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**Voices, Subjectivities and Desire: A Study of Sexual Minorities in
Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night***

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Abstract:

Queer is an umbrella term that deconstructs and reconstructs the identity of sexual minorities (LGBTQ). The Heterosexual perspective is a theoretically constructed mode of analysis that took the liberty to make heterosexuality normal, whereas queer is a new dimension to sexuality and gender that examines socio-economic, political, and security concepts rather than just talking about sexuality or sexual rights. Understanding identity is a must for everyone, and understanding the anti-identarian identity of queer is equally needed. Queer theorists, who question heterosexuality and conventional ideas of sexuality, study the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) Communities differently. Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* is a significant work that deals with LGBTQ (sexual minorities). Some characters have traumatic experiences with gender, sexuality, and identity, resulting in voicelessness, subjectivities, and a search for identity. In light of queer theory, this paper aims to examine non-heteronormative sexuality, suppression, sexual violence, suffering, and desire.

Key Words: Queer, normative heterosexual. Sexual minorities, Identity, *Cereus Blooms at Night*

The scholarship of queer is helps comprehending gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities. Queer an umbrella term used for those who are identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex and for those who substitute to term the LGBTQ+ community or sexual minorities. The history of queer studies can be traced to feminist theory, gay and lesbian studies, and women's studies depending on their race, social class, personal experience and generation that some people find the term derogatory. The queer theory starts with the notion that identities are not predefined; who we are, who we become, and how we live our lives are not defined by our identities. The lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) communities are studied in different ways by queer theorists, who question heterosexuality and conventional ideas of sexuality.

It is impossible to define a community based on queer if it does not identify any qualitative aspect. A significant contribution to the field of queer allowance is being offered by the text "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" edited by J. J. Halberstam, D. Eng, and J. E. Munoz (Amin). In this book, the question of "What's Queer" is given a fresh perspective, and the political significance of the term is explained. If everyone considered themselves queer, there would be no need for identity, and no one would be speaking out against society. Understanding identity is a must for everyone, and understanding the anti-identarian identity of Queer is equally needed. In certain aspects, rather than celebrating the lack of definitions and



mobility of queer it should be looked at in various contexts, histories, genealogies, and inheritance. “One can presume that certain categories will not have a distinct identity because they are intertwined. However, it must make a distinction between the particular experiences connected to the categories. One can attack the politics of queer for acknowledging the support for queer politics, for including issues beyond queer genders, for experience of multiple identity category membership, and for sexualities within queer groups (Bridge & Kane)”.

The mediaeval writers only wrote about what was natural. The term ‘queer’ became a viable forum for challenging the great writing tradition. As authors, scholars became politically open through their writings. Texts depicting queerness as ‘normativity’ can be found in the current scenario. *Cereus Blooms at Night* a thought-provoking text which delves deeper into issues such as non-heteronormative sexuality, suppression, sexual violence, and the agony of being an outcast. It compels us to reassess our perceptions, beliefs, and ideologies about human sexuality. The text calls into question not only the portrayal of the Caribbean landscape paradise, but also the social inequalities and disparities that exist; additionally, she articulates the complicated relationship between childhood trauma & psyche and the Caribbean landscape. The two gardens that exist in the novel represent queerness, natural and unnatural desires. Mr Thoroughly’s perfectly arranged serves as a metaphor of socially constructed hegemony. Whereas Mala’s Garden defines the limits of natural and human effort; besides that, this is the garden that produces *Cereus Blooms at Night*, representing freedom and contentment.

Cereus Blooms at Night is modelled on ‘knowing the text’ by the narrator. Through textual structures, we see Mr Tyler, a self-involved character of Mala’s story, but he never lets his sexual identity issue deviate from the story. The plot switches back and forth between the past and the present using this technique. Gay narrator Mr Tyler is given a pleasant voice by Mootoo. Pirbhai points out that “in heterosexual identitarian constructions, Mootoo’s work recognizing interconnected discourses of power that tend to emphasize the other” (Sexuality as Counter Discourse). Mr Tyler is a representation of Diasporic Otherness. His inner sentiments can be understood when he makes this statement, “What I actually wanted was to make at least one old person smile or feel like she or he was of some importance,” he describes the unusual ways in which he is treated in the almshouse (*Cereus Blooms at Night* 14). The desire to help others is the primary reason for entering Mala Ramchandin’s world. As a thoughtful and sensitive individual, Mr Tyler frames Mala’s and his own stories in different time frames, He is successful in recognizing the unhappy ruins of rumour as



well as the sharper edges of conviction, which reveals Mala's individual suffering. simultaneously he succeeded in understanding her story with a history that is worth confronting. The statement gives us a clear understanding of his desire to help others and his concern for them. "I was in Miss Ramchandin's room, sister. She woke up and I detected what I think are symptoms of trauma so I did not want to leave her alone" (Mootoo 23).

Sexuality, morality, and propriety are all topics of discussion in Trinidad and Tobago. The colonial ideas of property and morality have been sarcastically interpreted by Trinidadian historians. Between Mr Tyler and Mala's father Chandin Ramchandin's conception of property is completely different, as we noticed, Mr Tyler cleaned every room and designated them as property when he accepted the responsibility of caring for Mala. He treated her like a child and attempted to establish a strong link between them and in the end it he was successful. He could see a fighting spirit in Mala because she was closer to him, and through a roller coaster of feelings and ideas, he also discovered Mala Ramchandin's past with the help of other characters. The impulse to touch overpowered me; Mr Tyler writes, "My palm gently landed on her silver hair. I anticipated it to be rough and wiry because those characteristics would have suited the rumours" (Mootoo 35). Mr tyler never approached her with ill intentions. He could sense her body being entrapped in fear. Being gay, which he admits throughout the text, prevents him from engaging in sexual activity with her. "The relationship at the heart of the novel is between Mala, the elderly 'village Witch' with a childhood history of sexual abuse, and Tyler, her nurse, who pieces together her life story", writes John Corr.

But Chandin Ramchandin has a completely different idea of propriety. We witnessed in part three of the story the sexual encounter between Mala and Ambrose and also the sexual assault Mala suffered at the hands of Chandin Ramchandin. His concept of property is revealed when he shouts: "What the ass...? A man tiefing my baby? He braves to even try. I ent go let anybody tiefing my woman again. No man, no woman, no damn body go tief my property again. I go kill he. I go kill she too, if it come to that. I go kill me self too. I sharp-enin' cutlass tonight" (Mootoo 42). His inward anguish is simultaneously revealed in this conversation, and for him daughter as property. Besides having an impacting on his personal life, his wife Sarah's elopement with her friend affected his mind. He began drinking and sexually assaulted his own daughter. Thus, the concept of property is presented in two ways here. Arguments have been made in favour of a father sexually abusing his daughter. For example, we've seen animal in our daily life that have a relationships with their own fathers or daughters but give no importance those relationships but when it



comes human lives it will not accepted. According to a many of studies that have shown instances where the 'Man' has been portrayed as an animal, it can be concluded that it is very typical for a father to have that right after looking at the example of animals. Morality is lacking in this regard. In the "civilised society," a human should behave following with culture.

However, one can discern Otoh's character., who is concerned about Mala. The novel depicts Otoh Mohanty's distinct racial and sexual formation as evolving from the contradiction of colonial conditions. Otoh desired to know about her life and secrets while disclosing his own. Unlike Mr Tyler, Otoh desired to establish trust with Mala. "I felt as if she and I had things in common," he says. "She had secrets, and I had secrets as well. I wanted to go there and take off all my clothes and say, 'Look! See? See what I mean? I am distinct! You can trust me, and I'm showing you that you're the only person I'll put my trust in. And I am one person you can absolutely, positively trust. I'll be your friend" (55). The conversation reveals that he is different from his peers. He claims that he, like Mala Ramchandin, had secrets. Through this episode, one can envision his attachment to Mala; he even desire to strip down clothes to reveal his secrets and his concern for Mala. A caring attachment which is aware of her life. He goes to her house as one who is curious about her and to discover the truth. For discovering the truth about Mala, he relied on his father's (Ambrose's) support, as well as Ambrose's relationship with Mala.

The fact that people don't accept gay people in our society is deplorable and is referred to as 'homophobia'. The novel portrays that Mr Randolph's family was rejected Mr Tyler's life style and his brother Hector tell to his father: "He was kind of funny. He was like you. The fellas in the village used to threaten to beat him up. People used to heckle him and mock his walk and the way he used to do hands when he was talking" (64). Mr Randolph, father brutally beats him because of his sweet voice and his way of speaking. Therefore, this incident makes the reader rethink homophobia, which prevents people from accepting homosexuals as normal.

After reading Mr Tyler and Otoh (Gays), it is evident that they have a sense of empathy for others, yet it is impossible for so-called Men to do the same. Nobody knows Mala better than Mr Tyler and Otoh, on the other hand, nobody knows Mr Tyler and Otoh better than Mala, who makes an effort to learn about Mr Tyler and embraces him as a friend. The statement made by Mr Tyler himself can be used as proof of his homosexuality. "Try as I might, I was unable to stand tall. I wondered for the umpteenth time if Nana would



have been able to accept and love the adult Tyler, who was neither properly man nor woman but some in-between, unnamed thing” (Cereus 80). Mr Tyler has admitted clearly that he is neither a man nor a woman, but rather that he is somewhere in between. In addition, he brings up the point that he was too young to ask Nana about relationships when he was an adult. Once more, one can see how the boundaries of the so-called society limit people’s ability to express themselves.

The reader may encounter a situation in which Mala asks Mr Tyler to wear a ladies’ gown, causing him to feel as if he is metamorphosing and becoming fatter and less rigid. In his own words, “At first, I felt horribly silly, like a man who had put on women’s clothing for sheer sport and had forgotten to remove the outfit after the allotted period of fun. I felt flat-footed and clumsy. Not a man and not ever able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and nonexistence” (Cereus 76). It’s evident that “he believed his buttocks to be round and fat, with a small mound of belly, massive, rounded breasts, and a big tunnel buzzing between his knees”. In one way or another, the statement “Not a man and never able to be a woman” shows his true identity (82). He claims he does not identify as a man since he has never experienced his behaviour as one, but at the same time, he claims he possesses the physical characteristics of a woman. If heterosexuality can be predicted, then the biological can be applied to both Otoh and Tyler have to possess a biological anatomy. Mr Tyler has the anatomy of a man at the same time. Otoh grows into a man, his demeanour changes, and he even changes his name. However, it is worth noting that the narrator also referred to him as ‘He’, rather than ‘She’ (Corr). Mr Tyler and Otoh’s relationship is debatable. Because Mr Tyler and Otoh have different anatomy, one cannot classify them as gays.

If one is seeking to learn more about Sarah and Lavinia’s relationship, he or she should look into their early life. Chandin was in love with Lavinia, but she never loved him back. Sarah was the only person close to her when she was a child or in school. Despite his feelings for Lavinia but Chandin marries Sarah (Mala’s mother). Mala and Asha are his two children from his marriage to Sarah. After a few years of marriage Lavinia frequently visits Chandin’s house and they make weekend trips together. However, after a few days, Sarah and Lavinia started visiting indoors or in the house’s back yard. A photograph of Sarah and Lavinia led Pohpoh to find her aunt Lavinia and her mother in an awful situation. Pohpoh felt something was being hidden. Aunt Lavinia’s hands were on Mama’s waist. Her aunt hadn’t gone out until Chandin arrived. Mootoo depicts: “Even with her back to them, Pohpoh was aware of Aunt Lavinia and Mama down by the mudra tree whispering and giggling to each other, or Aunt Lavinia and Mama down in the sewing room,



Aunt Lavinia and Mama sitting on the sofa bed down there, Mama leaning into Aunt Lavinia's arms, or Aunt Lavinia braiding Mama's hair or standing behind Mama with her hands wrapped protectively around Mama's waist. Pohpoh turned her head away when she saw them facing each other once, and she felt them come together and hug. She imagined them kissing." (Cereus 120).

They both wish to elope from there and be together so they won't ever be apart. They continue to violate heterosexual norms in their connection and with their sexuality, but for now their separation helps. Although Lavinia takes care of things and assures Sarah not to worry, Sarah insists on having both of her girls with her, and Lavinia consents. They desired to be close, sleep together at night, and hug each other. Sarah asserts, "We're going on a long trip, far away. We going with Aunt Lavinia on a boat. For a long time. Papa doesn't know. Is a surprise. I pack up all your things. Everything packs up" (130). In the presence of a trip, she persuaded her daughters, but Pohpoh already knew this awful secret. In an effort to keep their relationship and elopement a secret from Chandin, Sarah says, "Papa doesn't know", and she tries to say, "I don't know either". Pohpoh and Asha were left in the house alone when they fled, owing to the circumstances. Queer is a term used to describe the lives of Sexual minorities (LGBTQ), the relationship between Sarah and Lavinia' and way of life was conventional to them on the other hand society was not ready to accept them, that's why they chose to flee. Living with the person you want to live with is important.

Chandin's encounters sexual violence with Lavinia and Sarah and even with his children, create a scene of shame and rage for him. He eventually concludes that women are a threat to his abuse. He mistook Pohpoh for Sarah when she eloped with Lavinia. The author envisions: "He wrapped his arm around her and began to touch her. Pohpoh opens her eye and she barely breathed, trying to pretend to be fast asleep, as she was terrified and perplexed by this strange, insistent probing. She tried to get out from under his grip. He sat up, fully awake. He then piled on top of her and slammed his hand over her mouth. She opened her eyes and looked at him, terrified. Sweat dripped on her as it covered his face and neck. He pinned her hands to the bed and forced her legs apart, glaring and breathing heavily like a madman" (Cereus 150). Chandin forced them to spend at least part of the night on his bed. Schools, studies, and housework were all possible for Asha and Pohpoh, but sleep was not. As the story proceeds, we notice Pohpoh goes to her father at night to save Asha from her father. Furthermore, there is evidence of Pohpoh's childhood sexual encounter with Boyie. "Leh we go to your house, ah tell you-I really want to do it with you," she says and her adult sex with



Ambrose (Boyie). For the first time, they'd met someone of their own choice. She senses a penis in her hand. Ambrose's story demonstrates yet another response to shame and guilt that depicts Mala's inability to be on her behalf. Guilt focuses on actions and inactions, whereas shame concentrates on oneself. Ambrose could not advocate for Mala both in her school days and as an adult, but he does provide food for Mala through his son Otoh so he feels shameful and guilty within him in the novel. When Chandin learns of her sexual encounter with Ambrose and Chandin is severely tortured physical and sexual violence on Mala. Chandin claims, "I ever hurt you? I never before hurt you. You want to know what hurt is? Eh? Forgiveness? Mercy? I'll show you what hurt is" (165). The narrator goes on to say that "He pushed her to the sink and shoved her face down into the basin, pressing his chin into her back as he used both hands to pull up her dress. He yanked out his penis, hardened weapon-like by anger. He used his knees to pry her legs open and his feet to kick and keep them apart. With his large fat finger, he parted her buttocks as she sobbed and whispered, 'Have mercy, Lord, I beg, I beg'. He rammed himself in and out of her. He reached around and squeezed her breasts, frantically pumping them to mimic the violent thrusting of his penis." (166).

He took the weapon out of her mouth and spurted all over her face at the end when she went limp. As a result, we can see Mala's physical and mental torment in this narration. Her father's venerable act drives her insane. In the natural world, she finds a sense of belonging and is transformed: It represents, in some ways, a second chance at life that society has denied her. "Mala will take care of you, Pohpoh. No one ever touches you again like that. I will never let anyone put their terrible hands on you again. I, Mala Ramchandin, will set you, Pohpoh Ramchandin, free, free, free, like a bird!" (190). These lines reveal Mala's other world, which she breathes in insanity and quest for an identity. In Mala's youth, she was incapable of defending herself therefore she says, "I will never let anyone put their terrible hands on you again" Even as an adult, she asserts beyond words, allowing an audience to see Mala as an insane who living in her own world.

Thus, *Cereus Blooms at Night* examines the subject of queer sexuality as well as the prospects for healing and rehabilitation following sexual trauma, as she recovers as a normal woman by the end of the text. Article of Whyte, "(Un)Manacled Sexuality! *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo as a Queer Bildungsroman?" asserts, "Finally, By posing the possibility of an alternative family structure, *Cereus Blooms* questions/queers' conventional conceptions of family and community". The portrayal of Tyler, Mala, and Otoh, who all fall under the category of queer, is crucial in comprehending their lives, their desire for an identity as voiceless, oppressed minorities, and social outcasts, as well as in challenging the cultural



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standards that forbid them from living their lives. Hence, Mootoo stands against the hetero normative identity construction that restricts the freedom of sexual minorities to live their lives and underlines the urgency of healing psychologically and socially and rebuilding their lives afterwards physical and sexual violence. To sum of in revealing the LGBTQ lifestyle, queer narratives take a different approach to the LGBPQ that is supposed to be accepted by all.



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