

**UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCE, EMBODIMENT AND  
OVERCOMING SEXUAL STIGMA IN SEXUAL  
MINORITIES**

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**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI**

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OVERCOMING SEXUAL STIGMA IN SEXUAL  
MINORITIES**

by

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Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Submitted

in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

to the



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# CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, “**Understanding Experience, Embodiment and Overcoming Sexual Stigma in Sexual Minorities**”, submitted by **Ms Diana Cherian** for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, is a record of bona-fide research carried out by her under my guidance and supervision. I am satisfied that the thesis presented by **Ms Diana Cherian** is worthy of consideration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The results of this thesis have not been submitted to any other University or Institute for award of degree or diploma.

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My tryst with understanding human sexuality and interest in alternate sexual identities started long before this dissertation did. As a child, I wondered why some effeminate men were ridiculed and feared even. When I was growing, I battled with my own sense of femininity and whatever was understood as masculine preferences and was classified as a 'tomboy'- a sketchy, waste-basket kind of term assigned to girls like me who were not quite 'girlish'. People who showed courage to break the societal gender norms and dictate their own sexual identity rather be dictated on hence, became inspirations for me and I set off, reading, exploring these identities. My masters' thesis on the life stories of hijras in Delhi commenced my research journey into this fascinating world of varied human sexual expressions. I have

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## **ABSTRACT**

Stigma as a phenomenon has long held the interest of researchers from various fields including sociology, anthropology, literature, political science and psychology and has been studied extensively from various vantage points. While the breadth of available literature has provided insights into the nuances of manifestations and implications of being stigmatized, certain types of stigma and certain stigmatized identities continue to stay at the margins of research interests. Sexual stigma, i.e. the devalued status ascribed to any non-heterosexual identity is a kind of stigma that has caught the attention of researchers relatively recently and has been sparingly studied in the Indian context. The limited research available on sexual stigma is marked with a predominance of quantitative, hypothesis-testing models that have ignored important questions like the role of the body in the experience of sexual stigma and impacts other than the negative and unconstructive ones for the individual concerned. In an attempt to plug these gaps in available literature, the present study explores using qualitative methodology, the experience of sexual stigma, its lived body experience or its embodiment and the possibility of outgrowing its negative impacts in a sample of thirty individuals with different sexual identities including gay men, lesbian and bisexual women and transgender.

The study utilizes two methods of data collection- a semi-structured interview and the body mapping method, which is a visual art method particularly suited to explore experiences of stigma and its embodiment in marginalized groups. The data obtained i.e. narratives and visual representations of participants' body maps were subjected to analysis using the thematic network analysis method. This method presents the findings in the form of web-like networks that allows for the researcher to understand the process through which basic themes collate to develop an organization theme and how organization themes converge to allow for the extraction of higher order themes that form the global themes of the study. A total of

fifteen global themes (with global theme fourteen sub-divided into three sub-sections) have been obtained from the participants' narratives of which nine global themes explicate the various manifestations and facets of sexual stigma, three global themes illustrate the manner in which sexual stigma is embodied and the last three discuss the possibility of resisting and outgrowing sexual stigma. The salient findings of the study include the reconsideration of sexual minorities as not passive recipients of discrimination but as active agents who process and hence influence the impacts of sexual stigma meted out to them; stigma based on sexual and gender roles as existing even within the queer community thus resulting in layers of privilege and discrimination in the community; sexual stigma experienced at the intersections of various parallel identities held that is not merely a summative effect of discrimination faced owing to multiple minority status; revisiting the importance of coming out in attaining self-acceptance and outgrowing sexual stigma and understanding it as facilitating but not a necessary condition that is linked to positive self-esteem in sexual minorities.

Analysis of the body maps and the narratives that accompany them reveal that sexual stigma is an embodied phenomenon and is lived by the body in the form of marks on skin, physical sensations of fear and anxiety in the anticipation of stigma and also as absorbed within certain parts or organs of the body. The thematic analysis reveals that the body of a queer person is policed and regimented by the individual herself/himself as a sign of internalizing the heteronormative roles imposed by the larger society and just like the identity of being queer is stigmatized, so is the body of the queer person. As the study explores sexual stigma as having other effects than ones that are only negative and depleting, findings reveal that individuals with alternate sexualities are capable of finding benefits in the otherwise difficult experience of being stigmatised and that psychological growth in the wake of sexual stigma is a valid possibility. The salient themes obtained however also indicate that growth is not a state of immunity to pain and trauma that is attained but a process that is fluid and dynamic

for a queer person, marked with simultaneous experiences of ridicule and rejection and hence may be better understood as ‘growing’ out of sexual stigma. The implications of these findings for future research and limitations of the study are also discussed.

Keywords:

Sexual stigma, embodiment, body map, psychological growth

## सार

कलंक एक घटना के रूप में समाजशास्त्र, मानव विज्ञान, साहित्य, राजनीतिक विज्ञान और मनोविज्ञान समेत विभिन्न क्षेत्रों के शोधकर्ताओं के दिलचस्पी को लंबे समय तक बनाये रखा है और बड़े पैमाने पर विभिन्न बिंदुओं से अध्ययन किया गया है। जबकि उपलब्ध साहित्य की परिधि ने अभिव्यक्तियों की बारीकियों और लांछित होने के प्रभावों को अंतर्दृष्टि प्रदान की है, कुछ प्रकार के कलंक और कुछ कलंकित पहचान अनुसंधान की दिलचस्पी के सीमा पर बने हुए है। यौन कलंक, यानी किसी भी गैर विषम पहचान के लिए उल्लिखित अव्यवस्थित स्थिति एक तरह की कलंक है जिसने हाल ही में शोधकर्ताओं का ध्यान अपनी ओर आकर्षित किया है और भारतीय संदर्भ में इसका अध्ययन ना के बराबर किया गया है। यौन कलंक पर उपलब्ध सीमित शोध को मात्रात्मक, परिकल्पना-परीक्षण मॉडल के प्रावधान के साथ चिह्नित किया गया है, जिसने यौन संबंधों के अनुभव में शरीर की भूमिका जैसे महत्वपूर्ण प्रश्नों को अनदेखा किया है और संबंधित व्यक्ति के लिए नकारात्मक और असंवैधानिक लोगों के अलावा अन्य प्रभावों को नजरअंदाज कर दिया है। उपलब्ध साहित्य में इन अंतर को समाप्त करने का प्रयास में, वर्तमान अध्ययन गुणात्मक पद्धति का उपयोग करके यौन कलंक का अनुभव का, इसके शरीर के अनुभव या इसके आगमन का अनुभव और विभिन्न यौन पहचान वाले तीस व्यक्तियों के नमूने में इसके नकारात्मक प्रभावों को बढ़ाने की संभावना का पता लगाता है जिनमें समलैंगिक पुरुष, समलैंगिक और उभयलिंगी महिलाएँ और ट्रांसजेंडर सहित सभी शामिल हैं। अध्ययन डेटा संग्रह के दो तरीकों का उपयोग करता है - एक अर्ध-संरचित साक्षात्कार और शरीर मानचित्रण विधि, जो एक दृश्य कला विधि है, विशेष रूप से कलंक से सम्बंधित अनुभवों का पता लगाने और परिधीय समूह पर उसके मूर्त रूप को जांचने के लिए के लिए उपयुक्त है।

अर्ध-संरचित साक्षात्कार और शरीर मानचित्रण विधि द्वारा प्राप्त किया गये तथ्य को विषयगत नेटवर्क विश्लेषण पद्धति द्वारा विश्लेषण किया जाता है। यह विधि निष्कर्षों को वेब-जैसे नेटवर्क में प्रस्तुत करती है जो शोधकर्ता को इस प्रक्रिया को समझने की अनुमति देता है जिसके माध्यम से मूल थीम एकत्र होकर एक संगठन का थीम का निर्माण करते हैं और कैसे एक से ज्यादा संगठन का थीम आपस में मिलकर उच्च क्रम का थीम का निर्माण करते हैं और जो वैश्विक विषय के अध्ययन का आधार बनते हैं। अब तक पंद्रह वैश्विक विषयों (वैश्विक विषय चौदह उप-खंडों में तीन उप-वर्गों में) के साथ संगठन विषयों को अभिसरण करने के लिए एकत्रित किया जाता है प्रतिभागियों के वर्णनों से प्राप्त किया गया है जिनमें से 9 वैश्विक विषयों का पता चलता है यौन कलंक के विभिन्न अभिव्यक्तियां और पहलू, तीन वैश्विक विषयों ने तरीके को चित्रित किया है जिसमें यौन कलंक अवशोषित होता है और अंतिम तीन विरोध करने की संभावना पर चर्चा करते हैं और यौन कलंक के वृद्धि को रोकने के उपायों पर चर्चा करते हैं। अध्ययन के मुख्य निष्कर्षों में

यौन अल्पसंख्यक भेदभाव के निष्क्रिय प्राप्तकर्ता ना होकर एक सक्रिय एजेंट जो प्रक्रिया करते हैं और इसलिए उनसे मिलने वाली यौन कलंक के प्रभावों को प्रभावित करते हैं, यौन और लिंग भूमिकाओं के आधार पर कलंक अजीब समुदाय के भीतर भी मौजूद है जिसके परिणामस्वरूप समुदाय में विशेषाधिकार की परतें होती हैं; और सामुदाय में भेद-भाव बनते हैं; यौन कलंक विभिन्न समांतर पहचानों के मिलन स्थलों पर भी अनुभव किया गया है जो कि अल्पसंख्यक स्थिति के कारण सामना करने वाले भेदभाव का केवल एक सारांश प्रभाव नहीं है; आत्म-स्वीकृति प्राप्त करने और यौन कलंक को कम करने के महत्व की समीक्षा करना लेकिन यह एक आवश्यक शर्त नहीं है जो यौन अल्पसंख्यकों में सकारात्मक आत्म-सम्मान से जुड़ा हुआ है।

शरीर के नक्शे का विश्लेषण और उनके साथ की कथाएं यह प्रकट करता है कि यौन कलंक एक अव्यवस्थित घटना है और त्वचा पर निशान के रूप में शरीर में रहता है, कलंक की प्रत्याशा में भय और

चिंता की शारीरिक संवेदना होता है और शरीर के कुछ हिस्सों या अंगों के भीतर अवशोषित भी होती है। विषयगत विश्लेषण से पता चलता है कि एक अजीब व्यक्ति अपने खुद के का शरीर को चमका कर और अनुशासित रखता है जो हेटेरोनोरमटिव भूमिकाओं को आंतरिककरण करने के संकेत के रूप में बड़े समाज द्वारा लगाया गया और जैसे कि अजीब होने की पहचान लांछित होता है, तो अजीब व्यक्ति का शरीर भी वैसा ही है। जैसा कि अध्ययन की जाँच किया गया है यौन लांछना का प्रभाव केवल नकारात्मक और कम हिओना नहीं है यौन कड़वाहट के अन्य प्रभाव भी पड़ता है निष्कर्ष बताते हैं कि वैकल्पिक यौन संबंध रखने वाले व्यक्ति बदनाम होने के अन्यथा कठिन अनुभव में लाभ खोजने में सक्षम हैं और यौन कलंक के चलते मनोवैज्ञानिक विकास का एक वैध संभावना है। हालांकि प्राप्त प्रमुख विषयों से यह भी संकेत मिलता है कि विकास दर्द और आघात के प्रति प्रतिरोधी स्थिति नहीं है लेकिन एक प्रक्रिया है जो एक अजीब व्यक्ति के लिए द्रव और गतिशील है, उपहास और अस्वीकृति का अनुभव के साथ चिह्नित है और इसलिए इसे यौन कलंक से 'बढ़ने' या बाहर आने के रूप में बेहतर समझा जा सकता है।

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मुख्य शब्द:

यौन कलंक, अवतार, शरीर का नक्शा, मनोवैज्ञानिक विकास

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