
UNIT 3 MAPPING SEXUALITIES

Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Learning Outcomes
- 3.3 Sexuality in Society
- 3.4 Histories of Sexuality
- 3.5 Sexuality, 'Identity', Power
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Unit End Questions
- 3.8 Glossary
- 3.9 References
- 3.10 Suggested Readings

3.1 INTRODUCTION

By now you know about basic understanding of the concept of sex, gender and sexuality. In this unit, you will learn how a historical and cultural aspect related to sexualities operates.

Generally, the term 'sexuality' elicits responses that have to do with biology. That is, whether as an area of study or as a set of ideas people have about their intimate lives, is sexuality too easily detached from the social contexts where it belongs, and presented as something of itself? There is a strong tendency to view one's sexual life as dictated by its own peculiar rules that:

- a) are biologically derived;
- b) have been historically stable (i.e., the same since the 'dawn of time');
- c) are 'essentially' about our 'private' lives; and
- d) are 'basically' the same across different cultures.

This unit is intended to outline that sexuality cannot be understood on 'its own terms'. It seeks to emphasise that we cannot meaningfully begin to deploy it for whatever purposes we have in mind – activism, scholarship, etc. – until we can comprehend fully that it is nothing but an empty vessel, filling up with a diversity of meanings, beliefs and actions depending on historical, social, and cultural contexts. Hence, we can only productively engage with this topic through understanding the different contexts which influence the making of sexuality (or, more accurately, 'sexualities'), rather than insisting that it constitutes a world-unto-itself.

We tend to both inflate its significance and downplay its role as a *social* process by treating it as a private 'thing'. So, for example, if you are a bad cook, it's a minor blemish, but being 'bad' at sex may be seen in some cultures as a major crisis which requires intervention (through seeking help of 'sexologists', for example).

3.2 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Define what is ‘sexuality’;
- Discuss and analyse sexuality across time period, culture and society with reference to class, status and politics;
- Locate sexuality in its historical existence and change; and
- Analyse sexuality in relation to identity and the notion of power.

3.3 SEXUALITY IN SOCIETY

It is ironic that Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), whose writings were fundamental to providing new – non-biological – directions in the study of sexuality in the West, firmly believed that sexuality was subject to biological drives. Despite literary, historical, artistic and other evidence that suggests that sexuality – both its expression and control – is fundamentally linked to contexts such as class, religion, wealth, and, gender norms, we nevertheless tend to de-link it from these social realities. If anything, we are inclined to think of these aspects as incidental, choosing to believe that ‘underneath it all’ there lurks a fundamentally fixed essence – and a drive – we can identify as sexuality.

So, the kinds of questions this unit seeks to explore are: Can we regard ‘sexuality’ as a fixed concept that can be easily understood both across different time periods and different cultures? Or, is it a made up of the most diverse contexts of social and cultural life, registering changes as this change? European theorists of the topic such as Michel Foucault (1990) have suggested that sexuality as a clearly demarcated field of study and debate emerges during the early 18th century through a combination of medical, legal, educational, and other discourses. That is to say, certain ideas regarding sexuality – that did not earlier exist – emerged during this period and that the emergence of these ideas was linked to the ways in which sexual behaviour was sought to be understood and controlled by a variety of ‘experts’ such as doctors, judges, and teachers. This, in turn, led to the emergence of different categories of ‘sexual beings’ such as the homosexual, the heterosexual, the sexualised woman, the sexually awakened child, the reproductive family, the ‘pervert’, etc. Soon after, Foucault suggests, sexuality became focused on the family. That is to say, an entire range of experts (doctors, psychiatrists, priests, teachers, etc.) concentrated their attention on the family, advising against the perils of ‘bad’ sexuality and ensuring its ‘good health’. So, through these processes, the family was both ‘sexualised’ and acted as an agent of sexualisation. That is, it became the benchmark for topics such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sexuality, and ‘healthy’ sexual behaviour. In this way, Foucault suggests, sexuality became a very important topic of discussion, rather than being banned from being discussed (or, repressed) as is commonly thought. ‘Good’ sexuality within the family–reproductive sexuality, able to produce a suitable labour force – then became part of the development of capitalism. As we will see in the sections that

follow, there are several additional contexts to be considered when we think of sexuality in the non-Western context. However, the key point to retain is the social and historical nature of sexuality.

There is one final point to consider that also relates to the way in which the topic of sexuality is researched. From a social science perspective, sexuality remains an area of study – perhaps even more than other kinds of social behaviour – where any degree of methodological precision is impossible to posit. This perspective differs from that shared by medically trained sexologists and others who offer a ‘scientific’ point of view. This follows from the perspective that we must re-think the truth-of-our-sexuality perspective as well as the biologism that has historically afflicted sexuality studies. The former suggests that a) sexual behaviour ought to be judged according to certain norms; and b) there is an underlying ‘truth’ about our sexual lives that we must understand (for example: ‘the gay gene explains homosexuality’; ‘sexual orientation is a fixed trait’; ‘men have uncontrollable sexual drives’, etc.). Biologism in the study of sexuality, as already indicated above, is connected to the view that it (sexuality) can be explained by recourse to a set of unchanging bodily essences and drives. Hence, just as we tend to think that our genders are biologically determined, so too we assume that our sexual lives unfold according to an ‘inner’ biological template. This, in turn, connects to two other ideas. Firstly, we think in terms of ‘expressing’ our sexuality as if it is an essence that simply appears through its own natural logic. Another point of view would be to say that we enact our sexual selves, that is, it is learnt behaviour. And, secondly, we too easily assume that ‘underneath our visible differences such as class and status, we harbour the same sexual ‘drive’.

Thinking about sexuality in another context – one that is just as susceptible to the inner drive discussion – Jeffrey Weeks (2003) points out that “the real problem does not lie in whether homosexuality is inborn or learned. It lies instead in the question: what are the meanings this particular culture gives to homosexual behaviour, however, it may be caused, and what are the effects of those meanings on the ways in which individuals organise their sexual lives” (Weeks, 2003, p. 34). This is an excellent way of thinking about the broader field of sexualities itself.

Moving beyond ‘medicalised’ approaches to sexuality and those that derive from the quantitative sciences, we can identify certain other frameworks that have sought to capture the social and cultural complexities within which sexual cultures are located. The Marxist approach, for example, suggests that we primarily view sexuality as a series of economic relations of domination and exploitation. So, Marxists would argue, the heterosexual family is a key site of support for capitalist relations of production in as much as it facilitates the seamless reproduction of a labour force that is socialised into an unquestioning acceptance of social and economic inequalities. The overwhelming emphasis on the economic within Marxist approaches does not, however, do justice to the various other matrices of sexual cultures (how to account for non-heterosexual cultures, for example?).

The psychoanalytic approach to sexuality derives from the pioneering writings of Sigmund Freud on the topic. This approach emphasises the role of multiple levels of consciousness in the making of sexual selves. Hence, the psychoanalytic approach would suggest that the sexual behaviour and thought is mere 'surface' activity that masks deeper fears, anxieties and desires. Notwithstanding its interest in exploring the influence of the social environment in the making of human sexuality, Freudian psychoanalysis nevertheless proceeds from the assumption that it (sexuality) derives from deeply embedded biological drives. The drive model is increasingly being replaced by relational and object relations perspectives. These may retain some of the essentialism of drive theory but have also drawn upon the writings of Foucault, feminism and post modernism to seriously rethink their earlier models.

Feminist frameworks of analysis posit the historical subordination of women as the fundamental grounds for analysis. The feminist approach cuts across all other analytical contexts, providing important ways of understanding the role of gendered power in the making of human relations.

Another approach is referred to as the social constructivist approach. Here, sexuality is explored through focusing upon its 'constructed' nature, that is, the different forms it takes according to the different social and historical circumstances. This approach moves away from notions of fixity and 'inner' drives towards ideas regarding constant flux in human behaviour and identity. The approach has been criticised for downplaying the role of biology. What is important to remember is that biology always operates in tandem with social and cultural realities, and it is this combination that produces different ways of being. This way of positing the issues avoids constituting 'biology' and 'culture' as totally unrelated realms, or biology as 'prior' to culture. It also serves to emphasise the fact that 'we become human only in human society' (Padgug, 1989). Precisely because sexuality is a learnt behaviour, it differs across different times and different cultures. Hence, there is no universal category of the 'sexual' that holds true across all times and across all cultures. What is erotic in one culture might not be regarded as such in another. This way of thinking about the topic also avoids thinking in terms of norms: that one particular context of sexual preference, behaviour, and desire is better than another.

Finally, within context, while it is important to avoid biological reductionism, we should also avoid the trap of absolute difference. So, approaches that seek to posit an *absolute* difference between 'western' and non-western concepts and identities are problematic in themselves. The long history of interaction between different cultures suggests that though the specificities of history and culture are important, we should also be mindful that contemporary identity politics is played out in *zones of interaction* that are characterised/shaped by ideas and behaviours from diverse sources and processes, including 'globalisation'. Hence, as one anthropologist has pointed out, "rather than trying to rescue an image of a purely indigenous sexuality, distinct and untainted by "outside" Western influence, it is more useful to ask what kinds of interactions, connections and conflicts emerge in the ...porous zones" (Pigg, 2005, p.54).

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) *How does the Marxist approach discuss the notion of sexuality? Do you find this approach convincing? Why or why not?*

3.4 HISTORIES OF SEXUALITY

In order to think about the social field within which sexual cultures are embedded, it is important to *historicise* sexuality. For, ideas about sexuality – as about its relationship to gender – have developed through time in conjunction with a number of other factors. Within this context, we must also think of how sexual cultures are located within fields of power.

In all cultures, including the European, a wide variety of conceptions of gender and sexuality existed before the advent of the modern era. Many forms of expression – body appearance, gestures, voice, and so on – were seen to be part of male and female, and a broad range of sexual behaviours were tolerated. Some theorists now argue for a strong connection between modernity and the emergence of norms around gender identities and sexual behaviour. This concerned the consolidation of hierarchies such that certain kinds of gender identities and specific forms of sexualities were seen to be superior to others. So, for example, ‘masculine’ men and heterosexuality became the standards for ‘normality’. Looking at some examples, let us keep in mind the link between gender and sexuality: historical analysis tells us that the two are mutually reinforcing concepts and each helps define the other.

In this section, we will explore three other contexts, those that have particular relevance for non-western societies. The colonial era was particularly important as a context that allows us to understand the social and political nature of sexuality. Indeed, the sexual politics of colonialism was one of the most significant strands in discourses that justified colonial rule, provided indices of difference between Europeans and non-Europeans, as well as lay at the basis of European anxieties about colonialism. A significant justification for colonial rule lay in the frequently reiterated notion of ‘reform’ that was required within colonised societies. Native sexual mores were frequently regarded as key objects of such reform and were also held up proof of the ‘moral’ inferiority of colonised populations. So, colonised societies were seen to be characterised by ‘passionate unreason’ and ‘unruliness’ (Levine,2006:125) with regard to sexual behaviour, and it was a common belief that native religious and other beliefs justified ‘loose’ sexual mores. This “lack of reason in the sexual arena mirrored colonial incapacity for self-rule” (Levine,2006:125). Further, while on the one hand a significant colonial fear centred around the threat to the white woman resident in the colonies from the ‘uncontrollably’ lascivious black man (Inglis’s discussion for Papua New Guinea, Inglis,1978), non-western women were frequently characterised as sexually ‘permissive’ (Alloula:1986). Many of these stereotypes remain with us to this day.

There were both differences and similarities between the sexual cultures of the colonial masters and their colonised subjects around the world. And yet,

the similarities tended to be largely denied. Why was this? For example, there was widespread prevalence of homoeroticism among European populations in the colonies and, for many European men in particular, the relative lack of proscription against homoeroticism was a key attraction for travelling and working in the colonies (Aldrich, 2003, Chaudhury, 2004). It could be suggested that the *sameness* of some of the sexual practices of the rulers and the ruled was a key threat to claims of moral and cultural superiority by colonial powers. Hence, the assertion of sexual *difference* became an important part of the discourse of European superiority. The production of colonial discourses around sexual and gender identities were significantly focussed on one aspect: that the gender and sexual identities of the colonised were different from those of the colonising populations. It is these contexts that need to be kept in mind when we consider the reasons for the promulgation of colonial laws that sought to 'normalise' sexual behaviour in the colonies. As is well known, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code – drafted in 1860 and passed soon after – proscribes 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature'. The fact that same-sex behaviour among consenting adults was only decriminalised in India in 2009 also tells us about the overlap between the sexual politics of colonial and post-colonial eras.

3.5 SEXUALITY, 'IDENTITY', POWER

There are different ways in which the field of sexuality acts as a significant site of identity, whether this relates to gender, 'community' or nation. Let us consider some contexts.

Sexual identities are simultaneously historical and contingent. That is to say, they have an unstable nature that is influenced by social and cultural circumstances. Further, there is no necessary link between sexual practice and sexual identity. So, in many non-western countries non-heterosexual behaviour does not necessarily lead to an assumption of being of a 'gay' identity. However, while we may say that sexual identities are fictions – i.e. invented and fluid – they can also serve the very real role of acting as points of resistance and support. This is most obviously true in the case of, say, homosexuality. In the West, for example, the 'construction' of a gay community has been central to responses to HIV and AIDS. Similarly, the emergence of gay groups in non-western countries has served to intervene in and guide, among other things, debates around 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Additionally, such groups have also intervened in debates about other kinds of norms formulated by the post-colonial nation states. These include those that have to do with ideas of 'authentic' Indian (African etc.) cultures that are now being 'destroyed' by 'westernisation'. Writers and activists linked to gay, lesbian, and queer movements in non-western countries have played an important role in re-thinking notions of the 'ideal' family, and normative gender identities.

There is a persistent debate among scholars and activists in many non-western countries regarding lesbian, gay and queer identities that centre around the idea that these are 'western' identities and not really relevant in the context of non-heterosexual behaviour in non-western countries. This is a

significant discussion for at least three reasons: i) that cultural differences are important to consider; ii) that non-heterosexual behaviour has also been a 'normal' aspect of, say, Indian culture; iii) sexual identities are also class identities, in as much gay and lesbian in India might be terms that circulate in relatively privileged contexts.

Notwithstanding this, many would argue that gay, lesbian and queer identities are significant aspects of contemporary sexual politics within non-western countries and should be given the same attention as 'indigenous' categories; after all, we don't refuse to travel in trains (or use electricity) because they originated from the West.

'Gender' and 'sexuality' are not merely ways of describing specific social relations. They are also sites of contestation and transformation of collective and personal identities. Hence, simultaneously as gender and sexual norms in a particular society seek to produce ideas about what 'our' culture is, they also give rise to counter-discourses and movements of resistance to these norms. The contestation of established norms is itself a struggle for recognition: it asks that actually existing state of affairs be recognised for what they are – actually existing – rather than be treated as non-existent through defining norms that wish it away. So, women's desires, gender oppression, and non-heteronormative behaviour are realities of human existence and cannot simply be swept away by ideas of feminine purity, the natural superiority of men, and the naturalisation of heterosexuality.

The trans-sexual and trans-gender histories of different societies around the world point to a multitude of sexual and gender identities and behaviours. The *hijras* of India (Nanda 1990, Reddy 2005), the *kathoeys* of Thailand (Jackson 1997), and the *waria* (Boellstorff 2008) of Indonesia are only three of several such long-established identities. Many writers on transgender issues, Richard M. Juang notes, "have referred to cultural systems in which third gender or sexes have an established role in order to develop a critique of the fixity and universality of contemporary Western taxonomies of gender and sex" (Juang, 2006, p. 256). And that "the existence of other cultural taxonomies is part of a larger body of evidence supporting the claim that Western models of sex, gender, and sexuality do not reflect some bedrock cultural necessity but one of several roads of historical development that are open to future change" (Juang, 2006, p. 256). Given these alternative sexual histories, the situation of postcolonial modernity – where such realities are sought to be suppressed and incorporated into a monolithic nationalist myth of heteronormativity – is a striking one. The history of colonial and post-colonial modernity in our region is, in fact, one of suppression and marginalisation of gender and sexual identities that did not (or do not) live up to heterosexual ideals that were produced through a collaboration between colonial discourse and a native elite that aspired to emulate norms defined by the colonising powers. So, both *hijras* and *kathoeys* – the former may be transvestites or transsexuals and the latter is the *Thai* term for a 'biological hermaphrodite' – face considerable discrimination in their societies. This is despite the fact that within Hinduism *hijras* have enjoyed well-defined ritual and religious roles, and within *Thai* culture, *kathoeys* have historically occupied a traditionally recognised 'third-gender' category.

As suggested above, the colonial period was a significant watershed in the making of modern cultures of sexualities in post-colonial societies. So, certain acts and behaviours were ‘criminalised’, and others were put forward as normative. Notwithstanding the adoption of colonial legal and moral attitudes towards sexuality in most post-colonial societies, there is a great deal of historical as well as contemporary evidence that points to the existence of well-established contexts of homoeroticism in the countries of the region. So, in performative traditions in India such as the Marathi, Parsi and Gujarati theatres, men who acted as women were *preferred* to women actors (Hansen 2004), and in contemporary Afghanistan, the tradition – known as *BachaBaazi* – of older married men keeping young male companions is a common one (Yaqub Ibrahim, 2008, p. 8). That in the latter case, it has also become a context of sexual exploitation does not itself undermine the idea of homoeroticism in the region. The important issue here is the existence of parallel strands of homoeroticism and homophobia.

The parallel existence of ‘men who have sex with men’ but also hate men who might be identified (or self-identify as) as homosexual calls for an explanation. Why is it, for example, that Iranian law permits sex-change operations but that homosexuality is punishable by death? There are at least two distinct but related contexts that need to be engaged with. The first relates to the difference between ‘behaviour’ and ‘identity’, and the second to notions of masculine identity. The term ‘gay’ is part of the *identity* politics of homosexuality that pertains both to self-identification as well as an assertion of the right to openly adopt certain lifestyle characteristics. Now, as considerable research shows, there is no dearth of men in different parts of the world who have homoerotic relations, but do not identify as either gay or homosexual. The latter aspect relates both to the notion that homoeroticism is an unexceptional part of men’s lives, as well as the idea that homosexual men are ‘effeminate’ or ‘woman-like’. Hence, while a large number of men have relationships with other men, there is stigma to being the ‘woman’ (i.e. being penetrated) in the relationship. Different terminologies (‘*Kothis*’ and *Panthis*’ in India, for example) express this anxiety. Hence, simultaneously as homosexuality is considered a ‘life-cycle’ activity, or a harmless ‘pastime’, it is also situated in a context where it does not disturb traditional notions of masculine identity and responsibility (to get married, be the ‘provider’, extend the lineage, etc.).

Though it is a different situation in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Gilbert Herdt (1999) points out that ‘while it is true that Sambia practice homoerotic insemination, they lack the category “homosexual” and have no “homosexuals” to fill the category even if they did!’ (Herdt, 1999, p. 17). That is to say, while non-heteronormative behaviour is very much a part of PNG culture, the manner in which it is conceptualised may be quite different from that in the West. The term ‘men who have sex with men’ was introduced into the HIV/AIDS prevention lexicon in the late 1980s in order to account for a group that was considered ‘at risk’ but could not be accounted for through an identity related term such as ‘gay’. If the cultural politics and debate (Cohen, 2005) around terms such as this and others that have gained prominence through NGO activism remind us that classifications

have a complex social history and are not ‘naturally produced’, they also, importantly, point to the possibilities of change through research, agitation, and activism.

There is an additional complication to the above that has to do with the debate on the imposition of ‘western’ and ‘universalising’ categories on non-western societies. Many scholars and activists now suggest that we ought to simultaneously recognise the long history of non-heteronormative behaviour in the Asia Pacific, *as well as* resist the temptation to simply lable these under the rubrics of ‘gay’ and ‘queer’. The latter context, it is suggested, ‘ignores the manner in which a particular penetrative Western discourse has interlaced sexuality, gay rights, human right, Oriental convictions, and Social Darwinism in confronting the question of same-sex desire and practice in the non-Western world’ (Sarwar, 2008, p. 15).

Moving on to other contexts of identity, one of the ways in which sexuality, gender and community identity come together can be explored through the notion of ‘honour killings’ that are prevalent in India and Pakistan in particular. ‘Honour killings’ occur for different reasons; however, the most frequent reason concerns perceived transgressions of familial and community boundaries when an ‘offending’ couple decides to marry on its own accord. It is noticeable that there are more women victims of honour killings than men. The most significant aspect of ‘honour’ concerns the control of women’s sexuality by men that is seen to have suffered a slight when a woman makes her own decision regarding a marital bond. Courts do punish the perpetrators of such crimes; however, they frequently reflect society-wide attitudes to masculine ideas regarding female sexuality. So, for example, in many cases, the ‘patriarchal bias’ (Warraich, 2005) embodied in the application of laws has meant that ‘instead of systematically intervening to address the violations of the right to life, judges have focused on the victims conduct and have been influenced by and reflected customary attitudes condoning the control of and violence against women. Even in the most progressive judgements to date, when dealing with ‘honour killings’ the courts have continued to focus on the issue of “provocation”’ (Warraich, 2005, p.104). Judges, as Patricia Uberoi points out, ‘bring to their interpretation of the law very masculinist sex-role stereotypes while manifestly upholding the cause of women’ (Uberoi, 1995, p. 321).

Female sexuality and the discourse of public women come together in another way. An example from contemporary Kerala will be helpful. During the 1990s, several scholars have pointed out, there have increasingly strident debate that index ‘augmented public fears about sexual transgression’ by women (Devika, 2009, p. 33). Hence, “visions of dystopia in public discussion in Kerala in the 1990s’ is ‘painted heavily with the horrors of ‘sexuality unleashed”’ (Devika, 2009, p. 33). Significantly, young women who had been subject to sexual crimes were often portrayed not as victims, but those whose ‘worldliness’ was to blame for the crimes they suffered. So, a high court judgement on the so-called Vithura case of 2000 involving the serial rape of a teenage girl noted that she was a “‘lascivious strumpet’ who, as the days passed by... became more and more coquettish and voluptuous

by availing the services of beauty parlours” (Sreekumar, 2001, quoted in Devika, 2009, p. 33). As J. Devika points out, the “fixation with the sexualisation of female bodies is... telling of how misogyny forms a sizable part of elitist cultural panic” (2009, p. 34). Women in public spaces not conforming to masculine rules of ‘modesty’ are frequently the source of a great deal of masculine (and patriarchal) anxiety regarding the ‘decline of society’. The ‘decline’ perspective appears to have particularly salient in an era of globalization, where women are seen to be affected by the cultural and social changes in a manner not ‘befitting’ models of ‘feminine honour’ and respectability. Similarly, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which is still under practice among various African communities, the Bhora Muslim sect and in Middle East as part of rituals with a view to essentially prevent homosexuality, and subversion of female sexual desire. This practice firmly denies women’s right to sexual choice and prevents young women from marrying outside their community at cost of inflicting bodily violence (Diarie, Waris).

Sexual violence is another significant context of identity politics. Rape, it has been recognised is more than a physical act: it is also a means of perpetuating symbolic violence that seeks to establish the superiority of masculine identity. Further, in cases of rape in situations of war and other conflict, the act also seeks also to assert that the superiority of the rapist’s group over that of the group to which the raped women belong. This relates to the idea that if men are not able to ‘protect’ the ‘honour’ of ‘their’ women, then it is their own honour that has been slighted. Increasingly, feminist thinkers have argued that the manner in which we think about rape – as ‘lost honour’, for example – is itself problematic, as it significantly draws upon *male* notions of honour. Nivedita Menon suggests that simultaneously as we seek to prevent and punish crimes of honour (and treat these as a human rights issue), we must also seek to problematise the notion that ‘rape is the worst thing that can happen to a woman’. According to Menon, we must question the ‘*meaning* of rape’ itself (Menon, 2004, p. 156 original emphasis). For, she says, “rape as violation” is not only a feminist understanding, it is perfectly compatible with patriarchal and sexist notions of women’s bodies and our sexuality (Menon, 2004, p.159).

Finally, while the above discussion may have more frequently referred to female sexuality, the manner in which it is conceptualised stands in a direct relationship to the ways in which male sexuality is imagined. So, for example, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women in Indian cinema have (though such representations are changing) historically been represented as the self-sacrificing wife and sexless mother on the one hand, and the promiscuous ‘vamp’ on the other. The man who has multiple partners is, on the hand, frequently represented as ‘virile’ and someone who embodies ‘genuine’ masculinity. In these ways, the cultures of sexuality illuminate a number of contexts human interactions that, in turn, tell us something about the ways in which cultures of sociality and power unfold.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the practice of sexuality in the context of the colonial state. Pick up any examples from any other documents to support your answer.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

The topic of sexualities is frequently approached either through a biological lens or through one that assumes a fixed cultural template. So, for the Indian case it is common to suggest a direct link between contemporary Indian sexual cultures and ‘classical Indian love texts’ such as Vatsayayana’s *Kama Sutra* and Kalyanamalla’s *Ananga Ranga*. Any such link is highly tenuous: contemporary sexual cultures are formed in the crucible of a variety of nationalist politics and transnational flows, assertions of non-heterosexual identities, global sexual-health programmes, the effects of new consumer cultures, changing patterns of work and leisure among young women, and the effects of different media flows. Further, it is also inadequate to assume that ideas around sexuality in non-western countries has been as stable as is sometimes posited in, say NGO or anthropological narratives that seek to account for ‘local’ practices in global sexual health campaigns. It may, in fact, be quite impossible to find a ‘purely’ indigenous sexuality that can be contrasted with a western one: both have been formed through interaction with each other. ‘Western’ and ‘non-western’ may not capture that history where European sexuality has been made through the image of the non-European ‘primitive’, or, where the postcolonial nation-state has built upon this discourse in order to produce its own ‘authentic’ culture. The substantial portion of sexual cultures in the non-western world is made out of these sorts of hybrid transactions. Finally, the search for an ‘authentic’ Indian (or ‘traditional’) sexual culture is worth thinking about for another reason: what anxieties does it express? And what kinds of positions of power does it embody?

3.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the concept of sexuality and its different perspectives with examples.
2. Analyse the historical nature of sexuality in relation to all genders.
3. Sexuality, identity, and power are interrelated concepts. Discuss it with suitable examples.
4. Is sexuality socially constructed? Analyse.

3.8 GLOSSARY

Biologism: Biological determinism (also biologism) is the interpretation of humans and human life from a strictly biological point of view, and it is closely related to genetic determinism.

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3.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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The unit adopted from the course MWG-004. Modifications are done as per the requirement of the BGS-011.