ABSTRACT

Queer Talk: The Politics of Transgression in the Novels of Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai

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ABSTRACT

Queer theory is the academic discourse that has largely replaced what used to be called gay/lesbian studies. The term was first coined by Teresa De Lauretis for a working conference on theorising gay and lesbian sexualities that was held at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in February 1990. The theory as such encompasses a whole range of understanding issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. Queer theory is largely based on the works of Michel Foucault, the French Philosopher. Besides Foucault, the works of Derrida, Lacan and Freud have contributed as important theoretical references. Beginning in the nineteenth century, sexuality gradually assumed a new status as an object of scientific and popular knowledge. The last two hundred years or so have seen what the critic and historian Michel Foucault once described as a ‘discursive explosion’ (Foucault 1998: 38) around the question of sex, by which he did not simply mean that it came to be talked about more widely or more often or more explicitly, relaxing the grip of repressive conventions or taboos.

‘Sexuality is much more than a facet of human nature, the seat of pleasure and desire. It has become a principle of explanation, whose effects can be discerned, in different ways, in virtually any stage and predicament of human life, shaping our capacity to act and setting the limits to what we can think and do’(Clover & Kaplan 2007: 12). Thus, the growing willingness to put sex into question, even to search for the truth about sexual behaviour, gradually opened up new ways in which the entire field of sexual possibilities and sexual identities could be imagined, permanently transforming people’s most intimate sense of their sexual selves. This study attempted at studying anomalies of sexual instincts with special emphasis on queering homosexuality in the works of the two novelists - Alan Hollinghurst and ShyamSelvadurai.
Hollinghurst was one of *Granta* magazine’s ‘Best of Young British Novelist’ in 1993. His acclaimed first novel *The Swimming Pool Library* (1988) won the Somerset Maugham Award (1989) and was also hailed as ‘The Best Book about Gay Life yet written by an English Author’ (White 1988: 2). The novel gives a vivid account of London gay life in the early 1980’s through the story of a young aristocrat, William Beckwith, and his involvement with the elderly Lord Nantwich, whose life he saves. It was followed by *The Folding Star* (1994) which was short-listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction and won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for Fiction). The narrator, Edward Manners, develops an obsessive passion for his pupil, a 17-year-old Flemish boy. It has been compared by many critics to Thomas Mann’s novella *Death in Venice*. His next novel *The Spell* (1998) is a gay comedy of manners which interweaves the complex relationships between architect Robin Woodfield, his alcoholic lover Justin and Justin’s ex-timid civil servant Alex, who falls in love with Robin’s son Danny. The novel is much shorter and funnier revolving around a central theme of romantic sexual disillusionment. *The Line of Beauty* (2004) traces a decade of change and tragedy and won the 2004 Men Booker Prize for Fiction. It was also short-listed for the Whitbread Novel Award, the British Book Award, Author of the Year and the Commonwealth Writers Prize. The book touches upon the emergence of HIV/AIDS, as well as the relationship between politics and homosexuality.

Apart from novel writing, Hollinghurst has also written poems, translated plays and edited poems and novels. His poems include *Isherwood is at Santa Monica* and *Confidential Chats with Boys*. He has translated *Bazajet* by Racine (1991) and has edited *New Writing 4* with A.S. Byatt (1995); *Three Novels* by Ronald Firbank (2000); and *A.E. Housman: Poems Selected by Alan Hollinghurst* (2001). At a time when the British writing establishment is coming to terms with overt gayness, Hollinghurst can be seen as a representative of the new wave, a serious writer addressing a wide audience, for whom the
sexual orientation of the personae is of little import for plot or character development. His novels offer readers; ‘insights into the contemporary gay world, but these are set against a wider backdrop of art in all its forms, and obsession – in all its manifestations’ (Smith 2002: 1). His work has been acclaimed for its un-sensational treatment of what the British press seem to regard as scandalous and salacious topics - life in a gay subculture, the workings of homosexual friendship networks and the physical activities of gay males. ‘Hollinghurst is openly gay’ (Stephen 2004: 1) and lives in London.

Shyam Selvadurai is a Sri Lankan Canadian novelist, essayist and a writer for television, born in 1965 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and is of mixed Tamil and Sinhala background, (mother – Sinhalese, father – Tamil), members of conflicting ethnic groups whose troubles form a major theme in his work. Ethnic riots in 1983 drove the family to immigrate to Canada. Selvadurai was nineteen.

As a Sri Lankan-Canadian gay writer, Shyam Selvadurai’s literary output has been relatively modest thus far. Funny Boy, his first novel, was published to acclaim in 1994. It won the W.H. Smith/Books in Canada First Novel Award and, in the U.S; the Lambda Literary Award for Best Gay Men’s Fiction and was named a Notable Book by the American Library Association. His second novel, Cinnamon Gardens (1998), was short-listed for the Trillium Award in Canada, the Aloa Literary Award in Denmark and the Premio Internazionale Riccardo Bacchelli in Italy. Selvadurai’s third novel, Swimming in the Monsoon Sea published in 2005 was a finalist for Canada’s most prestigious literary award, the Governor’s General Awards, in the category of Children’s Literature. It was honoured with a Lambda Literary Award in the Children’s & Youth Literature category in 2006, the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year Award and the Silver Winner in the Young Adult Category of Foreword Magazine Book of the Year Award. He has also edited a collection of short stories, Story Wallah: Short Fiction from South Asian Writers (2004),
which includes works by Salman Rushdie, Monica Ali and Hanif Kureishi, among others. He is represented in the anthology by “Pigs Can’t Fly,” the first of the six stories that comprise *Funny Boy*.

All of Selvadurai’s novels have a subtle and deeply humane style, wit and perspicacity that establish him not only as an important chronicler of the complexities of social and cultural difference but also ensures his place as a significant figure in post-colonial and gay writing. ‘As the Sri Lankan critic Prakrti has noted, Selvadurai’s particular gift is to understand how such factors as ethnic tensions and the legacy of British colonial rule are interwove with dominant ideologies of sexuality and gender’ (Hunn 2005: 1).

His first novel *Funny Boy* announced Selvadurai as a major new voice in Canadian, post-colonial and gay literature. The novel is a moving and honest coming out story of, Arjie Chelvaratnam as he grows from a ridiculed ‘funny boy’ more content to dress up as ‘bride-bride’ with his female cousins than play cricket with the males, to an intelligent, reflective teenager dangerously awakened by his first love, rebellious schoolmate Shehan. The novel gives a brilliant portrait of the anxieties aroused by gender non-conformity, especially in patriarchal societies. His second novel *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998) is set in the Ceylon of the 1920’s. It too features the homosexual desire of a young man, as well as the search for autonomy by a young woman in the same repressive circle. To help prepare ground for the novel, Selvadurai lived in Sri Lanka with his partner Andrew Chapman experiencing first-hand the discomforts and risks associated with being a non-conformist in a country with persistently traditional and conformist norms about sexuality. He mentions about the discomforts in his essay ‘Coming Out’ in *Time Asia’s* special issue on the Asian Diaspora, Selvadurai notes that ‘in this country that I still considered my home, I could never be at home’ (2003: 1).Selvadurai’s third novel *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* was published in 2005 and targeted to young adult readers. Set in 1980, Sri Lanka, the novel chronicles a
fourteen year old Sri Lankan boy falling in love with his visiting Canadian cousin, Niresh which finally makes him aware of his sexual identity. Amrith in the novel experiences both the challenges of being gay in a culture that considered it a sin and also the tensions of being in love with his cousin, Niresh. Selvadurai’s *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* is his first young adult novel.

Selvadurai’s novels always present at some level of consciousness the interaction between the personal and the political. How the intimate workings of a family represent or reflect a larger political context. This awareness in which the personal and the political are intertwined not only intrigued Shyam but has enabled him to reveal the capacities of racism, homophobia, sexism and other injustices and hatreds which are present at all levels within a society. He clearly has a deep engagement with his country of birth and its troubled history. In his own words he says, ‘I think *Cinnamon Gardens* is about personal courage and liberation’ (Smith 1998: 4). He knew about racial conflict, be it Tamil/Sinhalese or Ceylonese/English and the issues of being a gay or a homosexual in a society like that. In explaining his decision to be openly gay, he remarks, ‘I remembered how it was for me feeling there was no one out there who was a role model of any sort. When I decided to be out in public, I was really thinking of that version of me in Sri Lanka who would read my book and feel relieved to not be alone. If I decided not to be out, I would be sending a message to that young person that I was still afraid and ashamed’ (Hunn 2005: 2).

This research work undertook a modest study of some major perspectives on the issues of gender and post-modern sexual identities, the conflicting accounts of sexual orientation and the contemporary emphasis on sexual diversity in the novels of Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai. The main objectives of the study were:

1. To assess how the creation of queer identities has impacted upon the study of literature.
2. To study how the politics of transgression contribute to cultural and social repressions in the works of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai.

3. To critically look at how Hollinghurst and Selvadurai establishes their homosexual identity and ties those stories to larger themes of family and country.

4. To study how Hollinghurst and Selvadurai offer insights into the contemporary gay world set against a wider backdrop of art in all forms and obsession, in the generally well-to-do-world and,

5. To analyse how Hollinghurst and Selvadurai interweaves various sub-plots and characters around a central theme of romantic sexual disillusionment.

The first chapter introduces Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai as creative writers in English and their position as important post-colonial gay writers. Further, it explores the works of Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai and the recurrent themes of the personal and the political which exists in almost all their novels. The chapter surveys related literatures and journals. The objectives and significance of the study, research methodology is elaborated in this chapter.

Chapter two brings out how homosexuality has either been strategically suppressed or categorically demonised in all straightgeist cultural representations and how it has been read as a crime, sin, a disease and an abnormality in western societies in the later 19th century. The chapter looks into the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in some Western countries in the 20th century and how it has gained credibility as gay communities in literature, religious institutions and civil rights organisations. The chapter looks into recent understandings of queer studies (which include gay and lesbian theories; cultural studies and a portion of gender/feminist debates) that have contributed to complex and nuanced studies of homosexuality. It explains the term queer - long used pejoratively to refer to homosexuals,
especially male homosexuals – and how it has been reclaimed and embraced by queer theorists. The work of queer theorists such as Eve K. Sedgwick, Judith Butler and Michel Foucault is extensively discussed and how their contributions have made to look at homosexuality in a new perspective. The enriching ways that queer theorists have suggested to understand the on-going debates on gender and desire is developed throughout the chapter.

The third chapter addresses the issue of being ‘different’ in a funny way which does not conform to accepted gender and sexual norms. The novels of Selvadurai give a brilliant portrait of the anxieties aroused by gender non-conformity, especially in patriarchal societies. This chapter focuses on the gradual and ultimate passage of the protagonist to accept their sexual identity. The chapter talks about the concept of a third gender as tendencies of the unnamed third place and the metaphor of twilight moments that stigmatises identities and forbidden acts. It brings to light the risks and the rewards of understanding and experiencing sexual liberty and independence.

Chapter four focuses on how the novels of Hollinghurst bring to light a buried history of gay London from the Romans to the 1950’s, its writers and musicians, from Shakespeare to Pope, Wilde to James, Forster and Brittan to Firbank focussing mainly on the lives of gay men before the gay liberation movement both in London and the colonies of Great Britain. The chapter analyses contemporary gay life as represented in his novels, The Line of Beauty and The Swimming Pool Library. The issues about class, family, social politics and sexuality in the 80’s era London exploring related themes of hypocrisy, homosexuality, madness, wealth, drugs and the emerging AIDS crisis in novels like The Spell and The Line of Beauty which forms a central backdrop of modern gay culture. This chapter also brings to light the enticing yet painful panorama of metropolitan gay life highlighting gay parties, gay clubbing and gay cruising.
The fifth 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 opens the discussion to look into the forces of repression and its social and cultural implications. It also mentions the nuances of gender orientation and the policing of homosexuality and homosexuals by political and state institutional forces like law makers, police authorities and social elites.

The concluding chapter contains a summing up of the aspects that have been discussed in the previous chapters. This chapter makes an analysis of the novels of Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai. It covers the far-reaching changes in the various stages of evolving homosexual consciousness. It also brings out the influence of Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai’s contribution as writers creating a forum in which the discussion of homosexuality finds a way into social and literary discourse.

Queer talk and the politics of transgression in the novels of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai project the close relation between identity, liberation, politics of pro-sex and the essentialization of what kind of sex counts as progressive and transgressive. Both the writers in their works claim and present specific readings of sexual styles that transgress the matrix of power and libertarianism. Their works are based on the claim that sexual freedom requires oppositional practices that is, transgressing socially respectable categories of sexuality and refusing to draw the line on what counts as politically correct sexuality. There is a close relation between the political and the personal in both the writers in terms of the affirmation or reclamation of one’s collective identity. As Kauffman puts it:

Identity politics express the principle that identity – be it individual or collective – should be central to both the vision and practice of radical politics. It implies not only organising
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around shared identity, as for example classic nationalist movements have done. Identity politics also express the belief that identity itself – its elaboration, expression, or affirmation – is and should be a fundamental focus of political work (Kauffman 1990: 67).

In short, what was once the personal is political and the political need has become the personal. By creating a climate in which self-transformation is equated with social transformation both Selvadurai and Hollinghurst has created a new identity politics that has valorised a politics of lifestyle, a personal politics that is centered upon who we are – how we dress or get off that fails to engage with the institutionalized systems of domination. This thematics of transgression and transgressive practices/identities which are on the outer limits of institutional and ideological systems are valorised and subtly promoted in their works. Both Hollinghurst and Selvadurai adhere to a de-repressive view of sexuality and tend to associate resistance with the disruptive forces of transgression through their novels. Focussing on the liberation of sexual pleasure both writers organise a principle for political activism and an ethics for sex positivity and erotic diversity that risks replacing social liberation.

A growing number of authors have observed the proliferation of gay, lesbian, bisexual transgender/transsexual identities as an increasingly global phenomenon. The global proliferation of gender and sexual diversity with the apparent similarities of new categories and non-western societies turning to western-styled gay and lesbian forms have been put forward as explanatory models by many writers and also by Selvadurai and Hollinghurst as post-colonial, gay writers addressing a cross-cultural global gay category. Both writers relate the corresponding and continuing relations between politics and sexuality. If sexuality is made political in the most unsecret statement of queer identity, politics is also made sexual.

Though there are a lot of similarities in the thematic approach of the two writers, a comparative analysis of the novels of Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai bring out a number of important differences in their novels. The novels of Selvadurai give a brilliant
portrait of the anxieties aroused by gender non-conformity, especially in patriarchal societies. It deals with the discomforts and the risks associated with being a non-conformist in a country with persistently traditional and conformist norms about sexuality. All the three novels of Selvadurai chafe through the themes of traditional restrictions and societal pressures. The influence of family, friends and society play an important role in the novels of Selvadurai. Most of the protagonists are surrounded by conservative, wealthy influential family members and friends who fervently dominate their choices and force them to repress all forms of transgressive desires. Apart from Balendran, who is a mature character, a man in his forties, the other characters of Selvadurai are young adolescents coming out gay in a traditional society. The character of Arjie and Amrith are creatively presented as young gay teenagers who are awakening biologically not just as adolescent individuals but as homosexuals.

The adolescent boy was as troubling for the turns of the century artist as the better known predatory woman. The continued marginalization of this symbolic figure in the literary history points to a homophobia of contemporary distaste. The boy’s image has been used by Selvadurai in his novels to demarcate and visualize a sexual category that has tremendous capacities to map fantasies outside any form of limitation.

Of indeterminate character, this handsome liminal creature could absorb and reflect a variety of sexual desires and emotional needs. The boy personified a fleeting moment of liberty and of dangerously attractive innocence, making possible fantasies of total contingency and total annihilation. For men, the boy suggested freedom without committing them to actions, for women, he represented their frustrated desire for action. But most of all, his presence in fin-de-siecle literature signified the coming of age of the modern gay and lesbian sensibility: his protean nature displayed a double desire – to love a boy and to be a boy (Vicinus 1994: 90).
In Selvadurai’s novels the boy became the vessel into which an author – and a reader – could pour his or her anxieties, fantasies and sexual desires. The characters of Arjie and Amrith as adolescent homosexuals have been moulded by Selvadurai into the artistic and traditional framework of their persona. They are both literary and cultural models of socially sanctioned homosociality demonstrating male bonding through single-sex institutions like the boy’s school in the case of Arjie and the adventurous idealizations of cross-age male bonding in the case of Amrith. Selvadurai’s novels are usually romantic in character and output. Homoerotic desires and homosexuality is addressed mostly as an issue and a need to be recognised and understood outside the repressive limits and conventions of society and tradition. Male bonding and relationships are confined to desires and longings that are measured and respected. Open and stark treatment of homosexuality is absent in his works. All three characters have strong homosexual tendencies which they acknowledge in different ways and at different stages of their coming out physically and also by awkward yet persistent projections socially and emotionally. Apart from the sexual theme, the theme of the political and its related conflicts surround the novels of Selvadurai. Arjie and Balendran are socially and sexually constructed amidst the growing political tensions, one the Tamil – Sinhala conflict and the other that of the discords of a post–colonial society. The novels of Selvadurai elaborately studies the gradual and ultimate passage that the protagonist takes to come out and to accept their sexual identity with corresponding references to the author’s own passage to becoming gay openly and the discomforts he felt of being gay in a country he considered home.

The novels of Hollinghurst on the other hand widely bring to light a buried gay history of London from its writers and its musicians to the lives of gay men before the gay liberation movement both in London and the colonies of Great Britain. A wide exposition of past homosexuals from Shakespeare to Pope, Wilde to James Forster and Brittan to Firbank
are mentioned in his novels. The novels of Hollinghurst openly deal with gay contemporary life in all its manifestations. The issues of class, social and sexual politics, drugs, disco and Aids are vividly portrayed through his characters. The promiscuous sexual lives of gays and drug related hypnotic behaviour of modern gay males are explicitly presented through characters like Justin, Alex and Nick. The novels of Hollinghurst present the life of a gay in all its modern manifestations, the reckless lifestyles of gay men, the tortured and persecuted lives of past homosexuals, gay sexual lives, discos, clubbing, drugs, AIDS and the metropolitan lifestyles of gay men, a life of sex in the city and the politics of sexual liberalism and revolution after the liberation movement.

Hollinghurst covers a wide array of characters belonging to different age groups and different working categories. The character of Edward Manners represents the old gay world and characters like Will, Nick, and Justin represents the new gay world. The character of Leo and Arthur represents the working class homosexuals and that of Wani, Will, and Manners the elite, rich and elegant gay group. Most of the characters in his novels are wealthy but Hollinghurst aligns them with working class people who represent common and general existence of homosexuality in society. Leo and Arthur have to face a number of social hurdles and are emotionally insecure many times due to their working class background.

Most importantly, working class masculinity brings out images of working in physical proximity; talking about sports and physical activities, women and sexual prowess. Along with these images, working–class men are popularly thought to have low tolerance for emotional issues, to hold strong beliefs of traditional gender-based differences, and to be strongly homophobic. Hollinghurst reveals this homophobic attitude not just existing within them but also coming from their family. Leo’s mother remains homophobic till the end and refuses to acknowledge the fact that her son is gay. Arthur and Will are bashed in a working class area for being queer. Arthur returns home bleeding and seriously injured after killing
his brother’s male lover, a serious case of low tolerance for emotional issues and Edward’s choice of low, working class black lovers reveals the relation between homosexuality, desire and class relation. Nick has to constantly work towards his status as a working class gay juxtaposed in the world of the Feddens, who represent wealth, power, status and disgust for any form of sexuality outside heterosexuality. His relationship with Wani is a sincere exposure of homophobia that elite homosexuals experience. The ultimate choice of Nick by Wani as a lover who belongs to the working class world is another instance of internalised homophobia as he is uncomfortable to choose a lover from his own circle or class.

Unlike the working class background characters Will, Wani and Edward are less homophobic and more positive with regards their sexual status and their choices. They are less assertive, easy-going, withdrawn from issues that does not concern them and pleasure seeking in their outlook towards life and relationships. Hollinghurst exposes the themes of hypocrisy, madness, wealth, drugs and AIDS through this set of characters which forms a central backdrop to the modern gay culture.

Unlike Selvadurai the novels of Hollinghurst does not have any adolescent characters. Most of his characters are mature individuals, characters who are already aware of their sexuality and who either are openly homosexual or have tremendously suffered in the past as gays working and contributing towards the elevation of their collective status as members of a deviant category. One major difference between the two writers is the treatment of the homosexual theme. Selvadurai portrays the romantic side of coming out gay and the illusory transgressive behaviour of his characters contrary to the stereotype gay male promiscuity of Hollinghurst. Selvadurai’s novels relate the stories of young men around the theme of finding romantic love, exploring sexual experiences shaped predominantly on the notion of two people in love. The characters of Selvadurai are mostly waiting for Mr Right and exemplifying romantic love at different moments in their sexual careers in the context of
experiencing various masculine tensions brought about by their creative ways of finding love.

Hollinghurst on the other hand openly deals with the issue of being gay and brings out the modern lifestyle of living a gay life. Will, Nick, Alex and Justin all indulge in activities associated with unlimited opportunities to have sex with other men they meet at public sex environments like gay bars, swimming pools, gay centred places and subways. His characters are basically motivated towards thrills, frills and emotional hangovers. But at the same time, many of them feel threatened and unsafe in these spaces.

Although many of his characters crave for attention from men to bolster their self-esteem, they often mistake sexual conquest for emotional affection. Half of the men in the novels of Hollinghurst are engaged in unprotected sex at some point in their sexual lives pointing out the risks of such behaviour in the social contexts of unsafe sex and the dangers of being exposed to the AIDS virus. Almost all the novels of Hollinghurst covers the theme of AIDS marginally or obliquely and its relations to the sexual behaviour of gays in the time of AIDS. Nick experiences a sense of fear and loss as he sees the photograph of Leo who dies of AIDS in the novel. It awakens and frightens him of his reckless lifestyle, which included, erotic adventures, sexual coercions and unsafe sex, all which are heavy and tragic for him. This is evident in the dealings of the characters of Hollinghurst who are HIV positive and who are persistently shunned, despised and labelled as diseased. The characters of Hollinghurst all in turns experience the deadly virulence of the disease among gay men and the stress of being labelled as a gay HIV positive individual. His works are a movement towards the construction of a gay masculinity in the complicated age of AIDS and its continuing relationship with politics and society. Apart from the thematic treatment of AIDS, Hollinghurst touches on the relationship between politics and homosexuality, exposing heterosexual hypocrisy towards homosexual promiscuity.
The works of Hollinghurst and Selvadurai though different in its approach and treatment of homosexuality covers the far-reaching changes in the various stages of evolving homosexual consciousness. Their writings have influenced and promoted in creating a forum in which the discussion of homosexuality has found a way into the social and literary discourse. ‘By the late 1980’s and early 1990’s the call to develop theories of sexuality was being answered by an expanding body of literature that addressed the political and cultural positions of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals and others – a diverse conglomeration of sexual minorities who were increasingly identified as queer’ (De Lauretis 1991: 5). Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the closet* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and Warner’s *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993) signalled the consolidation of an approach to theorizing sexuality that crossed gender lines, integrating sexual theories related to masculinity and femininity and to heterosexuality and homosexuality. Most importantly, the emergence of queer theory within academia marked a radical shift towards positioning abject and stigmatised sexual identities as important entry points to the production of knowledge. A move to stabilize sexual and gender categories was and still is an integral part of this process. The adoption of the queer reflected the rejection of taxonomic sexual categories that initially had been established through sexological discourse in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s for a discussion of sexology and sexual taxonomies. Instead the term queer reflects an inclusive standpoint based on difference from opposition to the ideology of heteronormativity.

Thus, queer theory and queer politics represent a critical moment in the history of western sexuality in which sexual minorities and deviants who were previously defined by legal statutes and medical/psychological diagnoses are instead creating – in other words, a post-modern version of identity politics.

The contribution of writers like Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai has further added understanding to the social dimension of understanding sex as a literary discourse.
Their writings have generated a pro-sex political, sexual program that essentially and continuously project personal sexual liberation at all levels and at different points. Essential to this post-structuralist deployment of opposition is the tenet that what is normative is actually constructed through reference to deviance. Thus, it is deviance that is foundational and the normative which is unstable. Hollinghurst and Selvadurai consider this deviance as influential in destabilising sexual practices which at times causes instability not just in the sexual sector but also in the political and economic sector. This emphasis on the opposition of the normative and on the simultaneous destabilisation of the normative are aspects of queer theory that allow great interdisciplinary mobility, as they permit theoretical concepts initially applied to issues of sexual identity and the oppression of sexual minorities to be deployed in studies of other social subgroups as well as its studies of the written and spoken word, the built environment, material objects and other products of culture.

All colonial societies, in their struggle for independence and forming of a new nation, reshape and redefine their identity. This drive for a cultural identity involves the establishment of a collective, essential self that is shared by people with a common ancestry and common history. This essential identity is seen to be unchanging, eternal; it provides a common frame of reference to a newly emerged nation. The goal of these new nations, released from colonialism, is to bring to light this identity that has been suppressed and distorted and disfigured by the colonial masters; to express this identity through a retelling of the past. At the core of this restored identity lies the idea that, beyond the mess and the contradiction of today, is a resplendent past whose existence, when it is discovered, will restore a people as a culture, as a society (Selvadurai 2004: 3).

Hollinghurst and Selvadurai as postcolonial, gay writers have brought the identity of liberation of the homosexual amidst the anti-gay, anti-colonial, anti-racist social moments of our time. This collective identity can be very effective as a tool of resistance and
empowerment and freedom, a sense of identity that is transforming in itself, making itself new over and over again, a continuous work in progress. This sense of a homosexual cultural identity, while taking into account that a group or a culture might have many important points of similarity, also acknowledges that there are many points of difference between its people, and that these differences, such as sexuality and gender and class, also define who we are. This sense of identity stresses not just who one was in the past, but who one might be in the process of becoming. This is the idea that Hollinghurst and Selvadurai, through their works as post-colonial, gay writers contribute to the evolving homosexual consciousness and to the notion of beginning to come to terms with being gay, beginning to live out another very important part of their identity.