INTRODUCTION

Sexuality based discrimination in the dominant heterosexual paradigm revokes the representation of homosexuals in the main stream existence in general and literature in particular. Since culture does not encourage the expression of ‘deviant’ sexuality, the mechanisms of the Unconscious will devise its own methods to get articulated. Literature offers such a space where unacceptable sexual images take the shape of acceptable literary images or codes. Oscar Wilde is a writer whose creative oeuvre has been productive in eliciting both the explicit and implicit statements of homoerotic expressions. He belonged to an era marked by social taboos, which thereby necessitated him to articulate the so called ‘deviant’ sexuality of both the author and his characters, in an equally divergent aesthetic. The pairing of two people of the same-sex in his works can be analysed as a scheme devised by Wilde to liberate the suppressed desires of the Unconscious.

Jonathan Dollimore states: “one of the many reasons why people were terrified by Wilde was because of a perceived connection between his aesthetic transgression and his sexual transgression” (Dollimore 67). His works have often worked both consciously and unconsciously, to subvert the dominant ideologies and heteronormative constructs of not only the Victorian society but all those homophobic cultures that still exist in various degrees in various pockets across the globe.

The cultural representation of homosexuals as deviant or perverted contributes much to their material oppression. The act of labelling homosexuals as naturally deviant is a form of social control that prohibits the expressions of gay/lesbian desires. Society’s attitude towards same-sex relationship varies over time and place; but the predominant emotion has evidently been a strong disapproval of homosexuality. Most
of the religions consider homosexuality as a transgression against divine law and its hostility gets manifested as homophobia. Monique Wittig insists that the category of sex and its derivatives like gender and sexual difference have no natural or biological reality. They are ideological constructs, effects of an oppressive discourse of heterosexuality (“The Point of View: Universal or Particular” 63).

‘Gender’ is at present an intensely problematic word and a much contested concept which is a site of unease rather than of agreement. The discursive outbursts around the question of sex have relaxed the grip of repressive conventions and taboos. The case of Herculine Barbin (1838-1868) who committed suicide in Paris in 1868 when the medical examination declared that her ‘true sex’ was that of a ‘young man’ showcases the nineteenth century social insistence on unambiguously classifying every one as either male or female. It is the gallant willingness to put sex into question that opened up an enquiry into the various sexual possibilities and sexual identities.

Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, one of the founding texts in Queer theory, is an attempt to counter the pervasive heterosexual assumptions in feminist literary theory. Butler observes in the preface to 1999 edition of the book that the aim of the text “was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realised” (viii). Various new forms of gendering have emerged in the context of transgenderism, transsexuality, lesbian and gay partners, bitch and femme identities. Butler observes that since normative sexuality fortifies normative gender, to question the dominant heterosexual frame is to give up one’s sense of place in gender. The fear of losing one’s place in gender is the reason of the terror and anxiety that people suffer in admitting gay/lesbian identity.
Catherine Mackinnon is of the view that it is gender hierarchy, not heterosexual normativity, which produces and consolidates gender (Butler xii). Hence for instance, gay people are discriminated because they fail to ‘appear’ in accordance with the accepted gender norms. Gender is performative because gender is established through a sustained set of acts. Performativity implies repetition of an action that naturalises that act in the context of a body, as a culturally sustained activity. Thus gender is not completely an internal feature but one that is produced through certain bodily acts. It is more a cultural performance than a natural fact. The reality of gender can be challenged since it is a changeable and revisable reality.

Queer theorists challenge the validity and consistency of hetero-normative discourse, and focus to a large degree on non-hetero-normative sexualities and sexual practices. Queer theory states that there is an interval between what a subject does (social role) and what a subject is (the self). So despite its title the theory’s goal is to destabilise identity categories, which are designed to identify the sexed subject and place individuals within a single restrictive sexual orientation. Queer theorists seek to uncover the social construction of sexuality, sexual identities and the conjoining process of institutionalisation of the gay, lesbian and women’s movements. Deeply influenced by post-structuralism, queer theory tries to dismantle the heteronormative statuesque where a binary gender system consisting of men and women dictates what is ‘normal’ and considers every deviation from the norm as perversion. Queer theory also focuses on the performative aspect of gender identity as gender is always performed at every point of life through gender specific behaviour and its continuous perpetuation. Gender is therefore not the essence of a person but is continually attributed to one through his or her behaviour and actions. The binary gender system
is criticised because there could be more forms of gender identities than just man or woman.

The question of whether homosexuality should be considered as a naturally occurring phenomenon has long been a troubling issue. Homosexual practices were common in ancient Greece. The most widespread and socially significant same-sex relation in ancient Greece was pederasty – relation between adult men (erastes) and adolescent boys (eromenos). The male sexual activity in ancient Greek society was highly polarised into ‘active’ and ‘passive’ partners; the active role was associated with masculinity, while the passive role was associated with femininity. “They appear not to be of the same age: the erastes has a beard and plays an active role, whereas the adolescent has no beard and remains passive. He will never take an initiative, looks shy, and is never shown as excited” (Dolen). Any sexual activity in which an adult male played the active role with a social inferior was regarded as normal. Social inferior could include women, slaves, prostitutes or male youths. Homosexuality in such a context was considered as quite normal (Halperin). Erastes who shamefully preferred passivity was pejoratively called “Kinaidoi” (Dolen). Evidences of relations between women also exist as far back as the time of Sappho, the Greek Poet. There are fewer references to lesbianism than male homosexuality mainly because most of the historical writings and records are found primarily on men. The word ‘lesbian’ however comes from ‘Lesbos’, the island where Sappho was born.

The patriarchal Roman society gave Roman men freedom to enjoy sex with other males without losing their masculinity or social status. Roman men generally preferred youths between the ages of twelve and twenty (Williams 18). Adult male playing the active role was considered as normal; adult male’s desire to play the
passive role was considered a sickness called ‘morbus’ (Williams 200). Some Roman men even kept a male concubine before getting married to a woman. Social conquest was a common metaphor for imperialism in Roman discourse (Lopez 135).

Homosexual practices were widespread among many ancient Middle Eastern Muslim cultures. Some Arabs were surprised to see the French translation of an Arabic love poem about a young boy being changed to a young female (El-Rouayheb). The references to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Book of Genesis, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Quran speak about the existence of homosexuality in the ancient times. It is said that Sodom and Gomorrah were completely destroyed by fire and brimstone when the divine judgement by God was passed upon it. They were punished for their sin of homosexuality. Since then the names of these two cities have become synonymous with sin and homosexuality (Jordan 89). Today most of the governments in the Middle East have criminalised homosexuality. Same-sex intercourse carries death penalty in several Muslim nations.

The earliest known instance of homosexuality in ancient Egypt is the case of two high officials, Nyankh-khnum and Khnum-hotep. When they died they were buried together in the same tomb. In the tomb there are several paintings depicting two men embracing each other (Parkinson 59). Homosexuality in China has been recorded since approximately 600 BC. In Japan it is variously known as shudo or nanshoku; and has been documented for over one thousand years. It has also been a feature of Thai society for many years. Influences of Abrahamic religion and the laws of Church have played an important role in establishing sodomy as a transgression against divine law.
In the twentieth century, homosexuality has been treated as a diagnostic category, a suitable case for treatment. While the Bolshevik government in Russia repudiated all laws against homosexuals in December 1917, Germany developed a mythology in which homosexuality was seen as either the product of bourgeois decadence or fascist perversion. The sexual radicalism of the post-war period is evident in the way homosexuals turned potentially revolutionary. Glover and Kaplan observe that the term “homosexuality’s first appearance in English was probably in an early translation of Krafft-Ebing’s sexological compendium *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1892” (116). Trumbach and Bray point out “the historical importance of the ‘mollies’ as an early example of what a collective same-sex lifestyle might look like” (Glover 119). Mollies were known for their cross-dressing and excessive rituals such as the stimulation of childbirth. Certain attempts have been made to trace the growth of modern gay culture from the ‘Mollies Club’. An elaborate and detailed cultural history of gay urban life is attempted in George Chauncey’s book *Gay New York* (1994), which covers the period from 1890 to the beginning of Second World War. Chauncey notes that by the1920s the word used to indicate “a distinct category of men who were sexually interested in other men, though not necessarily adopting or approving a blatantly effeminate manner was queer” (15-16). In the 1940s the term preferred became *gay*. But ‘Gay’ was a term used with caution, because by then the world had begun to change and the cultural climate had become more inhospitable to lesbians and male homosexuals (Glover 122). In 1927 the state legislature passed the repressive ‘Padlock Law’ to roll back the increasing visibility of gay subculture. By 1933 it became an offence for gays to assemble in public places like restaurants or clubs. As a result they were forced to enter the closet. ‘Camp’ is another word that has gay provenance. At the turn of the nineteenth century it meant affected or effeminate,
“and to say ‘how camp he is’ was effectively to identify someone as a homosexual” (Glover 128). By the 1960s the meaning of the word has broadened to signify “a distinctive set of cultural preferences or a kind of taste, a highly aestheticized way of looking at things” (128). ‘Queer’ is a term reinvented by gay critics and activists to denote a cultural practice. “The first strategic redeployment of the word came in 1990 with the founding of the activist group Queer Nation in New York” (133). The group actually grew out of political work on behalf of people suffering from AIDS.

Several factors and incidents have lead to the gradual, yet revolutionary growth and development of LGBT movements. “Boston marriages”, the cohabitation of two women independent of financial support from a man, was recorded in the late nineteenth century, for instance, the Anglo-Irish women Eleanor Bulter and Sarah Ponsonby were identified as a couple and were nicknamed as ‘the ladies of Llangollen’ (Mavor). Edward Carpenter was one of the early advocates of sexual freedom. The Mattachine Society was created in 1950 to unify homosexuals. Similarly the Daughters of Bilitis was formed by some women for lesbians. Under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 homosexual activities were made illegal. But after WWII there were many arrests and prosecutions for homosexual acts. Finally a succession of well known men were convicted of homosexual offences and the government set up a committee under Sir John Wolfenden to consider homosexual offenses which resulted in the publication of The Wolfenden report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual offences and prostitution on 4 September 1957. The committee recommended that homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence. The recommendation eventually led to the declaration of the Sexual Offences Act 1967 that replaced the
The Act decriminalised homosexual acts in private between men above twenty one in England and Wales.

The Stonewall riots are considered as the most important event leading to the gay liberation movement. They were a series of violent demonstrations by members of LGBT community that took place on 28 June 1969 at the Stonewall Inn, New York. When the police raided the Stonewall Inn its gay residents protested violently. Within weeks they organised into activist groups to establish peace for gays and lesbians. Within a few years gay rights organisations were founded across the US. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed in New York City in 1969. On 28 June 1970 the first Gay Pride Marches took place commemorating the anniversary of the Stonewall riots. Homophile organisations gradually grew and spread to various parts of the world.

Dollimore who observes that, “Heterosexuality prevails merely because of convention; that historically homosexuality is associated with great artistic and intellectual achievement while heterosexuality is indicative of decadence” (12) also raises some valid questions about homosexuality:

...why in our time the negation of homosexuality has been in direct proportion to its symbolic centrality; its cultural marginality in direct proportion to its cultural significance; why, also, homosexuality is so strangely integral to the selfsame heterosexual cultures which obsessively denounce it, and why history – history rather than human nature – has produced this paradoxical position. (28)

While discussing the reasons for hostility directed at homosexuality Dollimore points out the re-emergence or intensification of homophobia in contemporary Britain
especially in relation to AIDS. Homophobia also intersects with misogyny, xenophobia, and racism. Homophobia gets manifested in the way contemporary culture is obsessed with representation of homosexuality as something that obviously exists yet ignoring its complete identification. “Attitude expressed towards it...express disavowal, hysteria, paranoia, fear, hatred, vindictiveness, ambivalence, tolerance and much more” (29). If we assess the case of many major artists, intellectuals or writers we can trace suggestions, and even demonstrations of significant homosexual elements in their lives. While some believe it necessary to demonstrate it, some others deny it. The discovery of homoerotic elements in the works of homosexual writers has in some cases led to far-reaching reinterpretations of it. When homosexuality emerges as culturally central, its existence confuses the mainstream culture. Various cultural theorists have offered different interpretations of homosexuality. George Steiner regards homosexuality as intensely formative of modernity. Luce Irigaray suggests that the fundamental structure of patriarchy is homosexual. Rene Girard says that all sexual rivalry is structurally homosexual. Roger Scruton believes that homosexuality should arouse a repulsion in accordance with which it should be prohibited (qtd.in Dollimore 29-30). Dollimore observes that “such recent centrings of homosexuality persist alongside the older tendency to ignore it, or deliberately write it out of the script” (30).

In the nineteenth century there was a so-called scientific attempt to construct homosexuality as primarily a congenital abnormality rather than a sinful evil practice as it was done before. Another attempt was to naturalise homosexuality. Dollimore observes that this “was more or less in accord with those contemporary ‘scientific’ theories transferring homosexuality from the realm of crime and evil into that of medicine...In one sense this appears a dubious improvement, merely replacing evil
with abjection” (48). Hirschfeld in the early twentieth century conducted a so-called scientific study of homosexuality and argued against its association with evil. He differentiated them in virtue of their identity and labelled them as identifiable minority (Dollimore 92). There are two different attitudes towards homosexual culture. On the one hand there are people who believe in integrating homosexual culture into the dominant culture. On the other hand there are people who argue that such integration is impossible since the existing order requires the denigration of homosexuality. A more sophisticated attitude towards homosexuality addresses sexual deviation more directly, finding in its inadequacy the origin of a devastating failure of aesthetic vision. The argument that homosexual identity is not biologically given, but socially constructed, is open to repressive deployment and is therefore problematic, because it assumes a social correction that if homosexuality has been socially made, he or she can be unmade.

In 1924 Andre Gide published his Corydon in which he defends homosexuality. He demands tolerance for homosexuality and also insists that it is intrinsically natural. Gide has made a bold attempt to openly discuss the topic of homosexuality at a time when it was hardly dealt with as a subject of literature. O’ Brien observes that during the period of Gide’s writing career no one else played a greater part in legitimizing homosexuality as a subject in literature (283). Gide defended homosexuality as a refusal to tolerate social discrimination and repression. Homosexuals were never considered as normal existence at least until the eighteenth century. Dollimore suggests that, “homosexual comes into being, is given an identity, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In its primary, pejorative form, this identity is understood as a pathology of one’s innermost being” (41). Paul Claudel, in the 1920s has attacked Gide for the explicit homoerotic passages in his novel Les Caves
du Vatican. Claudel assumes that homosexuality has perverted Gide’s art from within just as it has destroyed the person from within.

Alex Comfort in his work Sexual Behaviour in Society (1950) tries to demystify human sexuality so as to release them from the unnecessary and irrational sexual taboos. Similarly, the psychoanalyst and anthropologist Robert J. Stoller in his book Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity (1968) has made a thorough attempt to theorize the distinction between sex and gender. Novels like The Wall (1963) and Ruby Fruit Jungle (1973) have played a prominent role in the long and continuing struggle for the legitimacy of homosexuality. They reflect social change and help form some of the identifications appropriated for the reverse discourse on homosexuality. Altman, writing in 1982, gives a disturbing description of the existence of homosexuals:

...in this century totalitarian governments of both the right and the left have been excessively homophobic: in Nazi Germany homosexuals were sent to concentration camps; in Russia and China their existence is denied...in Argentina and Chile the present military governments have unleashed extremely crude antigay persecution; in Iran the fundamentalist regime of Khomeini has ordered homosexuals stoned to death. (109)

Mario Mieli takes a radical step in his book Homosexuality and Liberation which ends in an optimistic note: “I believe the movement for the liberation of homosexuality is irreversible, in the broader context of human emancipation as a whole. It is up to all of us to make this emancipation a reality” (230).
The history of homosexuality was not different in the United Kingdom. Roman Britain adopted rules which criminalised adultery among males. In the sixteenth century, King Henry VIII passed Buggery Act 1533 making all male-male sexual activity punishable by death. When Queen Elizabeth ascended the English throne in 1553, she reinstated the sodomy laws. Jeremy Bentham in his essay “Offences against One’s Self.” (1785) argued for the decriminalisation of sodomy in England and for the liberalisation of the laws forbidding homosexual sex. Nineteenth century witnessed a wave of prosecutions against homosexual men. The British sexologist, Havelock Ellis in 1897 argued that homosexuality has to be accepted as a natural anomaly. By the twentieth century homosexuality became more overt in London. Amidst the strict laws against homosexuality there were literatures which discussed the theme of homosexual love like the war poems of gay English poet, W.H. Auden. “In England between the wars homosexuality was tolerated in artistic circles with a knowing wink and a nudge but with little approaching understanding” (Holland 5). In 1958 the Homosexual Law Reform Society was formed in the UK to begin a campaign to make homosexuality legal. It caused much pain and took much time to reach a progressive approach to same-sex relationships. Protests and fights for rights have evidently loosened the hard core laws against homosexuality. Homosexual acts were decriminalised in the UK in 1967. By 1970s the Gay Liberation Front was established. Moreover, The Civil Partnership Act 2004 gave same-sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as married heterosexual couples in England. A paradigm shift was marked when Andy Street became the UK’s first openly gay directly-elected Metro Mayor in 2017.

Though there is a drastic change in the attitude of English people towards homosexuality in the present scenario, it has to be admitted that the situation was
worse in the Victorian England. In the prologue to Hesketh Pearson’s work *The Life of Oscar Wilde*, George Bernard Shaw prophetically observes that people’s attitude towards homosexuality would slowly change, but not during his time (11). The term ‘Victorian’ itself implied a claustrophobic room of “overstuffed moral furniture” (Fussell 126). “Prudery urged the Victorians to clothe the legs of tables, for legs must not be bare. They even started using ‘rooster’ for ‘cock’, the latter being a taboo slang for male genitals” (Ghosal 37).

Victorian England constituted a community which was hostile towards homosexuality because the act of same-sex relations threatened familial stability. The Victorian moralists imposed certain social discourses based on the bourgeois ideals of domestic life which condemned ‘abnormal’ sexual activities. During this period sexuality became more and more repressed until it was eventually confined to the personal sphere throughout. Thus, sex and sexuality gained the status of something that one does not talk about. The acting out of ‘deviant sexual behaviour’, such as homosexuality thus moved underground into nonexistence in the public eye. Although heterosexuality was considered to be normal during the period, homosexuality was secretly practiced owing to the laws prohibiting indecency in public. People with alternative sexual orientation often hesitated to come out of the closet, since their orientation was not accepted in the society. Keeping the ‘secret’ within the family allowed them to remain acceptable in the society. In 1885 gay sex behind closed doors was made a criminal offence and this was precisely what led to the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde. Wilde’s trial in 1895 for gross indecency over his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas gives a picture of sexual repression and hostility towards same-sex relationships in the nineteenth century England. Pearson gives a rather distressing picture of the way Victorian society dealt with Wilde:
... It was not a pleasant sight. The Victorians were busily engaged in a very ancient pastime at which they were adept...they damned Wilde with such vigour and thoroughness that, on this evidence alone they must be considered the most vicious age in history. By the fury of their condemnation they stand condemned. (291)

Pearson also observes that “The Sphinx’ is the first of his (Wilde) works to hint at hidden vices...he said that he had hesitated to publish it as it would destroy domesticity in England” (92). The Importance of Being Earnest was staged while Oscar’s trial was a hot topic of discussion in the society. Consequently, the author’s name was concealed with papers on the boards that announced the release of the play. Wilde was a victim in several distinct ways of Victorian hypocrisy and of much progressive yet repressive resistance which is called heterosexual humanism. This social hypocrisy becomes apparent if we examine the writers of the period who were put under severe pressure to come to terms with the establishment. “In England the free space for artistic creation was highly constricted in the Victorian era because of very strong ethical demands. While prudery in life was literally insufferable, the didactic function of art was taken almost for granted” (Ghosal 9). Oscar Wilde is one of the most cherished authors of the Victorian age and when talking about queer or gay history his name is often mentioned at some point during the discourse.

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde (Oscar Wilde) was born in Dublin on 16 October 1854 to Sir William Wilde and his wife Jane. Oscar’s father, William Wilde was Ireland’s popular ophthalmologic surgeon. “Near-dwarf though he was, William was irresistible to women: his first notable platonic conquest was the romantic novelist Maria Edgeworth. At twenty the first of his many natural children was born” (Jullian 21). He was knighted in 1864 for “his services as medical adviser and
assistant commissioner to the censuses of Ireland” (McGeachie 2). Oscar’s mother was a successful poet and journalist. She wrote under the pseudonym “Speranza”. Oscar had an elder brother, Willie, and a younger sister, Isola Francesca, who died at the age of ten. He was educated at Portora Royal School (1864-71), Trinity College, Dublin (1871-74), and Magdalen College, Oxford (1874-78).

Wilde’s birth disappointed his mother who was anxiously waiting for a daughter in her second delivery. So, she dressed him as a girl long after the age when the clothes of male and female children become distinctive. “In some queer way known to pathology but obscure to commonsense this fashion has seriously affected Wilde’s sexual nature”, observes Pearson (26). He was more a journalist in the beginning, writing reviews and articles for journals and magazines. His literary life began as a poet, but his career and fame thrived with the publication of children’s stories, plays and a novel later on. While the contemporaries of Wilde campaigned for new theatre staging radical social ideas, Wilde delivered plays which were artistically innovative and commercially successful. His prominence in London stage lasted for three years, from the release of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* in 1892 to that of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895.

While at Oxford, he was influenced by the Aesthetic philosophy of Walter Pater. Wilde later became the apostle of the philosophy of Aestheticism which deeply influenced his thinking and outlook of life, art and culture. “It was during these years that Wilde developed a reputation as an eccentric and a foppish dresser who always had a flower in his lapel” (Cauti 1). Aesthetes, including Wilde were engaged in an exclusive pursuit of beauty. The central principle of the theory of art for art’s sake, that every artist must have a supreme non-interfering space for creation, relies primarily upon the supposition that art has no ulterior value. Wilde who was well
aware of this argument believed in the perfect artistic freedom. In the essay, “The Soul of Man under Socialism” he argues that “the form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government” (*Poems and Essays* 384). But Wilde’s works do not completely preclude the question of social accountability of the artist. A close scrutiny of his works reveals their social relevance. Wilde’s mentor Walter Pater was one of the key figures for the Aesthetic movement in England. John Charles Duffy argues that “the Aestheticism promoted by Pater has its roots in Pater’s homosexuality” (335). Alan Sinfield has also tried to establish the connection of Aestheticism with the image of queer people who place importance on visual attributes and beauty (84). Wilde is also frequently mentioned as one of the foremost representatives of the dandy culture. “He provoked the jeers of the public by proclaiming and practising a reform in dress and in the appearance of the home” (Joyce 57). Wilde scorns the public voice which seeks to police culture. Dollimore observes that,

> ...Wilde recognizes the priority of the social and the cultural in determining not only public meaning but ‘private’ or subjective desire. This means that for Wilde, although desire is deeply at odds with society in its existing forms, it does not exist as a pre-social authenticity; it is always within, and informed by, the very culture which it also transgresses. (11)

Life is in fact an energy which finds expression through the forms which art offers it. For Wilde art, like individualism, is oriented towards the realm of transgressive desire: “What is abnormal in Life stands in normal relations to Art. It is the only thing in Life that stands in normal relations to Art” (*Maxims* 1203). “Art is Individualism and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies
its immense value”, says Wilde (Soul 272). He is against judging the quality of art in terms of its moral messages. He never tried to classify a work as either moral or immoral. Wilde’s observations on the relation between art and morality are quite consistent and unambiguous. “As a writer/critic, Wilde seems to have one-point agenda – battering the citadel of Victorian priggishness” (Ghosal 40). He was equally critical of the invisible censorship that operates through public opinion. He believed that any attempt to gratify the public expectations is to betray one’s aesthetic vision, which will definitely degrade the quality of art. Wilde was distressed to know that people found in *Salome* only incest and necrophilia. He feared that censorship would degrade literature far more than any didactic or so called immoral book could possibly do (Ghosal 45). Wilde strongly protested against the moral devotion that delimits the scope of the artist. He opines: “No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style” (*The Complete Works of Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde: Stories, Plays, Poems, Essays* 17).

He married Constance Lloyd in 1884 and had two children Cyril and Vyvyan, by 1886. To support his family, Wilde accepted a job as the editor of Woman’s World Magazine, where he worked from 1887-1889. He was happily married to Constance, but slowly their love declined. “Indeed as time went on, his wife’s devotion became rather overpowering, and his epigrams on the subject of marriage harmonized less and less with the Dickensian ideal of nuptial bliss” (Pearson 121). His relationship with his wife declined towards the end. “He seems to have stopped thinking about her or being aware of her, a withdrawal of the premises of love, or even affection, so total that it must have helped to destroy her as much as him” (Bayley 9). W. H. Auden describes Wilde’s marriage as “the most immoral and perhaps the only really heartless act of Wilde’s life” (121). He states:
It can happen that a homosexual does not recognize his condition for a number of years and marries in good faith, but one cannot believe that Wilde was such an innocent. Most homosexuals enjoy the company of women and, since they are not tempted to treat them as sexual objects, can be most sympathetic and understanding friends to them; like normal men, many of them long for the comfort and security of a home and the joy of having children, but to marry for such reasons is heartless. (121)

Wilde was closely associated with Robert Ross, whom Ian Small describes as “Wilde’s first homosexual lover, certainly a lifelong faithful friend and his painstaking literary executor” (xvii). Robert Ross was Wilde’s most intimate friend who probably understood and sympathised with him more than anyone else. They met in the late eighties. Pearson describes Ross thus: “He was a small, slight, attractive man, with an affectionate, impulsive nature, and considerable charm of manner. People took him to at once; and as he had the art of flattering them without appearing to do so, his circle of acquaintance rapidly widened” (182). Their friendship deepened and they were soon ‘Oscar’ and ‘Robbie’ to one another. They remained close friends throughout and Ross remained Wilde’s literary executor. In 1891 he met Lord Alfred Douglas with whom he developed a strong friendship that would last until the end of his life. The poet, Lionel Johnson introduced Douglas to Wilde. Pearson describes Douglas thus: “By nature he was generous, outspoken, loyal to his friends, a terror to his enemies, high spirited, wilful and independent... He responded quickly to kindness, but reacted fiercely against any sign of hostility or the least attempt to dominate him” (266). They met and very soon they became intimate friends.
They were almost instantaneously attracted to one another, Douglas being fascinated by Wilde’s conversation, Wilde being fascinated by Douglas’ personal appearance and historic name... Douglas was an aristocrat, and Wilde romanticised aristocrats; Douglas was a budding poet, and Wilde loved poets; Douglas was excessively good-looking and Wilde worshipped physical beauty... Douglas became his ideal.

(Pearson 265)

Auden observes that it was Douglas “who introduced Wilde, whose affairs had thitherto been confined to persons of his own class, to the world of male prostitution” (124). Though Philippe Julian has traced evidences for Wilde’s attraction towards same-sex in his childhood, Pearson observes that it was in the late eighties that Wilde became a practicing pederast.

We are told by people who study this kind of thing that in the lives of many adolescents there is a period when attraction to their own and other sex is about equal, and during which their sexual bent may be decided by chance. Whether or not true, Wilde at any rate remained bissexual for a prolonged period, becoming homosexual from the time when he gave way to that side of his nature. To anyone who had known him well or studied his personality closely, there can have been nothing surprising in the revelation of his sexual nature, for the emotional life of a man is bound up with his sexual life, and, as we have seen, there had been no development of his emotional nature.

(Pearson 260-61)
At the height of his fame and success he had the Marquess of Queensberry prosecuted for criminal libel which unfortunately unearthed evidences against Wilde himself and led to his own arrest and trial for gross indecency with men. Queensberry hated Douglas’ company with Wilde. He sent insulting letters about Wilde to Douglas. Philippe Jullian gives a picture of Wilde’s confrontation with Queensberry at the Tite Street: “...Wilde: ‘Lord Queensberry, do you seriously accuse your son and me of improper conduct?’ Queensberry: ‘I don’t say you are it, but you look it and you pose it, which is just as bad. If I catch you and my son together again in any public restaurant, I will thrash you’” (258).

Very soon Wilde received a card from Queensberry on which was written ‘To Oscar Wilde, posing as a somdomite’ (sic). In his rage the Marquess seemed to have mis-spelt the word (Jullian 264). Wilde was so upset that he decided to go on with a criminal prosecution. Wilde met Humphreys, Ross’ solicitor, and applied for a warrant. Marquess was arrested and charged at Marlborough Street Police Court, and the case was adjourned for a week. Humphreys then tried to persuade Sir Edward Clarke to lead for the prosecution. Clarke was ready to help if Wilde could assure his innocence.

He (Clarke) asked Humphreys to bring Oscar to see him and said, ‘I can only accept this brief Mr Wilde, if you can assure me on your honour as an English gentleman that there is not, and never has been, any foundation for the charges that are made against you.’ Wilde solemnly swore that the charges were absolutely false and groundless... If only he had admitted the truth to the barrister matters would have rested there, but was a prisoner of the very prejudices at which he mocked. (Jullian 264)
Meanwhile, Lord Queensberry with the help of his detectives set about obtaining witnesses and evidences to prove the accusation on the visiting card. During the trial, Wilde hesitated to admit his orientation towards homosexuality, though he encouraged it in his literary works, especially in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde’s writings were used by Queensberry’s lawyer as evidence against him. “In the Queensberry case it was used as evidence against him, and there are no more instructive passages in forensic records than his cross-examination on the subject by Edward Carson a contemporary of him at Trinity College, Dublin” (Pearson 155).

Wilde lost the first case and his friends advised him to flee to France in order to avoid prosecution, which he refused. He was acquitted of the charges of gross indecency and was eventually found guilty. “He was immediately charged by the Crown for offences under the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act which criminalised all homosexual activity, irrespective of the age or consent of the parties involved” (Varty 7). He was then sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour, “the most severe punishment which the law imposed for this crime” (7). He was released from the Reading Goal in 1897. After his release Wilde lived in France under poor conditions. He lived there under the name of Sebastian Melmoth which he used as a pseudonym until his death. He died of cerebral meningitis in Paris on November 30, 1900. He is buried in Lachaise Cemetery, Paris.

Homosexual practices, though not openly recognised, were widespread in London. “During the 1890’s no less than 20,000 people in that city alone were known to the police for this reason. But the police...did not prosecute homosexuals unless they committed some really flagrant indiscretion which brought their case into publicity” (Woodcock 160). Theoretically, Wilde praised the desexualised pro-male love discourse that was more or less accepted in Victorian society. But, practically he
indulged in the pederasty by having sexual relations with young boys (Bartle 94). Wilde was unable to admit his homosexuality as this would have invited severe judicial consequences. Wilde denied his having sexual relations with boys or men during his trials and thus renounced homosexuality. “This foolhardy attempt to deny his homosexual tendencies placed Wilde himself in the dock; he refused to listen to his friends’ pleas that he cross the Channel, and ended by serving two years in prison” (Stonyk 254). In a society that upholds the ideology of compulsive heterosexuality and undermines homosexuality as a crime, one has no option than conceal his sexual orientation. Consequently, a gay/lesbian writer has to fake a created self so as to satisfy the social needs. To accomplish acceptance in the mainstream literary world they are coerced to be ‘normal’. They conceal their desires and drives because the cultural codes force them to do so.

Since culture does not facilitate the expression of alternative sexual orientations, the mechanisms of the Unconscious acquire a medium of its own to get articulated. The conscious self is permitted to project only that kind of images which are socially and culturally acceptable; but the unconscious finds ways of expressing the forbidden desires through symbolic expressions. Psychoanalysis, which has sought not to silence or repress sexuality but to make people speak about it in particular ways, offers this insight.

Psychoanalysis is hardly considered as one of the physical sciences since it lacks a positivist definition. It is a theory of interpretation and is primarily discussed in relation to the commonsense facts of consciousness. Foucault points out that “Psychoanalysis can be considered as a science of science, since science is itself a highly interpretative activity” (373). The theories postulated by Sigmund Freud offer explanations to the unconscious functions in the production and consumption of arts:
Freud saw art as a privileged means of attaining instinctual pleasure. In order to achieve this end without suffering fear or guilt the censor had to be caught unawares. The successful strategies of the artist in getting an audience to share the pleasure was what Freud called the artist’s ‘innermost secret’ (Wright 84).

Though psychoanalysis is basically a kind of therapy employed to cure mental disorders by examining the interfaces between the conscious and the unconscious elements in the mind, some of its technique can very well be used in the interpretation of literary texts as well. Despite its methodological disparities it provides a platform for the critical examination of many literary works. Psychoanalysis associates literary works’ ‘overt’ content with the conscious mind and ‘covert’ content with the unconscious. The peripheral reading of a literary text may yield to the social and moral demands, but the covert meaning discloses the writer’s unconscious mind, thus facilitating the return of the repressed.

Sigmund Freud, who pioneered the psychoanalytic criticism, speaks most importantly about the unconscious element of the mind which has a strong influence upon our thoughts and actions. The forbidden desires, traumatic experiences and unresolved conflicts of the mind are forced out of conscious realm to the unconscious through a problematic process called ‘repression’. In order to explain this concept Freud divides the psyche into three levels namely- Ego, Super Ego and Id which correspond to the Consciousness, Conscience and Unconscious respectively. Since most of his ideas are concerned with various aspects of sexuality his literary criticism is often criticised as being ‘pan-sexualism’ which means the act of tracing all actions to sexual instinct. What is of peculiar interest to psychoanalysis is that aspect of experience which has been ignored or prohibited by the rules of language. The
energies of these suppressed desires become directed outside conscious awareness, associating themselves with particular images which represent unconscious wishes. As Dollimore states:

...in growing to childhood, and thereby becoming positioned within sexual difference – masculine or feminine, with each of these governed by a prescriptive heterosexuality – perverse desire is not eliminated but transformed, via repression and sublimation, into other kinds of energy which civilisation then draws upon – indeed depends upon. (Dollimore 105)

There are different methods of psychology which discuss the various mechanisms of the return of the repressed. Elizabeth Wright has made a classification of Id Psychology, Ego Psychology and Psychoanalytic character analysis. ‘Id Psychology’ is a model of psychology which emphasises on the sexual instinct trying to find representation in images. ‘Psychoanalytic character analysis’, on the other hand, focuses on the interpretations based on the psychoanalytic study of the fictional characters. ‘Ego Psychology’ seeks “meaning not in the individual psyche, in private fantasy, but in the public encoding of the private, in what was mutually shareable” (Wright 61).

Pearson observes that “the core of Freud’s doctrine is in Wilde’s statement: ‘Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us...the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it’” (202). Freud defines homosexuality as the most important ‘perversion’ of all which obsessively preoccupies many cultures. “He also found homosexuality to be so pervasive in human psychology, and made it so central to psychoanalytic theory, that he became unsure as to whether or not it
should be classified as a perversion” (Dollimore 174). Freud argues that considerable amount of homosexuality can be detected in all normal people (The Standard Edition of the complete Psychological Works 399). He explains the relationship between the perverted and the normal in three ways. First, some pervert trait is seldom absent from the sexual life of normal people. Second, there is a continuum between the normal and the perverted. Third, normal sexuality can be understood only by understanding its pathological form.

If on the one hand the repression of desires helps to produce the noblest cultural achievement, they actually stem from a renunciation which will be the cause of suffering forever. Freud observes that, “Society believes that no greater threat to its civilization could arise than if the sexual instincts were to be liberated and returned to their original aims” (Dollimore 176). The repression of perverse desires to attain normality actually generates extreme dysfunctions like neurosis. In order to escape this, repressed desires seek expression in accepted social spaces, but in disguise.

Literature offers such a space where the unacceptable fantasies and desires become sublimated into acceptable literary images. As Freud proposes, art draws upon the unconscious for its themes and images. Suppressed desires in the unconscious often take distorted forms in literature thus getting projected to the so-called forbidden social space. Pairing of two people of the same-sex in a fictional work can be analysed as such a scheme devised by some gay writers. The friendship between two people becomes one of the key relationships in these works. The two people may come from different walks of life and may have different personalities and potentials, but they are normally shown to exhibit strong companionship and mutual respect.
Oscar Wilde has employed the pairing of same-sex in many of his works as a mechanism to liberate the libidinal desires of his unconscious. The fact that Oscar Wilde, the apostle of the doctrine of aestheticism, was imprisoned for being a homosexual evidently throws light upon the absurdity of the social and moral control that was part of the conventional morality of Victorian Britain. Since it was not morally acceptable in the Victorian England for a person to be a homosexual, Oscar Wilde had to invent this ‘other world’ within his own literary world. To put it in Freud’s own words, “The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously – that is which he invests with large amount of emotion – while separating it sharply from reality” (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* 144). It can then be evidently argued that pairing of the same-sex is a device Wilde has made use of to give shape to his forcibly suppressed sexual orientation. Although the strict norms of society insist on leading a morally upright life the desire to relish a life of pleasure takes shape in different forms.

Pairing of the same-sex thus acts as a device which offers the writer a space where his unacceptable desires get sublimated into acceptable literary image. Wilde, in his works, has thus paradoxically given expression to the ‘deviant’ sexual orientation, while satisfying the Victorian moral needs as well. It took time for a progressive liberation that offered a powerful and provocative counter narrative to the long established story about Victorian sexual repression.

Oscar Wilde being a prominent writer of the Victorian Period has been the subject of numerous biographies. A few among them are Frank Harris’s *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* (1916), Lord Alfred Douglas’ *Oscar Wilde and Myself*
(1914) in which Douglas discusses his relationship with Wilde, Hesketh Pearson’s *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit* (1946), Richard Ellman’s *Oscar Wilde* (1987), a much popular biography of Wilde which received the Pulitzer Prize for Biography in 1989, Neil McKenna’s *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (2003) which offers an exploration into Wilde’s Sexuality; and Andre Gide’s *In Memoriam: Oscar Wilde* (1905). Wilde’s sexual orientation has variously been considered by his biographers as bisexual, gay or pederast. Eibhear Walshe’s *Oscar’s Shadow: Wilde, Homosexuality and Modern Ireland* (2011) discusses Wilde’s alternative sexual orientation. It is also an attempt to study the idea of homosexuality as prevalent in Ireland. However, Merlin Holland, Oscar Wilde’s granddaughter, cites from several different biographies of Wilde to demonstrate how biographies become unreliable fictional representation of so-called facts. She observes that:

Thirty-eight years after his death two of Oscar Wilde’s friends were corresponding about his life. ‘I don't suppose’, wrote Reggie Turner to Robert Sherard, ‘any book will ever be published on that limitless subject (Oscar) which will be entirely satisfactory to everybody “in the know” or will be free from inaccuracies, mostly unimportant enough, and the future historian or compiler will be puzzled to get at the most probable straight path and is sure to stray sometimes and somewhere. All these books have told me that no biography is quite to be trusted. (10)

Not just Wilde, but his literary works as well have been subjected to scholarly examinations. A remarkable attempt is made by Michael Patrick Gillespie in his *Oscar Wilde and the Poetics of Ambiguity* (1996) in which he examines all of Wilde’s oeuvre to bring to light Wilde’s literary career. In *Acting Wilde: Victorian Sexuality*,
Theatre and Oscar Wilde (2011) Kerey Powell demonstrates that Wilde’s works are organised by the idea that all so called reality is a mode of performance and the meaning of life are really the scripted elements of dramatic spectacle.

No attempt is so far made to scrutinise Wilde’s literary world as a whole based on his alternative sexual orientation. Critics have of course traced the homoerotic elements in Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray; and ‘Earnest’ and ‘bunburying’ in The Importance of Being Earnest have been examined by a few at least as a code word for gay. But male-male bonding or ‘same-sex pairing’ in many of his works remains unexplored.

The main objective of the proposed research is to elicit and explicate the same-sex pairings in the works of Oscar Wilde in general and to explore the queer possibilities in it. It is also an attempt to show how pairing of the same-sex in literature has proved itself an effective tool whenever the moral codes of society forbade the free expression of alternative sexual orientation. The research focuses primarily on the creative oeuvre of Oscar Wilde including his plays, novel, short stories, poems, prose and letters. The methodology of the research is purely textual, reading the texts in the light of Psychoanalysis and Queer theory.

The thesis, titled Same-Sex Pairing as a Device to Liberate the Unconscious: A Study of Oscar Wilde’s Creative Oeuvre, has three core chapters other than Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter division is devised based on the thematic concerns of the project. The thesis as a whole is an attempt to bring out the same sex pairing in the works of Oscar Wilde and to examine how the same-sex pairs serve the function of the return of the repressed.
The first chapter titled “The Triumph of Mind over Morals” examines the explicit same-sex pairings in Wilde’s works and discusses the social responses towards it. It analyses Wilde’s works which have explicit same-sex pairing in it. The study focuses on how Wilde has employed same-sex pairs in his works, so as to liberate his repressed sexual desires. An attempt is made to trace the presence of two people of the same sex, most often men, who are emotionally bound to each other. Though Wilde hardly presents them as homosexuals their friendship exhibits much intimacy, giving subtle homosexual undertones to the stories. This chapter also examines the social responses towards Wilde’s attempt to depict same-sex pairs in his works. The works analysed in this chapter include, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “The Model Millionaire”, “The Sphinx without a Secret”, “The Devoted Friend”, “The Star Child”, “The Happy Prince”, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Vera*, *The Duchess of Padua* and a few poems. The title of the chapter echoes Henry’s remark in the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: “Men represent the triumph of mind over morals” (Chapter IV, p. 58)

The second chapter “Mask Speaks more than the Face” deals with the symbolic manifestations of same-sex pairing in Wilde’s works. It examines how certain images and symbols in the text facilitate the depiction of same-sex pairs. Since the portrayal of explicit same-sex pairs threatens the moral stability of the society, as it is observed in the first chapter, the writer devises some alternative mechanism to find outlet for his repressed desires. Wilde has thus made use of symbolic manifestations of same-sex pairing in order to liberate his unconscious desires. He does this by using some every day object or images in the plot which suggests homosexuality. The disambiguation of such objects makes homosexual reading of the work possible. Wilde’s short stories, “The Remarkable Rocket”, “The
Canterville Ghost” and “The Selfish Giant”; his plays *Salome* and *An Ideal Husband*; his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; and some of his poems are subjected to interpretations in this chapter. The title of the chapter is an observation made by Wilde in his essay “The Truth of Masks”: “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth”

The third chapter titled “The Return of the Repressed” examines the various psychological approaches to same-sex pairing. A psychological study of the characters is carried out to examine the functioning of same-sex pairing in Wilde’s works. The study focuses on the ways in which the literary characters and situations can be analysed using the principles of psychoanalysis. Different components of psychoanalytic theory are employed as tools to examine the presence of unintended depiction of same-sex pairing in the select literary texts. The works considered in this section are *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime*, “The Fisherman and his Soul”, *A Florentine Tragedy, A Woman of No Importance, “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.”* and “The Decay of Lying”. The title of the chapter implies the psychological process by which repressed elements in the unconscious tend to reappear as unrecognizable derivatives in the conscious mind.

The works categorised into the three chapters are likely to overlap with each other. But for the sake of convenience they have been classified as explicit same-sex pairing, symbolic manifestation of same-sex pairing and psychoanalytic approach to same-sex pairing.