

Abstract

The normative discourse of heterosexuality creates a barrier that makes invisible the spectrum of identities that exist in society. This hegemony of heterosexuality casts a shadow not just over our personal relationships but constitutes our relationship with the other scales such as the urban and the national. Chandigarh was planned in independent India to produce a kind of subjectivity that would be in line with the nation's modern imagination-'unfettered by the traditions of the past'. It aspired to be a city that 'provides for all' and would produce a new kind of citizen for the Nehruvian vision of a secular, socialist and modern Independent India. My thesis pushes the boundaries of the modernist understanding of inclusivity by focussing on non-normative sexual identities in Chandigarh. By focusing on the intersection of class and sexuality as a "lived experience" by kothi men, I am drawing attention to urban sexualities other than upper-class gay men. Intrigued by the fact that Indian cities did not experience 'gay villages' or 'gay ghettos' like in the western context, I bring into light the processes that inform the production of same-sex spaces in an Indian context. .My study is also crucial in understanding the spatial possibilities and negotiations that are possible in fixed concrete materialities of urban planning. Some core questions that informed my understanding were- In what ways do alternate sexualities co-produce urban space in the highly surveilled, planned city of Chandigarh? How has the planned city of Chandigarh shaped sexual identities (particularly the non-normative ones) of its residents? How do identities, spaces, and embodiments materialize within and outside the prescriptive grid of the Chandigarh plan? Studying this group brings into question many invisible layers of class, caste, homo-hetero normativity that have so far remained veiled in the discourses of the queer movement in India and elsewhere. It is to be noted that kothi identity emerges as an outcome of HIV/AIDS projects in India, and the history of its visibility counters the idea of a neoliberal queer subject. An ethnographic study of kothis also reveals frictions and fractures within the queer movement. In my analysis, I emphasize the particular historical and geographical trajectories of varied gender and sexual subjectivities that are missing from the more globalized discourse of queer activism.