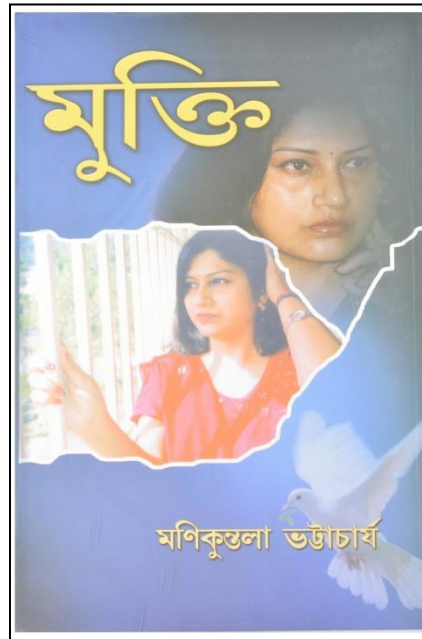


## A Brief Study on Homosexuality Issues in Manikuntala Bhattacharjya's Assamese Novel "Mukti"

**Mridul Moran, M.A., M.Phil.**

Assistant Professor, Department of Assamese, Dergaon Kamal Dowerah College,  
Assam, India, Pin: 785 614

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Courtesy: [https://www.amazon.in/Mukti-Purbanchal-Prakash-Manikuntala-Bhattacharya/dp/8172131070/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?qid=1565807779&refinements=p\\_27%3AManikuntala+Bhattacharya&s=books&sr=1-3](https://www.amazon.in/Mukti-Purbanchal-Prakash-Manikuntala-Bhattacharya/dp/8172131070/ref=sr_1_3?qid=1565807779&refinements=p_27%3AManikuntala+Bhattacharya&s=books&sr=1-3)

### Abstract

Homosexuality, third gender is kept apart from the mainstream, so such discussions happen to be lesser. Homosexuality, bisexuality, third gender, etc. are depicted in Assamese literature negligibly. In Maini Mahanta's *Sparsha* (Touch, 2006), Anuradha Sarma Pujari's *Nil Prajapati* (Blue Butterflies, 2013), Minakshi Burhagohain's *Nil Nakshyatra* (Blue Star, 2014), and Binisha Devi's *Raktaraag* (Red Tune, 2019), we find about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and third gender relationship. Manikuntala Bhattacharjya's *Mukti* (Liberation, 2005, 2006) is a homosexuality centric Assamese novel. The main objective of this paper is to investigate the homosexuality issues in *Mukti* novel.

**Keywords:** Manikuntala Bhattacharjya, *Mukti*, Assamese Novel, Homosexuality, LGBT, Sexual Exploitation.

## Introduction

In today's sexist social structure, only heterosexual relationship is welcomed. So, alternative sexuality or homosexuality is sidelined from the mainstream discourse. In most of the societies, homosexuality is a sensitive matter. The supreme court of India, on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2018 gave a historical verdict on homosexuality. The Supreme Court declared it is natural and has given constitutional right. In there it is declared that, "In view of the aforesaid findings, it is declared that insofar as section 377 criminalizes consensual sexual acts of adults (i.e. persons above the age of 18 years who are competent to consent) in private, is violative of Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21 of the Constitution." In 1977, 15 December, American Psychiatric Association declared homosexuality as a natural sexual urge, even though homosexuals have not get proper rights yet. A handful of countries like Canada, Britain, and some parts of USA have given it a constitutional recognition, but in most of the places homosexuality is a punishable offense. Violent attitude of people has given rise to the birth of a word 'homophobic' in English. From the human rights perspective it is a matter of injustice. (Rai 2010) Indian gay theorist R. Raj Rao writes, "I call sexuality a social construct because it is society that expects a male (a state of being) to grow into a man (a state of becoming)." (Rao 2017)

Heterosexuality is the chief theory of patriarchal sexual politics. (Bezbaruah 2016) This ideology considers LGBTQ as a challenge. From the so-called mainstream society, they are physically and mentally different. So, they are considered 'other'. They are marginalized.

Abhijit Rai, in his book, proves that homosexuality is not any kind of disorder (mental or physical). According to him, 'lack of scientific outlook' is a chief reason for such type of attitudes toward them. Homosexuality is a natural part of sexuality. But in our age-old traditions, such ideas are still in extent. The author discusses such things in his book with information. (Rai 2010)

A prolific and versatile writer, Manikuntala Bhattacharjya is counted among the leading litterateurs of Assam. Her broader way of perceiving life is clearly reflected in her writings that highlight various social issues like witch-hunting, HIV-AIDS, homosexuality, old age home, insurgency prevailing in the society. Manikuntala Bhattacharjya's *Mukti* is the first homosexuality centric Assamese novel. The main objective of this paper is to investigate the homosexuality issues in *Mukti* novel. The present study is based on analytical method. The analysis primarily concentrates on the Gender perspective.



Courtesy: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/memoirs-cast-in-verse-writer-turns-to-prosody-not-prose-for-autobiography/cid/704661>

### **Homosexuality Issues in *Mukti***

Homosexual relationship is the same human relationship with that of heterosexuality. But we observe deformed kind of sexual affairs in homosexuality as well as heterosexuality. Males are also victimized in sexual desires of 'males'. Such points remain unnoticed in society. There are male sex-workers for males too. By hiding their sexual identity, such people also engage in homosexual activities or other males are also victimized by such homosexual activities. Manikuntala Bhattacharjya authored the novel *Mukti* on such topic. This small novel was first published in 'Amar Asom', 'Rangali Bihu Edition', 2005. In 2006, August, it was published as a book.

The author came across some characters associated with homosexuality while searching for content for a television serial. The novel is based upon them. Smriti is working on a new novel. Her friend Raushan Seth is helping her in finding contents. Mr. Bhatia, friend of Smriti's husband Rupak is also helping her. Seth Sahab is basically from Delhi. His brother died from HIV AIDS. After this Raushan got engaged with an NGO and busy awareing the people living in the slum area about AIDS. He brought her to Basanti, the sex-worker (prostitute). From Basanti Smriti learns about a different world. She comes across a wounded boy in death-bed. Basanti has eight boys under her. They have demand as there are customers looking for boys (sex-workers).

: How old they are who look for boys?

: Same as that of Raushan Seth. (Bhattacharjya 2010: 30)

Raushan Seth adopted Basanti's son Sankar. However, Seth does not tell about it to Smriti. She comes to know about it from Basanti only. But one day, this Sankar beheaded Seth Sahab later. From this, Smriti got ashamed of the ingratitude of there of the slum

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dwellers. But later, from Basanti, Smriti learn the ghostly truth. Raushan Seth is a homosexual. In the name of social work, he adopted Shankar, but in reality, he oppresses him on a daily basis. Failing to tolerate such exploitation, Sankar comes up as a murderer. Learning this Smriti changes her attitude towards Sankar and Seth. She determines to educate Sankar. By killing Seth Sahab, Sankar achieves liberation.

In this novel of Bhattacharjya, three aspects related to homosexuality get represented:

- Male sex-worker,
- Hide of sexual identity, and
- Sexual exploitation on males.

This novel actually centers the third point mainly.

### Conclusion

Since homosexuality, third gender, is kept apart from the mainstream, so such discussions happen to be lesser. Till now, it is still a far cry to observe such topics with an open mind. Among them, some people begin to draw empathetic pictures on such issues. Through homosexuality, representation of topics like sexual exploitation on males can be regarded as the writer's brave attitude. However, according to the author also, homosexuality is an unsocial thing. As she says, "A very confidential affair (conduct), that can be termed unsocial, is being tried to be depicted in the novel." (Bhattacharjya 2010: 5) So, it cannot be said that the novelist is also free from the traditional sexist notions. *Mukti* is the first Assamese novel based on homosexuality. But in it, sorrows of the homosexuals are not portrayed.

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Mridul Moran, M.A., M. Phil.  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Assamese  
Dergaon Kamal Dowerah College  
Dergaon 785 614  
Assam  
India [mridulmoran8feb@gmail.com](mailto:mridulmoran8feb@gmail.com)

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