Chapter V

Repressive Forces to Transgressive Desires:

Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai

The chapter focuses on the cultural and traditional repressive forces that act like an institution curtailing homosexual tendencies. It also highlights the importance of the prejudices that the characters of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai are made to face and the great difficulties that they have to endure while simply yet persistently trying to shrug off the demands of their culture. The chapter also looks into how sex and sexual acts were subject to a whole range of repressions and prohibitions and the evidences that highlights the extent to which sexuality has always been on social, cultural and political agendas in one form or the other. It also looks into how homosexuality has been unusually investigated and understood in lesbian, gay and queer studies largely governed and constructed within hetero-normative frames of reference. The chapter also examines and indicates the discursive explosion in the field of sex and sexualities and how church and state institutions incited a proliferation of discourses concerned with sex and sexuality and its interoperation with power and knowledge. The same discourses ensured that almost every aspect of daily life was sexualised. Both Hollinghurst and Selvadurai in their works distinctly understand this operation in terms of knowledge, power and discourse and an analysis of a certain form of knowledge regarding sex, not in terms of repression or law, but in terms of power. Their novels portray how this power is exercised from innumerable points and how deeply these relations are concerned with prohibition. Characters like Balendran and Nick are forced by these power relations to remain repressed, silenced and prohibited. In The History of Sexuality, psychoanalysis is viewed as a normalising discourse, and if sex is repressed,
silenced and prohibited, then the simple fact that one is speaking about sex has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. Hollinghurst and Selvadurai through their characters continue to establish the grounding terms upon which subjects understand, operate and represent the truth of self, an aspect of identity, a principle truth something which has to be brought into cultural visibility. Their works continuously propose that sexuality is not simply the natural expression of some inner drive or desire but a genuine production of a personal identity.

5.1 Why Transgressive Desires? Sexual Desires and Identity

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the belief that homosexuals were identifiably different coexisted with the belief that these same people were invisible. Indeed, central to the debates about the textual representation and recognition of homosexuality has been a concern over how homosexual identities and same-sex practices might be visualised or spoken of in cultures which either make such identities invisible or silence its speakers. How subjects think and write sex and sexuality, and how subjects relate to the cultural and material dimensions of sex, have changed and are changing. If the sexed subject of early twentieth-century sexology and medicine was figured as either heterosexual or homosexual, as normal or as aberrant, as healthy or as pathological, in the last twenty years such as ‘queer’ deviations and perversions have been deployed to contest sex-gender norms, celebrate sexual difference, and dislodge a hetero-normative framework which assumed that perversion and inversion were illnesses which only non-heterosexual subjects experienced. Yet at the same time as medical and quasi-scientific texts were seeking neat definitions of the new sexual subject, literary fictions were less able to capture any sex or gender coherence. Oscar Wilde’s plays, for instance, promote and venerate sexual transgressions; Radclyffe Hall’s and Virginia Woolf’s ambivalent sexual subjects occupy central place in their respective fictions; and E.M. Forster’s novels, which undoubtedly foreground sexuality in relation to Englishness
and empire, are also subject to self-censorship (the ‘homosexual novel’ *Maurice* remained unpublished until the later part of the twentieth century (1971)). In the United States, Walt Whitman’s poetry figured the nation and sexuality in terms which connected desire with materiality and the body; and despite the myths of silence, invisibility, and isolation attached to the homosexual closet, black lesbians and gay men were crucial in the literary revival associated with the Harlem Renaissance at the beginning of the twentieth century. More generally, the fiction of J.R. Ackerley, Willa Cather, Colette, Noel Coward, T.E. Lawrence, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, and Christa Winsloe imagines eroticism and desire in ways which complicate the binary model of sexuality which was being adopted in legal, medical, and psychiatric journals (Waugh 2006: 429). On a deeper level, the issue of speaking frankly about sexuality particularly one’s own sexuality is a means towards one’s freedom. Yet speaking of sex is not the same as speaking of sexuality or transgressive desires. According to Jonathan Weinberg ‘The transgressive, like the closet itself, is not a universal state, but a matter of multiple positionings. There are as many kinds of closets as there are lesbian and gay lives’ (1996: 14). Amidst this swing of human inquiry and explanations resides the deep human desire to define and articulate the sociological assumptions and perspectives in generating a collective obsession with identity. The basic questions as to who am I? Who are you? How are we different? How are we same? There are often social labels attached to certain human characteristics that have received attention to such an extent that they inherently became known by socially imbued labels such as unnatural, immoral, inferior, contemptible and savage. In contemporary academic parlance transgressive desires and its meaning are like socio-culturally inscribed markers and boundaries of who ‘I’ am. It can be as simple as one’s eye colour or hair colour but depending on the cultural context such expressions or desires may have attendant cultural mores, taboos and prejudices established as a means to police and regulate them. Sexual desires and identity require some form of
definable outward expression. Since witnessing explicit displays of homosexual intimacy is not possible in all cultures and times it is often confused or intermingled with other culturally inscribed activities like the effeminate male, who is often labelled gay, irrespective of his sexual activities. No matter how sexuality and gender are expressed in any given cultural setting they are rendered meaningful only through social and cultural practices.

The nature of transgressive desires and the issue of identity can be better understood by looking into Foucault work. Foucault’s work is important because it proposes that sexuality is not simply the natural expression of some inner drive or desire. The discourses of sexuality concern the operation of power in human relationships as much as they govern the production of a personal identity. By stressing the ways in which sexuality is written in or on the body and in showing how the homosexual is forced into cultural (in)visibility, Foucault begins to dismantle the notion that sexuality is a transparent fact of life. Criticism dealing with the representations of sexualities in literary and cultural texts highlights two overlapping areas of concern and investigation. ‘First, there has been wide-ranging debate about the causes of sexuality, centred particularly on the controversies broadly grouped as essentialism and social construction. Sigmund Freud’s insistence on drive over instinct, and on the operation of the psyche rather than biology, did not prevent the deployment of psychoanalysis in broadly essentialist accounts of human sexuality. Indeed, sexual essentialism in one form or another is alive and well, and forms part of a continuing debate concerning the causes or nature of sex and sexuality. Secondly, critical output has re-conceptualised sexuality in relation to on-going debates concerning subjectivity and identity’ (Waugh 2006: 436). While Foucault’s work sought to critique identity, theories of sexual identity in lesbian and gay studies, alongside the sexualisation of identity politics, have been key features in shaping and giving structure to queer cultures for the past thirty years.
Essentialists usually maintain that a person’s sexual identity is biologically determined and objective, something which is free of the determinations of culture and texts. Constructionists argue that identity is culturally and historically specific, grounded in contingencies that make such an identity relational and non-objective. The essentialist-constructionist divide set the scene for much of the work in sexuality studies. Two of the most significant contributors to the essentialist-constructionist divide are John Boswell and Jeffrey Weeks. Boswell’s *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (1980) came to represent the realist-essentialist problematic. His work argued one key premise: that a ‘gay identity’ and ‘gay people’ can be found throughout history. On the other hand, Weeks’s output, including his early *Coming Out* (1977) as well as his more recent *Invented Moralities* (1995) proposes that all sexual identities are socially and culturally specific. According to Carole Vance, social construction theory grants sexual acts, identities and even desire by cultural and historical factors. Judith Butler equates identity with sex, gender and parenthood. According to her, identity is assured through the stabilising concepts of sex, gender and sexuality confirming to the cultural emergence of gendered beings that conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) has dealt with the notions of subjectivity, developing and drawing on post-structuralist theorisations of the subject. For literary theorist Lee Edelman, sexual identity is constituted through rhetorical and psychological operations, determined by the figures and tropes in which sexuality and its discourses are culturally constructed. Similarly Eve Kosofsky’s *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) offers a reading of homosexual identity in literary texts which is indebted to Foucault’s and Derrida’s trajectories. Rather than a history of changing attitudes towards an unchanging homosexuality, Sedgwick contends that much of twentieth century discourse has been informed by a straight forward homo/heterosexual binary definition in which there is a powerful anti-homosexual bias. This straight forward
binary division of sexualities is part of an oppressive sexual system which is fraught with repeated decenterings and exposures. Finally, the work of New Historicians and Cultural Materialists views sexual subjectivity in terms of the contexts, language and texts in which sexuality takes shape. For Alan Sinfield, a ‘gay identity’ has for a long time always been in the process of being put together or constituted. In its advocacy of a ‘post-gay’ identity, Sinfield’s *Gay and After* (1998) argues that there is a need to recognise that, for all ‘our anti-essentialist theory’, lesbians and gay men in the recent past may have imagined sexuality to be ‘less-diverse’ and ‘less-mobile’ than it actually is. Theories of sexual identity in lesbian and gay studies, alongside the sexualisation of identity politics have been key features of queer cultures. Epstein (1987) and Seidman (1993) argues that a good deal of social constructionist studies through the early 1980’s sought to explain the origin, social meaning, and changing forms of the modern homosexual. Instead of asserting the homosexual as a natural fact made into a political minority by social prejudice, constructionist traced the social factors that produced a homosexual subject or identity, which functioned as the foundation for the building of a minority, ethnic-like community and politics (cited in Seidman 1994: 171). Both Hollinghurst and Selvadurai in their works have tried to capture and maintain the identities of their characters as socially and culturally specific. Apart from the repressive forces their characters have pulled together different issues about their own self in relation to social integration, sexual relations and their gayness. According to Crimp, identities are constituted in relation to each other, but they are also constituted through political identifications which constantly reconfigure those identities (cited in Bower 1994: 1030).

Characters like Balendran, Bill and James are assertive, dominant and self-confident yet needing emotional nurturing and comfort with their sexual behaviour since they suffer from internalised homophobia expressing discomfort being associated with the social label of being gay. Nick, Will and Arjie can be considered as emotionally detached, supporting
friendship and sexually comfortable in being gay. Yet, though they are an easy going group, they are mostly androgynous – having both male and female characteristics with weak traditional and emotional relatives resulting in a general sense of loneliness to address the issue of homosexuality for general welfare. Justin, Robin, Alex and Danny reflect a gay culture of festivals, night club, resorts, drugs and gay social and therapeutic activities. Their lifestyle is an advertisement package to gay identified cultural events and gay affirming activities – an outlet seeking to carve out an identity through such activities. Identity politics is a positive terrain of sexuality in the works of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai. Identities in their works offer a sense of agency at the same time they show their arbitrariness. They are about becoming rather than being. They are a means of realising human diversity and of achieving progressive individualism. It can also be seen as Ken Plummer has suggested the proliferation of new sexual stories (Foucault 1976: 192). As such, sexual identity in their works act as relay points for a dense network of interconnected differences that involve gender, race, nationality and age. Through their works perverse sexual identities, in particular, breach boundaries, subvert good order, reveal the worm of transgression at the heart of the normal, and thereby warn us that even the strongest identities are figments of our imagination – which can make them more, not less, potent.

5.2 Social and Cultural Restrictions

Sexuality has always been an arena for moral and cultural conflict, but increasingly in contemporary societies it is a central issue in mainstream debates on civic values and citizenship. Questions about who we are; what we need and desire, and how we should live are, to a striking degree, also debates about sexuality. The usefulness of seeing sexuality as shaped in culture is that it allows us to recognise the contingency and the arbitrariness of our own social arrangements. Culture in Foucault’s writings, is understood in terms of the inter-operation of knowledge, power and discourse. One of the principal objectives in Foucault’s
work, and one which makes it distinctly anti-psychoanalytic in tone and method, is the analysis of a certain form of knowledge regarding sex, not in terms of repression or law, but in terms of power. Power is not a group of institutions or mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. Power is exercised ‘from innumerable points’, power relations are concerned with prohibition, but ‘have a directly productive role’; and there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between the rulers and ruled at the root of power relations. Sexuality, tied by Foucault to the joint operation of knowledge and power in discourse, is not a drive or oceanic force which, subject to the dictates of either the id or the unconscious, overwhelms the subject nor are society’s institutions quite the repressing top-down force implied in ‘civilization and its discontents’. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s claim in the Epistemology of the Closet of thought and knowledge in the twentieth-century Western culture as structured by crisis of homo/heterosexual definition reveals the signs of what Adrienne Rich called ‘compulsory heterosexuality’. The presence of homosexuality in society/culture and the hope for the visible absence of oppression, prejudice and inhospitality with regards to sexual orientation is a mystery that can be taken as a closet which needs to be opened not just in terms of what it hides and reveals but as an acknowledgement of its presence unmasking institutional power, its past and present, its humour and mystery helping us to understand the world in all its queerness.

5.2.1 Family, Marriage and Tradition

In a world where traditional sources of authority, such as religion, family, marriage and tradition are intensely powerful and where heightened individualism is increasingly the norm, it is difficult to see whether there will ever be a fixed set of values to which everyone would adhere to. The usefulness of seeing sexuality as shaped in culture requires a shift in our thinking about morality – a shift from a morality of acts, which locates truth and rightness
or wrongdoing in particular practices and in the expression of certain desires, towards an ethics of relationships.

Balendran in *Cinnamon Gardens* by Selvadurai is a character who struggles with his identity and his homosexuality against the strictures of family, marriage and tradition, while conforming to social and cultural expectations he enters into a sexually unfulfilling marriage, and reveals himself as a decent but weak individual, racked by the guilt he feels for neglecting his wife and for having betrayed his feelings for Richard. But by the end of the novel, however, Balendran is able to see through the hypocrisies and deceits of his society and, though remaining bound by his marriage and family, acknowledges his love for Richard.

Selvadurai through the character of Balendran tries to decide the practices of freedom through which we could determine what sexual pleasure is and what are our loving, passionate relationship with others. According to Foucault, ‘The practices of freedom are what people try to make of themselves when they experience the existence of freedom in the history that has formed them’ (Selvadurai 1998: 201).

Selvadurai’s remarkable gift for analysing and describing people is very neatly portrayed in all his works. As a gay, he is himself in many ways reflected in his characters and this merger leads to more natural representations of their passage towards their own self as a homosexuals. There is an invisible bond between himself and Balendran, a married gay man in his forties battling to live in a repressed, conformist, colonial society. In his own words, Selvadurai states that ‘As a gay man you can imagine that that phantom figure always walks, step by step, with me. Perhaps I would have married and perhaps I would have been like Balendran while I didn’t intend this as I was writing the novel, in retrospect I think that he is that phantom person, that other me’ (Waters 1998: 1). Selvadurai’s novels portray rigidities at different levels, chafing through the themes of traditional restrictions, political tensions, class oppression and gender orientation. Repressed desires of characters struggling
through the conflicts with family members and social mores in the society they live in. His novels are a constant reminder of the price that a non-conformist has to pay rebelling against conformity – emotionally and socially. Arjie in *Funny Boy* is unaware of gender construction in the beginning as he loves to play with saris and kohl till family and friends one by one make him understand the fact that being ‘funny’ is unaccepted and wrong. As a child and a young adult Arjie displays ‘certain tendencies’ (Selvadurai 1994: 162) which makes his father unsettled calling Arjie ‘funny’ in defying accepted norms of the ways men and women are expected to behave. With fourteen cousins, Arjie in *Funny Boy* learns about territoriality and leadership. Through these he also learns about gender. During spent-the-days at their grandparents’ house the boy cousins dominate the front garden, the road, and the field for playing cricket. The girls belong to the back garden and kitchen porch. Arjie gravitates naturally towards the back garden where the girls play games of imagination. He does not comprehend why no one thinks it strange that his female cousin Meena can play cricket with the boys, but he is restricted to play bride-bride. when ‘the pleasure the boys had standing for hours on a cricket field under the swelling sun, watching the batsmen run from crease to crease was incomprehensible to him (Selvadurai 1994:3-4). Arjie is often times called a ‘pansy’, a ‘faggot’ and a ‘sissy’ by her female cousin Tanuja. The other cousins know that these words are insults, but they do not understand their meanings or their significance. The adults in *Funny Boy* mostly belong to an older, more conservative generation that attempts to fit Arjie into society’s norms. Daryl uncle an old friend of Arjie’s aunt is the first adult that Arjie comes across, who is open on the matters of gender. Arjie instantly takes a liking for this uncle and feels comfortable and natural around him. Daryl Uncle does not consider *Little Women* a girl’s book, and he even buys Arjie the rest of the series. Arjie in the novel is surprised to learn that *Little Women* used to be one of Daryl uncle’s favourite books because his father always frowned on reading as a feminine pastime. As Arjie grows older, his eyes
open to things that would have previously gone over his head, such as civil strife and culturally appropriate gender roles. His love for romance only serves to make these things more clear, as they disrupt the idealisations that he holds dear. Selvadurai in the novel lets Arjie the character grapple with family conflict, political realities, racial hatred and his own sexual identity. In a family where men, including his father, are distant and business-like, a capacity for intimacy and an appreciation of beauty are looked down as feminine attributes. And though he hates sports and enjoys wearing his aunt’s jewellery, it is not long before members’ of his own family try to force him to take up more masculine pursuits. Exiled from the ‘free play of fantasy’ he was allowed in the girls’ world, and unable to reconcile himself to the rough-and-tumble world of the boys, Arjie becomes aware of the unstated constrictions that are a way of life in his family and his culture. These broken ideals usher out the era of his childhood and prepare him for the tumultuous events of his later life and an identity that has developed based on acts that were natural to him. Selvadurai tries to weave in certain processes of political transformation and cultural identification enabling culturally transgressive moves by facilitating the formation of communities dedicated to new styles of politics through the character of Arjie. The privilege to suppress and protect the body and to work for a queer identity is one central feature in Arjie that unsettles societal and familial assumptions that sexual identities, including heterosexuality are stable.

Another character of Selvadurai who has to constantly discover and find himself is Amrith in *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*. The difficulties he had to endure from his own friends like Suraj Wanigasekera who continuously embarrass him over his growing friendship with Niresh. Selvadurai explores and projects the feelings of a young adult growing into homosexuality and the constant tension that Amrith experiences in the sea of his life. As he passed into his teenage years, Amrith felt that his mind was separating more and more from his body, causing him to grow more detached within himself. Selvadurai aims to portray the
deception and hypocrisy of social restrictions that limit and curtail many tendencies that are outside the confines of culture and tradition. As Amrith becomes aware of his tendencies,

He did not know what to do about this thing within him, where to turn, who to appeal to for comfort. He felt the burden of his silence choking him (Selvadurai 2005: 204).

Amrith knew that the rumours about Lucien Lindamulage were true but having lived a sheltered life, Amrith does not understand what the gossip is about and becomes more confused as his feelings for Niresh strengthen. He wondered about himself and the feelings he was beginning to have for his cousin Niresh and the immensity of the problem he had in hand in relation to having it exposed to his family. The dangers of being a gay in a culture that traditionally considered it illegal and sinful. Amrith battles with this personal and intensely acute emotion all alone. Submerged in pain and isolation Amrith, realises that despite the odd manner and scandal surrounding Lucien Lindamulage, he ‘felt that he could simply be himself around Lucien Lindamulage’ (Selvadurai 2005:59). Amrith’s journey to being gay and its acceptance is a personal journey. Amrith’s parents had died when he was six. He was adopted by his mother’s friend and Amrith has not yet come to terms with his parents’ death and the possibility of his adoptive parents’ involvement. The novel explores both the good and bad aspects of family: love and trust, inherited traits and feuds. Amrith’s parent’s marriage was not approved by either of their families, so when his parents died in a motorcycle accident, Amrith’s remaining blood relatives refuse to have anything with him. Amrithis terribly torn in this struggle as he is the unwanted, different product of his parents. He struggles in reconciling his feelings about his dead parents and the trouble in their families, and also with his adoptive parents and sisters, who he both loves and hates. The novel exposes the effects a feud can have on life and in Amrith’s case even more because of the fact that he is gay in a culture and a family that would exclude him again for this reason. Amrith’s past is complicated and he does not even understand his present, He is torn apart as
he swims and struggles in the monsoon sea of his life with his friendship and feelings for Niresh and his relationship with his family, his adoptive parents and sisters. When Niresh reveals that the rosy picture he has painted of life in Canada has been a lie, plot secrets begin to surface, family feuds form the background to current tensions, largely to do with the jealousy over the attentions of Niresh. Amrith becomes aware of his own homosexuality even more clearly as this tension comes to climax in a swim in the monsoon sea, in which Amrith nearly drowns Mala and himself as he quarrels with Mala over her growing friendship with Niresh. The world that Amrith finds himself in is emotionally driven as he is torn apart, through his love for Niresh, mourning for his parents and his love of acting and how he must find a way to put himself back together. Amidst the conflicts of tradition, family and cultural restrictions Amrith finds liberation within his own self and through the liberating love of his mother which acts beyond the restrictions and limitations of time, culture and social boundaries.

Rigidity is everywhere around Annalukshmi, another character that rejects stifling social pressures in *Cinnamon Gardens*. Annalukshmi, an educated, independent, new woman, prefers teaching in a mission school and resents her father’s plans to arrange her marriage. She defies family pressure to accept an arranged marriage and is a freethinking woman. As Selvadurai asserts ‘Annalukshmi was not going to let herself be stopped by the ridiculous conventions of society. She convinced herself that it was only fear of societal censure that made her mother forbid her … After all, when they were girls in Malaya, her mother had not protested when her father had taught her to ride her cousin’s bicycle’ (Selvadurai 1998: 9). Selvadurai’s remarkable gift of analysing and describing people through the conflicts of time and culture can be seen in the character of Annalukshmi. Her sisters Kumudini and Manohari do not share her odd ideas and there is the lingering presence of the high-strung, critical Phelomena aunty who constantly adds fuel to the fire. Her mother Louisa, herself was a
victim of a tumultuous marriage who tries to protect the interests of her daughters even as she has to constantly worry about getting them the ‘right’ husbands. She knows that in all these reputation plays a major role and even mild gossip can harm their matrimonial prospects. Annalukshmi’s longing for independence as well as her conflict at the thought of giving up the chance for marriage and children, is a strong and courageous act for her time. The time of 1920’s in Ceylon, against the backdrop of the ending of British rule, when slight traces of female emancipation was beginning, where she decides to go against her family and tradition to discover her own love and sympathy for the working people of Ceylon.

Hollinghurst in *The Line of Beauty*, depicts the irony of a gay marriage set up that brings into question the larger fantasies of a ruthless tradition. Wani’s mother, Monique Quradi, hires a fiancée for Wani to put up a show that his son is straight and normal. When Wani tells Nick that Martine, his fiancée has always been paid by his mother, or rather kept by his mother for him, Nick wonders how little he knows about Lebanese customs and glances at the house to notice the black front door, the veiled windows, the absolute discretion and exclaims, ‘What a charming arrangement, to keep your son’s girlfriend … For god’s sake, murmured Wani, looking away. ‘She was never my girlfriend’ … Of course you must never tell papa. It’s his last illusion’ (Hollinghurst 2004: 441). Wani Quradi remains closeted till the end of the novel. Nick is not aware of running risks with Wani but is a keen observer of the privileged social groupings that handicaps their relationship. Witty observations about politics, society and family open like revelations for Nick who is highly conscious of his gayness. These observations curtail and navigate Nick’s personal and sexual politics as a gay living with non-gays and as a homosexual living in a world that does not engage with his homosexuality. Will in *The Swimming Pool Library* as he goes to the opera with James and his grandfather becomes aware of the hatred and the contempt his grandfather has for homosexuals and how he makes fun of their gayness. His grandfather belonged to a
culture that disliked, tortured and harassed homosexuals and this dislike reminds Will that he would have to take it for himself and all the gays through life, wanting either to forget it or to disprove it. Both Hollinghurst and Selvadurai reflect on the attendant clashes that family, culture and tradition posits on their characters and their choices in their writings. They also genuinely suggest how the themes of high-society morality in novels like *Funny Boy, Cinnamon Gardens, The Line of Beauty and The Swimming Pool Library* reflect the hypocrisy of the parodies of interclass interactions and the prejudices of politically progressive families.

### 5.2.2 Cultural Norms, Gender Orientations and Society

‘The world is queer, because it is known only through representations that are fragmentary and in themselves queer. Their meanings are always relative, a matter of relationships and constructions. In contradiction, to its title the series seems to say that things themselves are not queer, rather what is queer is the certainty by which we label things normal and abnormal, decent and obscene, gay and straight’ (Weinberg 1996: 11). The novels of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai tries to investigate the mechanism by which a society claims to know gender and sexuality. The struggle of the spirit against oppression – of class, gender and sexual orientation is at the heart of both Hollinghurst’s and Selvadurai’s novels. Their characters are manifested in depicting the nostalgic regret and the repressed desire of this oppression and conflict.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* begins with the claim that ‘the major nodes of thought and knowledge in the twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured…by a chronic, new endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition’ (Sedgwick 1990: 1). The fact which potentially shifts the emphasis that specific acts and identities can be looked at through myriad ways in which gender organises and disorganises society. One of the most obvious differences that Hollinghurst and Selvadurai in terms of position tries to bring out through their works is the presence and absence of gay men in visual culture and its
impact on societal concerns with regards to gender issues. The ironies of certain characters that are suppressed of the gay content within the discipline of cultural and societal norms are symbolically often times taken as a closet that needs to be opened. They are also treated as mysteries that needs to be solved or as a kind of a mask, behind which is the essential identity of gender orientation. Both Hollinghurst and Selvadurai attempts at interpreting these mysteries in the form of interpreting codes and exploring the ways in which these codes can define culture, society and gender orientation.

The character of Lucien in *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* is exemplified to highlight the societal and cultural attitude towards people with different sexual orientations. Amrith had once overheard Uncle Lucky warning his aunt that Lucien Lindamulage should leave his secretaries at home when they went on business. Amrith heard his aunt getting furious with her husband for believing such rumours. Yet, from the heat of her anger, Amrith felt that his aunt knew that the rumours were true and that she was deeply saddened and troubled by whatever her friend did. Selvadurai engages the character of Lucien Lindamulage in *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* to highlight social scandal and hypocrisy that results from being a homosexual in a society that did not even dare to talk about it openly. The term ‘Ponnaya’ which was used to describe Lucien’s odd character by the boys in Amrith’s school because of his secretaries and his odd relation with them sent chills down the spine of Amrith as he realised that it disparaged him as a man.

There was something scandalous about Lucien Lindamulage that Amrith did not understand. It had to do with his constant round of young male secretaries. Amrith had once overheard Uncle Lucky warning his wife that Lucien Lindamulage should leave his secretaries at home when they went on business outstation; that what the old man did was illegal and he could end up getting arrested. Aunty Bundle had been furious at her husband for believing such rumours. Yet, from the heat of her anger, Amrith felt she knew the
rumours were true and was deeply saddened and troubled by whatever it was her friend did (Selvadurai 2005: 59).

Amrith realises that Lucien is different and becomes aware that it is unaccepted in their culture as he looks at him when they come down to the courtyard,

Lucien Lindamulage’s secretary was waiting for him – a young man in his mid-twenties with an olive skin, glossy black hair, and full lips. As Amrith looked at him, he remembered how he had once heard boys in his school mention Lucien Lindamulage’s secretaries and refer to the old man as a ‘ponnaya’ – a word whose precise meaning Amrith did not understand, though he knew it disparaged the masculinity of another man, reducing him to the level of a woman (Selvadurai 2005: 60).

The best exploration of repression of homosexual tendencies can be seen in *Funny Boy* during the game of bride-bride when Her Fatness says, ‘A Bride is a girl, not a boy’ (Selvadurai 1994: 11) and openly calls Arjie ‘A Faggot’ and ‘A Sissy’. As Arjie is caught as bride in the bride-bride game he is taken to the drawing room by his aunt and exposed shamelessly for crossing over.

The other aunts and uncles looked up from their papers or bestirred themselves from their sleep. They gazed at me in amazement as if I had suddenly made myself visible, like a spirit. I glanced at them and then at Amma’s face. Seeing her expression, I felt my dread deepen. I lowered my eyes. The sari suddenly felt suffocating around my body, and the hair pins that held the veil in place pricked at my scalp (Selvadurai 1994: 13).

Amrith in *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* experiences the same unease and un-comfortableness with his drama teacher.

Amrith felt curiously uneasy around madam. She had a way of looking at him as if she saw right into his soul and understood something about him that he did not understand about himself. And what he saw made her more kind to him, more gentle. She never joked or
teased him, or used her wit against him. And yet, her gentleness made him all the more uncomfortable (Selvadurai 2005: 45).

To be gay in Asia in the early 1980’s was no joke, Selvadurai through his characters reveal the prejudices and the difficulties every character has to go through to find his true self in a land where choices are submerged under the pressure of family, tradition, society and culture. Selvadurai through his novels has not only evoked a trend of addressing weighty issues, but has created a forum in which the discussion of homosexuality finds a way into social discourse. Selvadurai manages to critique through his novels the foolishness behind the prejudices of his characters while acknowledging the great difficulties facing anyone who attempts simply to shrug off the demands of their culture. His characters are constantly being confronted with choices, and none of them is simple. He acknowledges the difficulties and does not shrink from the fact that sometimes cultural repression is, in the immediate vision, insurmountable. Selvadurai almost invisibly links the small unknown individual with faceless society, and portrays a nation on the verge of a great change.

Alan Hollinghurst combines his thematic concerns to the socio-cultural context within which his novels and characters are merged. Hollinghurst presents richly developed portraits of the ways in which sexuality, culture, race and history enter into complex relationships. He sums up deep psychological and social satire by mixing gay men at different social levels and positions. Nick is typical of the young men who populate Hollinghurst’s novels. Nick, the protagonist in The Line of Beauty is uncomfortable with the Feddens about his relationship with Leo, a black office worker. The relationship is a sexual education that teaches Nick the risks and rituals of homosexuality and the ordeals of passion. Yet, the truth was he did not have the courage to tell them as he thought that they would consider it vulgar and unsafe. Nick also never
talked to Catherine about his crush on her brother Toby. He was afraid she would find it funny. Nick delights in keeping certain geometries of his emotions secretive as allusive cultural discretions. This social criticism is important to Hollinghurst’s art as he tries to portray the fathoms of male sexuality by combining it with an unsentimental moral intelligence highlighting the social, cultural fatuities of living. The novel also highlights a shivering yet morally exacting satire on the incident of Hector Maltby, a junior minister in the foreign office, who had been caught with a rent boy in his Jaguar at Jack Straw Castle, one of the highest pubs in London. Hollinghurst mentions the allergic reaction it brings amidst the people gathered for a party at the Feddens as the news of his resignation and the end of his marriage gets discussed. Nick immediately feels self-conscious and starts blushing as if he had been caught in the Jaguar himself.

It was often like this when the homosexual subject came up, and even in the Feddens’ tolerant kitchen he stiffened in apprehension about what might carelessly be said – some indirect insult to swallow, a joke to be weakly smiled at. (Hollinghurst 2004:24).

*The Folding star* has issues with the homosexual subject as the protagonist Edward Manners keeps shifting his passions between himself and his lovers. Edward Manners a sentimentally detached man is a private language tutor who experiences hypnotic fantasy with one of his pupils Luc. The fantasy quickly becomes a morbid infatuation that manifests into adoration. Edward seems to be at emotional crossroads as he often smiles at his own sense of anticipation, of being poised for change. He feels empty and aches for his pupil at times. The boy Luc affects him so much that he suffers without feeling afflicted. The novel has been described as a ‘homosexual *Lolita*’ by the New York Review of Books, as Hollinghurst combines lust, obsession, desires with poetry and sensitivity. Yet Edward Manners lives among many gay men not only in the regard of the longing for a relationship but also in the sense of the nervousness, excitement, sensuality
and anxiety that affects gay men with issues of having a committed relationship with one person, the minimal trust of two people pleasuring themselves together without much grasp of understanding cultural vulnerabilities. His character exquisitely depicts the nuances of affection, the anticipation for intimacy, and the desire of fulfilment of unconditional needs. The novel’s stream of consciousness illusions are manifested and merged with Edwards despair over unfulfilled love that is often consciously mirrored as dirty or illegal. The novel redefines love triangles and its social positions and the problems that Edward deals with as a homosexual teacher. He felt ‘half master and half victim’ (Hollinghurst 1994: 28). The mixed feelings of anxious longing and fear of commitment constitute the social and cultural restrictions that forces Edward to keep his affection at bay secretly longing for the intimate companionship of a man. Edward Manners always finds himself marvelling at how his sudden burst of feeling has wrong-footed him. He leaves his home and family, Belgium ‘a kingdom of ruins and vanished pleasures’ (Hollinghurst 1994: 392) to escape the constraints of transgressive anxieties and desires only to find himself trapped by his emotions. Edward lives in a vessel of loneliness and independence as a lover and a teacher pinned and stifled with rules in a social sphere that redefines what it means to be gay.

William Beckwith in *The Swimming Pool Library* is highly privileged, cultivated and a promiscuous young gay man. The grandson and heir of Viscount Beckwith, Will in his own words says, ‘I belonged to that tiny proportion of the populace that indeed owns almost everything’ (Hollinghurst 1989: 6). Yet Will in the novel encounters and experiences gay bashing from a group of skinheads who take his watch and the Firbank novel as he returns home after visiting Arthur who lives in a working class area of London. Sedgwick terms homosexual panic and gay bashing as bias-related and hate-related crimes against homosexuals, ‘The forensic use of the ‘homosexual panic’ defense
for gay-bashers depends on the medically mediated ability of the phrase to obscure an overlap between individual pathology and systemic functions’ (Sedgwick 1990:21). All these directly and indirectly suggest the homophobic attitude of society and people towards gays both in the past and in the present that repress and negate any sexual energy outside the social norms. Hollinghurst also writes about an unpleasant encounter that Will has with a working class boy, who offers him sex for money. Will refuses but there are undertones of fear and violence. Through Staines, a gay photographer Will learns that Nantwich’s brother was beaten to death for being a homosexual. Nantwich’s diaries reveal stories about different gender orientations that alienate gays from the hetero world.

Charles describes a North African man trying to covertly sell gay pornography as he is fearful and scared to be cast out from his community. The novel also mentions about Will’s best friend James who lives the life of a repressed gay. James is a hard-working doctor who is insecure and sexually frustrated as a gay man.

He was so lovable, shy, manly, I couldn’t see why he wasn’t adored more, or more often.

Yet if I couldn’t do it there might be a reason others couldn’t: he didn’t project sex enough, he was too subtle a taste for the instant world of clubs and bars’ (Hollinghurst 1998: 25).

*The Swimming Pool Library* as a novel talks extensively about repression and homophobia that culture and society in the past and in the present have continued to affect the lives of gay men. Will, Charles, James, Bill, Staines, Phil and Gabriel are all affected in turns, some brutally and others less. Hollinghurst through his characters raises many complex issues around class, sexuality and indulgence. He blends in issues and tales of modern transgressions with the treatment of minority groups in England. The details of how other are the gays in the social, cultural sense and how fascinating is the conception of this other in the light of privileges and security is graphically and historically captured by Hollinghurst. He vacillates between the social and the moral with
an almost animalistic sense of depravity intertwining the dark erotic world of gay fantasies and the solid intellectual stimulation of art and history. Culture and society have certain phenotypic expressions with attendant cultural mores, taboos and prejudices established as a means to police and regulate sexualities that have ambiguous characteristics. Yet the science of life and the scientific studies on queer genes and brains are attempting to justify one’s sexual identity. The increasing necessity to analyse and assess exactly how bodies are defined as different and queer, whether they are related to sexuality, and how sexuality is defined has become an important site of contest. Both Hollinghurst and Selvadurai in order to express the needs and desires of homosexuals and to retain humanity and dignity within their cultural contexts, raise issues related to biological and cultural reproductions of processes in arenas that highlight sameness and difference, so that a reductionist understanding of the queer body does not produce the demise of queer bodies and their attendant biological and cultural heritage.

5.3 Political and State Institutional Forces

The understanding of who is a heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual or some other hybrid is a complex sociocultural discourse inscribed by markers and boundaries since sexuality is often policed by institutions such as government, insurance companies, courts and churches and even work places. Thus, the truth of the body is seen as an invaluable means to justify one’s existence and right to equality, a test to determine a person’s real self and imbue cultural and social meaning which sanctions homosexuality or any other alternative sexuality. Hollinghurst’s novels also bring out a number of repressive forces that serve to curtail homosexual tendencies and also to limit and expose actions and acts that are beyond the framework of gendered norms. His novels highlight different agencies ranging from policy makers, politicians, law makers, police and the social elites who demean
homosexuals and homosexuality as deviant and an aberrant category of beings who need medical help or legal punishments to repress desires that are unaccepted and sinful.

5.3.1 State and State Institutions – Politicians, Policy Makers, Law Makers, Police

Authorities and Social Elites

Attitudes towards same-sex relationships, reflected in the general population, the state and the church have varied over the centuries and from place to place. From acceptance to rejection and from expecting queers to engage in relationships, to casual integration, to seeing the practice as a minor sin, to repressing it through law enforcement and judicial mechanisms, to prescribing it under the penalty of death. Modern laws in most developed countries accept same-sex relationships and are accorded legal protection. Many government organisations have established formal structures for confirming legal relationships between people of the same-sex. Yet in many cultures it is still considered unnatural, a perversion outlawed and in Muslim nations it remains a capital crime. During the early 14th century, accusations of homosexual behaviour were instrumental in disbanding the Knights Templar under Philip IV of France. Nazi Germany’s treatment of homosexuality was based on the understanding that homosexuality was a threat to masculinity and was seen as contaminating the Aryan race. In the 1950s, politicians in the United States tried to discredit Senator Joseph McCarthy by accusing one of his aides of being a homosexual. In January 2001, 6000 books on homoerotic poetry of the 8th century Persian Arab poet Abu Nuwas was burnt by the Egyptian ministry of culture to placate Islamic fundamentalists.

In Ancient societies in Greece and Japan, strong bonds between men were fostered who served in the military. These societies believed that a man who loved another man that stood beside him would fight harder and with greater morale. A classic example of such a military force is built in the formation of the Sacred Band of Thebes. A classic work of
Middle Eastern literature called *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights* or *Arabian Nights* is believed to have documented several accounts of intimate relationships between men in the military. A lot of art work that has survived from this period document relationships between men and boys in both cultures.

But during the middle Ages, the adoption of Christianity by the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 4th century and the eventual fall of the Roman Empire led to a decline in the prevalence of homosexual behaviour in military forces. By the time of the Crusades, the militaries of Europe had largely switched gears believing that homosexuality was sinful and therefore, had no place in an army that served their perception of God’s will. The Knights Templar under Phillip IV of France, a prominent military order, was destroyed by accusations of sodomy. In modern times, modern laws have brought about a fundamental shift in the acceptance and tolerance of homosexual behaviour. Europe and North America have seen a growing acceptance of homosexuality as a result of modern liberalism and the Gay Liberation movement. Yet by contrast many Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries have gone from tolerance to outright hostility. Attitudes in countries like the United Kingdom and the Netherlands openly accept homosexual individuals into the armed forces and others but the United States and many nations in South America and the Caribbean are either discharging or quieting homosexuals from military services. This strict interpretation is also known as Sharia an Islamic law to remove individuals believed to be homosexuals from their armed forces. They are many times subjected to torture, humiliation, marginalisation and even death penalty. The novels of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai bring to attention the nature of political and state institutional forces that directly and indirectly affect the lives of their characters. From the lives of gay men in the 1920’s in London to the romantic disillusions’ of contemporary gay men in the novels of Hollinghurst and in the novels of Selvadurai the
experiences of being gay and different in a patriarchal society stifled by tradition and customs.

Lord Charles Nantwich, an 83 year old aristocrat is jailed for being a homosexual in *The Swimming Pool Library* by Hollinghurst. The novel is pervaded with homophobia which is addressed in many forms. Through Nantwich’s diary in the novel which is given to William Beckwith, the life of gay men before the Gay Liberation Movement is brought to light. From the moment Will starts reading his journals, new truths and new perspectives are opened up to him. The novel is an honest exposure of gay world before the Second World War when homosexuality was still considered a crime and a sin. The diaries reveal how homosexuals were bashed, tortured, discriminated and even killed by high officials and politicians ruthlessly, trampling a culture that existed outside heterosexuality and the accepted norms of gender.

In Nantwich’s own words he expresses the disillusionment he feels in a world where he is negated as a social taboo, a sick sexual being who has to give up his transgressive desires to be considered normal. During his stay in the prison he explains the months in the Scrubs as a kind of desert in time, featureless, blurred, silent and atrocious

My early days there called on my resilience. It was like being pitched again into the Gothic and arcane world of school, learning again to absorb or deflect the vengeful energies which governed it. But a difference soon emerged, for a while the schoolboys were bound to struggle for supremacy, and in doing so to align themselves with authority, thus becoming educated and socially orthodox at once, we in the prison were joined by our unorthodoxy: we were all social outcasts. The effects of this were often ambiguous. Many of the distinctions of the outside world survived: respect for class, disgust at certain violent or inhuman crimes, and the ostracising of those who had been convicted of them. But at the same time, since we were all criminals, a layer of social pretence had been removed. There
could be no question of pretending one was not a lover of men; and since many of the inmates of my wing were sex criminals – or ‘nonces’ in the nonce-word of the place – there was between us a curiously sustaining mood of sympathy and understanding (Hollinghurst 1988: 295-96).

The character of Bill in The Swimming Pool Library clearly evokes the fear of policemen and authority. Bill is a weightlifter, a large muscular man who coaches teenage boxers. Trapped inside his body, Bill seems a fearful man. He is devoted to Nantwich, his patron, and to the boys he coaches.

Bill and I became great friends, and he, who was regarded as a kind of mascot by many of his fellows, and entrusted with secrets in the way that one might pour out one’s feelings to one’s dog or cat, knew a great deal about almost everybody, and seemed to feel keenly their various trials and tragedies. He pointed out to me a number of relationships between the men, confirmed my suspicious interpretations of odd gestures and habits, and revealed what was fairly a structure of submerged bonds and loyalties (Hollinghurst 1988: 298).

We meet another character, Charles’s brother, a homosexual who exploited his servants and was subsequently beaten to death for being a homosexual. The novel from one angle explores modern gay culture, with its pubs, clubs and swimming pools exposing new independence and identity assertion but at the same time there are repressive forces of the past which Hollinghurst presents through the diaries of Nantwich in The Swimming Pool Library that highlight the dangers and the risks associated with being a homosexual before the Stonewall Era. Yet, even after decades of fighting for sexual freedom and homosexual persecution there are characters like Nick and James who still feel alienated and discriminated in the passage to assert an identity of their own. In Will’s own words he says ‘And then what the hell had James done? Though he had his mischievous side he was a conscientiously good citizen. He parked on yellow lines, but he always displaced his ‘Doctor
on Call’ sticker’ (Hollinghurst 1988: 251). James’s house was a neat comfortable flat with a mood of transience and fine living Will remarks that even in his own house James would nicely tuck away certain magazines of the Third World Press on black homosexuals which might have an exploitive urge. Will gets a telephone call from James; he tells Will that he has been arrested while seeking sex, this is ironic since James’s sex-life is non-eventful compared to Will’s. It appears to be a case of police-entrapment, with an undercover officer soliciting sex from homosexual men. Another instance that Charles talks about in the novel is the sense of devotion that homosexuality can foster between men and how that devotion aids duty and right action when in a circle like a military operation opens a new outlook to view homosexuality from a homosocial angle. Nick the protagonist in *The Line of Beauty* represents the tension and the realities of gay life against the backdrop of Thatcher – Era England. Nick, who is new to both his sexuality and manners of high society, experiences the dangers and rewards of his own private pursuit of a beautiful identity.

Nick was confident that none of them knew he was sleeping with the boss, and with ten or more years of practice he could head off almost any train of talk that might end in a thought – provoking blush. Part of him longed for the scandalous acclaim, but Wani exacted total secrecy, and Nick enjoyed keeping secrets (Hollinghurst 2004: 207).

As the boom years of the eighties unfold, Nick, an innocent in the world of politics and money, finds his life altered by the rising fortunes of this glamorous family, the Feddens. His two vividly contrasting love affairs, one with a young black clerk and one with a Lebanese millionaire, harbingers the dangers and rewards of his own private pursuit of identity, a pursuit as compelling to Nick as the desire for power and riches among his friends. The novel navigates the problems of being gay in an era of drugs, AIDS and growing sexual politics. Nick, Wani and Leo - all go through personal and private ups and downs as gays in a straight world where they are snubbed, insulted and ignored.
Still, they had all the rest, sex, money, power: it was everything they wanted, and it was everything Gerald wanted too. There was a strange concurrence about that. Nick felt his life horribly and needlessly broken open, but with a tiny hard part of himself he observed what was happening with detachment as well as contempt (Hollinghurst 2004: 472).

Hollinghurst points out the vastly disingenuous treatment of homosexuality by politicians, and their demonising attitude towards homosexualities in their talks, policies and political agendas. This social criticism is primary in Hollinghurst’s art and he delightfully projects the lubricious fathoms of male sexuality combining it with an unsentimental moral intelligence and the fatuities of fine living as defined by the tenets of politicians and law makers. Gerald, in the novel even after several illuminating conversations with Nick, insists on maintaining the culture of intolerance, and laughs at the idea of equal rights when talking about sexual rights completely destroying any amount of gay self-expression by his self-serving policies.

Gerald pondered this and then flicked up his eyebrows in sour resignation. The facts of gay life had always been taboo with him: he and Nick had never shared a frank word or knowing joke about them, and this was an odd place to start (Hollinghurst 2004: 479).

When Nick is made to leave the house after the scandalous exposure of their private lives Gerald very neatly projects the difference in the scandals committed by both of them, demeaning one because it is homosexual in nature and justifying the other because it is heterosexual in nature though immoral.

No, actually, you haven’t the faintest … idea what you’re talking about!’ He stood up convulsively, and then sat down again, with a sort of sneer. ‘Do you honestly imagine that your affairs can be talked about in the same terms as mine? – I ask you again, who are you? What … are you doing here? (Hollinghurst 2004: 482).
In *The Folding Star* Hollinghurst exposes us fearlessly to the consequences of unfulfillable, annihilating desire which is objectified in Edward Manners’ pursuit of a male Lolita symbolically represented by Luc. The novel does not have much repressive elements, yet, it has repression which is psychologically projected through the unfulfilling attempts of Manners’ broken love affair. It delivers the message that the course of true love never runs straight and that it has invisible social laws and forces that annihilate the course of homosexual desires. In his own country Belgium, Edward feels uncomfortable and rejected as he ruminates:

I felt the poetry of the thing tonight, perched above the breakers and the dim phosphorescence of the returning foam. I knew nothing about this country, to me it was a dream-Belgium, it was Allemonde, a kingdom of ruins and vanished pleasures, miracles and martyrdoms, corners where the light never shone. Not many would recognise it, but some would. I seemed to have lost Luc in it. It was his wildness that had brought me to him and now it had taken him away. I studied my situation with a certain aesthetic amazement (Hollinghurst 1994: 392).

Selvadurai’s character Balendran in *Cinnamon Gardens* is the obedient son who hides his homosexuality under a façade of comfort and lies. He belongs to an upper class family of Colombo’s wealthy suburbs. As a member of the social elites, Balendran negotiates his homosexuality to the dictates of his father’s patriarchal and traditional ways. Balendran is a character that is sympathetically structured and portrayed by Selvadurai as his own phantom self. Balendran in the course of the novel gets tested by a lot of events that question and provoke his sensibility as a gay. The clasp of social and elitist chain that binds and tortures and frequently prick his conscious seasons Balendran to discover his true self. Balendran struggles not because he does not love his wife or father but because he rejects his own self and his sexual nature.
Love. He rolled the word around in his mind. He knew that his love for Richard was long dead. The passing of twenty years, a wife whom he loved in his own way, and a son, whom the very thought of filled him with happiness, insured that. As for the type of love Richard and he had had, he accepted that it was part of his nature. His disposition, like a harsh word spoken, a cruel act done, was regrettably irreversible. Just something he had learnt to live with, a daily impediment, like a pair of spectacles or a badly set fracture (Selvadurai 1998: 38).

Balendran’s character manifests the politics of social and class repressions that authorises his homosexuality and its consequences in a society that practically looks down at it as a disease and as a degrading social behaviour. Arjie in *Funny Boy* is sent to a Victoria Academy to force him to become a man, an institution that caters to elites in the Sri Lankan society. The Queen Victoria Academy serves as a symbol for colonial, aristocratic and middle class privilege – male privilege. This is the tradition Arjie is expected to be part of. Arjie’s father institutionalises Arjie thinking that rules and regulations can correct the funny homosexual trait in his son. Indeed Arjie’s father tells him that the academy ‘will force you to become a man’. Arjie’s older brother tells him that their father suspects and fears his homosexuality; his move to the academy is clearly to cure him of the affliction. But Arjie rebels against the institution and the sadistic principal and strikes up an intense friendship with a fellow student who is also rumoured to be gay. As gay men and as gay teenagers the characters of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai continuously live and fight the system that demean, contempt and harass homosexuality and homosexuals. The characters attendant clashes within their own self and with the forces of the social and the political are the main ingredients that fill the lines of their novels. The issue of being liberated in the mind and the areas of life that are manifested in the roots of culture, system and tradition are the questions that Hollinghurst and Selvadurai fight for through their writings.
5.4 Homosexuality, Religious and Sexual Negotiations

Many people who feel attracted to members of their own sex have a so called coming out phase at some point of their lives. It is generally described in two phases. The first phase is the phase of ‘knowing oneself’, and the realisation or knowledge emerges from the understanding that one is open to same-sex love. This is often described as an internal coming out. The second phase involves one’s decision to come out to others, which involves coming out to family, friends and colleagues. Coming out can sometimes lead to a life crises, as gender behaviour is predominantly oriented with culture and legal ideologies. The Supreme Court of Canada, citing the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, has established the legality of same-sex relationship on the basis of human rights, but it is still difficult to change their moral stance on homosexuality. Many people in religious groups recognize homosexuals to choose a same-sex relationship, but also believe that same-sex relationships are incompatible with their chosen religious practices. In psychology it is considered an ‘understudied relationship’. Social psychologists J.T. Wood and S.W. Duck (1996) in their book Understudied Relationships found that most mainstream research is predisposed towards studying only heterosexuality, implying that same-sex relationships are neglected and ignored by majority of psychologists. Religion and its influence have major implications on the issue of homosexual negotiations. The Roman Catholic Church requires homosexuals to practice chastity in the understanding that homosexual acts are ‘intrinsically disordered’ and insists on the fact that all are expected to only have heterosexual relations and only in the context of a marriage, describing homosexual tendencies as a trial by stressing that people with such tendencies must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. The church distinguishes between deep-seated homosexual tendencies and those that are only the expression of a transitory problem. The Vatican requires and states that any homosexual tendency or tendencies must be overcome at least three years before ordination to the
In the wake of colonialism and imperialism, countries undertaken by the Abrahamic faith and Non-abrahamic religious groups have shown new adopted attitudes which are antagonistic towards homosexuality. Taking an example, when India became part of the British Empire, sodomy laws were introduced; while there was no basis for them in the Hindu faith which led to persecution in society and in religion. This experience was repeated by other Abrahamic religious nations upon their acquisitions by the British Empire. Although Hinduism at present has taken various positions ranging from positive to neutral to antagonistic with regards to homosexuality, these laws have brought it repression in myriad forms with regards to the understanding of a third gender in the legal and institutional sense.

Sikhism, another religious sect of India has no written view on the matter, but the Sikh society is generally understood as an ultra-masculine and a conservative society, tolerance of any homosexual behaviour or orientation is bound to meet outrage or strong disapproval. However, many Sikhs do believe that Guru Nanak’s emphasis on universal equality and brotherhood is fundamentally in support of homosexual human rights.

Confucianism has allowed homosexual sex with the precondition of procreation. Abrahamic religions have held varied views of homosexuality, depending on place, time and form of same-sex desire. Islam regards love and desire for beautiful youths as a natural temptation for all men, but sexual relations as a transgression nugatory of the natural role and aim of sexual activity. Buddhism traditionally does not concern itself with the gender of the beloved. Contemporary Western Buddhists and many Japanese and Chinese schools hold very accepting views, something that is traditionally allowed when the relationship does not impede the birth of a child, while other Eastern Buddhists since colonial times have adopted attitudes that scorn the practice.

Christianity has traditionally condemned deliberately non-procreative sex, and while attitudes have in some sectors been liberalised, the majority of denominations still view homosexual relationships as sinful. Judaism, depending on the movement, is either liberal, conservative,
or neutral on the subject. The Orthodox tradition generally views homosexual sex as sinful and views homosexual attraction as out of the norm, while religious sects such as Reform Judaism and Reconstructionism are fully accepting of gay attraction and sex. Conservative Judaism doesn’t view attraction as sinful. Homosexual acts are just thought of as being equal to breaking any other of the mitzvot (Jewish commandments). This movement, however, does not admit openly gay Jews as rabbis, nor does it perform commitment ceremonies. It is very open to it, and because of the movement’s belief in an evolving Torah (law of God in Judaism), the issue is very big in the movement today. Native American religions generally grant gender-variant individuals honoured status for their perceived spiritual powers. Shintoism, Discordianism and Taoism regard homosexuality positively. Religions collectively termed as ‘Pagan’ including Druidism and Wicca are also beginning to accept.

Apart from the repressive forces, the characters of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai have pulled together different issues about their own self in relation to social integration, sexual relations and their gayness.

They were moving at once in the element of music, the earth-tremor bass and penetrating shimmer of high metallic noise. Alex checked his jacket, and he stepped down with Danny on to the edge of the immense dance-floor, swept by brilliant unpredictable stabs of light, a shiver of recognition ran up him from his heels to his scalp, where it lingered and then gently dropped downwards again through his shoulders and spine. On the wall behind him was a sign saying ‘Dangerously Loud Music’. Alex was shocked and laughing at the sound (Hollinghurst 1998: 81).

It is also important to note that in the works of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai, there is a continuous negotiation of homosexuality and class not just as a matter of life’s current situation but as the results of intricate background factors. Family comforts in relation to homosexuality play a major role in impacting the lives of most gay men. Some of the
characters try to talk to their family about being gay; some never talk about since they are considered ‘different’ or ‘funny’ or ‘ponnaya’ and some are rejected by their family and society for being gay. Many such factors as problems in marriage, politics, social class and gender stresses have been pointed out as the resulting repressive forces of coming out open in the novels of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai. Leo’s mother in The Line of Beauty is an orthodox, devout Christian who does not accept her son’s homosexuality till the end. When Nick and Leo wanted to get together and Nick suggest Leo’s place Leo looks away with an reluctant smile and says ‘My old lady’s at home’ (Hollinghurst 2004: 35). Nick notices that he was embarrassed and sees this as the first hint of shyness and shame in Leo. Leo further adds and says that ‘She is dead religious’ (ibid.: 35). When Leo’s sister comes to meet Nick after Leo’s death the conversation reveals the intensity of her mother’s fault in not accepting the truth about her son. ‘She doesn’t accept the death … She doesn’t accept he was gay. It’s a mortal sin …’ (Hollinghurst 2004: 408). In The Swimming Pool Library, Will in the opera with his friend James feels a certain sense of unease with his grandfather Viscount Beckwith as he says,

He had spent all his adult life in circles where good manners, lofty savoir-faire and plain callousness conspired to avoid any recognition that homosexuality even existed. The three of us in our hot little box were trapped with this intensely British problem: the opera that was, but wasn’t, gay, the two young gay friends on good behaviour, the mandarin patriarch giving nothing of his feelings away (Hollinghurst 1988: 140).

James and Bill in The Swimming Pool Library are characters that functions as shaded gays and negotiates their homosexuality purely at the stack of their convenience and terms. James keeps all his gay pornography hidden, avoids sex with strangers who are gays and maintains a platonic relationship with Will. Bill after having served his term in prison where he was with Charles Nantwitch, for having a love affair with a boy three years younger than himself is
now more careful and refuses to cross the line. Apart from the soliciting of sex and sexual negotiations the novel is pervaded with other themes like the soft-core homoerotica of pornographic films and the exhibition of photographs by Staines a photographer. Will learns that the theme of natural love and sexual negotiations of the gays have been destroyed by government oppression which was very powerful during Charles’ time. He desolately shuttered when he realise that it still has a lot of lingering repressions. He even decides to stop writing Charles’ biography as he realise that Charles’ was trying to educate him on his past through the diaries.

Arjie in *Funny Boy* is sent by his father to Victoria Academy to force him to become a man. When Arjie who does not understand the necessity of this need asks his brother why he is being transferred to a new school, his brother replies, ‘He doesn’t want you turning out funny or anything like that …. You’re not, are you?’ (Selvadurai 1994: 205). Balendran in *Cinnamon Gardens* had abandoned Richard, an advocate of Edward Carpenter, under pressure from his domineering father, the Mudaliyar, in conforming to social and sexual expectations. The return of Richard to Ceylon awakens in Balendran the sense of what he has given up to be in marriage, to raise a son and the thought of the man he could have been had his father not intervened. ‘He was lonely, not for friendship exactly but for the desire to be able to truly share himself with someone’ (Selvadurai 1998: 384). Balendran decides to negotiate the loss by extending his love and friendship for Richard in the end. He moves forward and comes out open with his father, whose power and domineering presence had stopped him all his life to express his sexuality. His gayness which was sacrificed for the cause of his fathers’ position and reputation is finally rejected by Balendran as he goes to meet Richard. The final chapter has a saying quoted from *The Tirukkural*, verse 505 ‘A man’s conduct is the touchstone of his greatness and littleness’ (Selvadurai 1998: 378). As Bala goes to meet Richard this line is justified when he says:
Richard, might I ask for your friendship? This may be very difficult for you, but ask I must.

I am trying, by this request, to learn to content myself with what cannot be changed, to draw sustenance from the small comforts. But perhaps that is not such a small comfort after all (Selvadurai 1998: 385).

On the other hand, Amrith in Swimming in the Monsoon Sea goes to his mother’s grave to reveal that he is ‘different’ and feels a sudden sense of ease and comfort within himself in coming out as he finally negotiates his sexuality within himself and with his mother who is his family in the most courageous manner.

He whispered, ‘I am …’, but he could not continue, for he did not know a decent word to describe himself. And he refused to use ‘ponnaya’. Finally, he leaned closer and whispered, ‘I am … different’.

Just by saying it out loud, just by admitting that it was so, Amrith felt the burden of his secret ease a little. It was all he could do for now. He would have to learn to live with this knowledge of himself (Selvadurai 2005: 205).

Both writers address the discomforts mentioned above as suggestive of possible non-acceptance leading to internalised homophobia curtailing homosexual tendencies. The distancing from the socially accepted images of gay men can reflect a homophobic discomfort with being labelled gay by others; the distancing can also reflect a desire to open up the social images of being gay to a more diverse view. The relation between social integration, sexual integration and self-acceptance to gayness and being gay is what the characters in the novels of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai have to identify to shrug off the difficulties and the risks associated with being gay in any culture. Hollinghurst and Selvadurai through their works project the insight into how particular life situations translate into relatively different ways of expressing and negotiating class, homosexuality and sexuality asserting the acceptance of oneself as gay. This acceptance is manifested in multiple
different components like being comfortable with one’s sexuality, apparent comfort in interactions with other gays, comfort with describing oneself as gay, comfort with the common social images of gay men and comfort in being open about gayness to non-gays. In addition to the difficulty in accepting one’s homosexuality, the emotional detachment and traditional sex-role beliefs and experiences act as popular problems, since gay males frequently develop alternative family structures for emotional and instrumental support. If emotional detachment and traditional sex-role beliefs are part of homosexual expression, then gay men should negotiate the intimacy needed to develop the necessary non-traditional family structures. If these cultural norms are held by men who are homosexuals, these interactions would balance to fit their emotional and sexual needs with the pressures of moral and cultural set-ups leading to a broad acceptance of their homosexuality.