure as excessive to the US nation-state within a post 9/11 national security culture. Puar argues that, as opposed to the Muslim terrorist monster, the rights-bearing homosexual patriotic subject emerges as a normative sexual figure through claims to gay marriage and participation in the US army. In *Queering Digital India*, we build upon Puar's ideas by carefully examining regional, religious, caste, ethnic and linguistic differences that form provisional assemblages on digital spaces. We have argued that Puar's critical intervention arising out of the specificities of post 9/11 USA is useful for the purposes of analysing how sexual modernity is entangled with neoliberal nationalism in India. However, in order for her ideas to travel transnationally, one needs to consider how regional-ethnic, caste, class and linguistic conflicts reshape sexual modernities in India. In understanding how neoliberalism emerges from a specific East Asian and South Asian contexts, the works of Rupal Oza (2006), Srila Roy (Legg and Roy 2013), and Nivedita Menon (2012) provide insights about regional specificities and their entanglements with projects of gender and sexual equality. The authors in this volume bring these conversations to bear upon the nature of digital technologies, Indian nationalisms and queer desires in order to trace an unruly genealogy of how desiring bodies are specifically encoded through regional variations within the present political conjuncture in India.

The Organisation of Chapters

We begin this collection with a roundtable discussion between the editors and four academics as well as practitioners to talk about the intersections between digitality and queer politics within their respective work. In keeping with the unique concept of *adda* (Chakraborty 1999) we gathered together to discuss and critique how we see digital culture and queer politics coming together. *Adda* is literally the practice of friends gathering together on a recurrent basis for extended intellectual informal conversations. All of the contributors to the roundtable come from a unique position of putting their academic work in practical context within community-based research, while

coming together provisionally (not always together in one time and space) through digital technologies to ‘chat’ with each other. Our *adda* is a lyrical fragment of the everyday exchanges that are a part of our digital (tactile) life. The six of us remain tethered with each other and many of the contributing authors through *Facebook messenger*, *Whatsapp*, *Google Chat*, *Facetime* and *Skype*. Our research (media and medium) travels through wires, generating sensations between wires, bodies and now this book. As we move through the chapters, we remain cognisant that many of the authors’ ‘field research’ emerges from the author(s) bodies belonging in digital space that take on the becoming of their (re)search. The next few chapters chart these multiple (digital) becomings and pick up the key themes of queer bodies, spaces and nationalisms.

Gairola’s chapter attempts a close reading of two Hindi-language films: Hansal Mehta’s *Aligarh* (2016) and Shakun Batra’s *Kapoor & Sons* (2016), to show how digital representations of ‘outing’ members of the LGBTQ community in India consolidate the effects of the Victorian statute of the Indian Penal Code, Section 377. As such, the legal ramifications of this British colonial law police meanings and makings of home in both films. The essay points to the rise of electronic, visual media in recent, queer Hindi cinema to critically engage representations of the digital as indicative of post-millennial masculinities in the two films. Gairola argues that, essential to understanding the politics of queer, contemporary India, are also critical, historical understandings of how and why representations of technology, like their material counterparts, enable imaginings of alternative queer lives in India.

Kareem Khubchandani ends this section with ‘Cruising the Ephemeral Archives of Bangalore’s Gay Nightlife’. Khubchandani’s essay explores the visual and textual promotions of gay parties via digital venues, as well as the interactions, choreographies, soundscapes and organisation of the parties themselves. This essay attends to two understudied and distinctly ephemeral sites of queer Indian cultural production: underground gay men’s dance parties and the internet-based communication that promotes them. These parties are designed to elide the production of material evidence of their existence, but as Khubchandani’s essay demonstrates, the effects they have on the community, on the psyche and on the bodies of their attendees persist. Given the moral and legal policing of gay men in India, party organisers in Bangalore elide public promotion of their events, opting instead for internet-based advertising. By examining the language and imagery used to promote parties, Khubchadani shows the kinds of pedagogy the parties engage in to curate a ‘global gay’ aesthetic.

Khubchandani engages with the *oeuvre* of José Esteban Muñoz's work, in order to mobilise Muñoz's appeal to the ephemeral archives for reading queer night life. Drawing upon major queer performing artists and Ernest Bloch's ideas about futurity, Muñoz provides us with ways of thinking and 'cruising' through queer archives. Queerness has a vexed relationship with archives, since visibility for queer desires is often connected with policing and legal consequences (as evidenced in the chapter by Singh on the sting operations conducted on PlanetRomeo). Khubchandani employs Muñoz's ideas about cruising on the ephemera of Gay Bangalore nightlife (such as flyers, digital memes, invitation pages, chats on PR and Manhunt) in order to trace how global and local forces shape the nightlife of gay men in Bangalore.

In the second part we turn to digital activism and advocacy. These chapters trace either mobilisations for and against juridical recognition (Pawan Singh, Ila Nagar), or mobilisations for public health initiatives (Rohit Dasgupta), or modalities of self-representation. These chapters help us in understanding how domination impinges upon certain bodies in order to relegate them for policing and death, how queer bodies assemble against domination, and how multiple kinds of desire are generated in and through diverse digital platforms. Ila Nagar's chapter 'Digitally Untouched: *Janana* (In) Visibility and the Digital Divide' turns the lens away from gay men to trans and *janana* identities. Nagar argues that, while images of queer bodies have penetrated the digital space, especially in the wake of the Section 377 ruling and the subsequent (online) protest and activism, the *janana* is a queer subaltern figure marked through misrecognition or silence or through erasure within middle-class LGBTHKQ activism. Nagar helps us to understand how we can rethink queer subalternity through a keen analysis of linguistic hierarchies that is written into the 'coding' of the digital sphere. Employing ethnography and critical discourse analysis this research uncovers the consequences of illiteracy, class and perverse sexuality on the lives of men with uneven income who have sex with men on the streets of Lucknow. The subjectivity of the *jananas* remain untouched by the debates about juridical equality, since the occasion of their (legal) appearance is marked by violence, while their erasure is performed through the deployment of caste and class hierarchies within queer digital spaces. She argues that queer images in India are circulated through access to technology that the majority of the *jananas* do not have access owing to their irregular income. The images make *jananas* visible and invisible simultaneously. Their experience is effaced by putting them in a media image, where their lack of agency in the production

and circulation of images is blatantly visible. This chapter explores the lives, injustices and discourses of people who have not been touched by the digital revolution and who are outside the digital world. The deployment of *kotil/janana* images in digital activism is a form of exploitation of the diverse sexual life worlds. Nagar argues that the *janana* body is subjected to domination through religious rhetoric as well as the rhetoric of constitutional equality. For Nagar, the LGBTHKQ juridical activist spaces that have erupted on digital platforms exclude the *janana* subject, by figuratively conjuring the *janana* body as the dancing body, one that performs the visibility of the *janana*, yet relegates their substantive concerns to a liminal space.

This is followed by Rohit K. Dasgupta's chapter on the use of digital and social media for sexual health advocacy in Kolkata, India. This chapter reports on how an HIV capacity-building charity, Solidarity and Action Against the HIV Infection in India (SAATHII), used digital media and the internet to transform HIV prevention across India. The chapter describes the design and launch of the SAATHII website and an online resource centre and illustrates how, through digital media and the internet, SAATHII was able to widen access, advocacy and information dissemination among multiple audiences to complement traditional community mobilisation HIV prevention approaches. To conclude, the chapter reflects on SAATHII's work with digital media and the internet based on the notion of credibility and how credibility is created that allows for mobilisation and advocacy in Kolkata to disrupt dominant approaches to HIV prevention in India so as to better meet the challenges of developing AIDS-resilient communities.

Singh's chapter 'The TV9 Sting Operation on PlanetRomeo: Absent Subjects, Digital Privacy and LGBTQ Activism' ends this section by looking at a television sting operation that took place in February 2011 when TV9, a Hyderabad-based Telugu news channel aired a sting operation conducted by an undercover journalist on the nationally popular online gay dating service PlanetRomeo. The news anchor's sensationalist overtones of moral panic were accompanied by the breach of the service users' privacy whose profile content including pictures was exposed in the story. While such egregious publicity of user information in digital spaces marked a continuity with other local news reporting practices on sex scandals, the incident assumed a particular gravity given that privacy related to same-sex conduct among consenting adults was a legally recognised right under the 2009 Delhi High Court Naz ruling that decriminalised homosexuality. Singh argues that the TV9 sting foregrounds the zonal logic of privacy as more urgent given that the violation

occurred in online media spaces that are only ambiguously private. The scandalously public profile users never came forward to claim privacy violation marking a profound absence in an episode in which the same pathologised figure of the online gay man became a signifier of moral corruption and queer empowerment. Drawing upon media studies, critical studies of law, new media studies and the scholarship on the globalisation of sexuality Singh's chapter highlights the stakes in public identification as gay or lesbian in the Indian context within the Naz framework of rights and visibility.

In bringing together a series of chapters about public health campaigns, the policing of gay male chatrooms, young women's self-representation on the internet, and *janana* subjectivity we assemble a range of identificatory regimes that are formed through multiple power-knowledge formations. In this way, our book attempts to map multiple forms of domination and productive mobilisations.

In the third section we move to digital intimacies (also see Dasgupta 2016) and begin with Sneha Krishnan's "'Bitch, don't be a lesbian": Selfies and Same-Sex Desire'. Krishnan examines practices through which young women pose for, take and upload selfies as sites where forms of same-sex play come to materialise. Building on prior research by scholars such as Cohen (1995) and Katyal (2013) who have conceptualised such desires in the idiom of *masti* or play among friends, an idiom that is revealing of the ways in which the notion of the sexual is circulated in this context, Krishnan's chapter seeks to unpack the gendered forms of playfulness through which middle-class women in the city of Chennai in India engage in practices of eroticism with each other. Towards this, it draws on ethnographic research conducted among college-going middle-class students in Chennai. The chapter thus through a study of practices surrounding the selfie unpacks the ways in which digital cultures mediate desire, friendship and subjectivity. Debanuj DasGupta's chapter 'Disciplining the "Delinquent": Situating Virtual Intimacies, Bodies and Pleasures among Friendship Networks of Young Men in Kolkata, India' interrogates the virtual networks of runaway and delinquent young men/boys engaged with a non-governmental organisation (PDS) in Kolkata, India. Dasgupta argues that affective bonds forged between staff, volunteers and the young runaway boys on virtual spaces such as *Facebook* hold the potential to cut through the neoliberal regulation of the runaway boys' bodies. PDS, as DasGupta notes, seeks to reform the lives of the runaway boys through educational, body-hygiene and income-generation projects. However, the volunteers forge intimate bonds with each other on digital platforms such as *Facebook*, which remain in excess of PDS's territorial dimension.

The screen, body and digital intimacy forged by the young men present a rather queer time and space in contrast to the developmentalist time of PDS, which seeks to facilitate the re-entry of the delinquent boys into mainstream Indian society. DasGupta considers the substance of virtual intimacies forged by the young boys in order to understand the ways their bodies take on a deterritorialising and reterritorialising dimension through online and offline spaces. DasGupta engages with the question of the political potential of bodily sensations. The chapter maps how young men are utilising social networking sites such as Facebook to form affective bonds that are in excess of the regulations disciplining the body. DasGupta returns to George's Bataille's ideas about expenditure, and how our bodies always have an excess of energy which cannot be contained.

The final chapter of this section is Inshah Malik's 'Kashmiri Desire and Digital Space: Queering Indian Citizen and National Identity'. In this chapter, Malik argues there has been an 'invisibling' of Kashmiri desire for 'queer' *Azadi* (Freedom) in response to the Indian postcolonial state's reproduction of a normative 'upper caste', 'Hindu', 'heterosexual' subject and the displacing of the Kashmiri subject. Postcolonial nation-states are patriarchal through the punishing of sexual difference as well as other differences such as ethnic identities, which are considered in contravention to the interests of the nation-state. In this sense, experiences of queerness could be extended to other political identities that do not conform to the 'state-approved' idea of citizenship. Malik begins by mapping out the necropolitics of the Indian state and then problematising the killing of a Kashmiri youth through a conflation of his queer and Kashmiri identity. Examining instances of digital activism and self-assertion on digital spaces, Malik's chapter provides a different way of understanding queerness in India. Malik's mobilisation of Mbembe's 'necropolitics' offers a way of reading how the bodies of Kashmiri men and the desire for *Azad Kashmir* is relegated to (digital/real) death. Malik traces diverse Facebook memes and suggests digital policing and blackouts as necropolitical apparatuses.

Conclusion

Thus this edited volume is an assemblage of a diverse range of theoretical and disciplinary scholarship in order to cross breed between continental philosophy and postcolonial as well as Queer of Color thinking. In doing so, this edited collection presents newer ways of imagining sexual politics and its interimbrication with digital technologies and Hindu nationalism within present-day India. We present a cautionary note toward celebrating the digital sphere as a utopic

space of queer freedom, at the same time gesturing to the potentials within intimate formations forged on digital platforms that undercut the neoliberal disciplining of bodies and pleasures. We remain committed to an unruly body of literature that seeks to trace (queer) desires through the ether, and yet remain firmly grounded to question how desiring bodies are arranged along and across the international division of labour.

In assembling this book, our hope has been to suggest ways of disentangling neoliberalism, nationalism, digital technologies and queerness in the Indian context. Our introduction attempts to lay out a theoretical structure that informs the organisation of the book. The following chapters take up questions of how to think about queering digital India and how different queer figurations are assembled through digital formations. We hope to highlight critique that is immanent within diverse queer formations, and thereby offer ways of thinking about productive mobilisation forged within and through digital spaces. We invite our readers to return to this introduction while journeying through the book as a potential road map, or perhaps a flashlight that helps illuminate the haphazard journeying of the desiring subject. Hopefully, our readers will undertake a journey that has neither any beginning nor any ending, but rather multiple becomings. In this sense each chapter might help gather speed toward multiple becomings.

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