

# Deconstructing Homonormativity through Necrophilia in R. Raj Rao's "The Gang Rape"

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## **Abstract**

Lisa Duggan popularised the term 'homonormativity' in *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003). Homonormativity stresses congruity with the norms of heterosexual culture, that includes procreation, marriage, and productivity. This is a shift from liberation to assimilation for LGBTQI+ people. However, radical queer writer R. Raj Rao deliberately punctures the idea of homonormativity in his short stories like "The Gang Rape". This story highlights taboo issues even within mainstream queer cultures, such as queer necrophilia, radical lesbian feminism, and the inverted 'necro gaze'. This article uses Duggan's ideas in conjunction with those of Anil Aggrawal, Mari Ellis Dunning, Danielle Knafo, Jonathan P. Rosman and Phillip J. Resnick, and Rebecca May.

**Keywords:** homonormativity, heterosexuality, necrophilia, lesbian feminism, queer

## **Introduction**

The term homonormativity was popularised by Lisa Duggan in *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, referring to the acceptance of only those queer individuals who do not displace the centre and threaten the larger heterosexual structure, and create mutations only at boundaries.<sup>1</sup> Homonormativity lays emphasis on commonality with the norms of heterosexual culture that includes procreation, marriage and productivity. The radical potential of queer lives lies in propagating new ways of loving and living but homonormative culture aims to strip off this radicalism and makes queers congruous with the heterosexual mainstream. Hence, acceptability is based in how closely the LGBTQI+ community is to the appropriate, heteropatriarchal, cis-normative [identifying with the gender assigned at birth] culture.

Duggan writes that "homonormativity is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."<sup>2</sup> It calls for normativity within the queer world so that it does not threaten the larger framework of heterosexual cis-gender culture. A significant reason behind this selective acceptance of homosexual individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), pp. 49-50.

<sup>2</sup> Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, pp. 49-50.

is that the market is now aware that queers have disposable income; this is commonly referred to as the pink economy or rainbow capitalism. ‘Pink Economy’ or ‘Rainbow Capitalism’ as terms were developed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries due in part to the greater acceptance of the LGBTQI+ community, but predominantly predicated on the widespread acceptance of capitalism. Earlier pink capitalism was limited to gay bars and gay bathhouses, but later it widened its reach to various other avenues, as members of the LGBTQI+ communities engaged in conspicuous consumption. Thus, the variety of queers that are acceptable are rich, so-called productive, and can live alongside heteronormative culture:

The new homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: ‘equality’ becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, ‘freedom’ becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the ‘right to privacy’ becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, the price for mainstreaming of queers is blunting the edges of radicalism and steamrolling plural subjectivities. So, in one way, it is an idealised performance of queerness. Radical queers are seen as impediments to the upward mobility of homonormative queers seeking assimilation.

This is a shift from liberation to assimilation, but some radical queer writers like R. Raj Rao deliberately puncture the idea of homonormativity. Rao’s short story “The Gang Rape” bears witness to it. This story highlights a taboo issue even within edgy queer cultures, such as queer necrophilia (necrophilia refers to love of the dead or attraction to corpses, whereas queer necrophilia refers to sexual attraction to a same-sex corpse, and is thus doubly non-normative), and in a manner where it is life affirming. This story blurs the boundaries in multiple ways when seen through the lens of queer death studies (QDS); as not only does it blur the distinction between living and dead, shows the love of a living lesbian for a dead straight woman, but also creates chasm between the straight and the homosexual worlds.

In addition to this, it evinces female necrophilia which is almost absent in necrophilic studies (even in the straight world); hence it is a unique literary specimen. It depicts oppression prevalent in the straight world, and reveals radical queer practices as answers to both heteropatriarchal opprobrium and homonormative subjugation. The theoretical apparatus in this article merges Duggan’s idea of homonormativity, Anil Aggrawal’s classification of ten types of necrophilia,<sup>4</sup> Mari Ellis Dunning’s depiction of necrophilia in children’s literature,<sup>5</sup> Danielle Knafo’s psychoanalytical interpretation of necrophilia,<sup>6</sup> Jonathan P. Rosman and Phillip

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<sup>3</sup> Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> Anil Aggrawal, “A New Classification of Necrophilia,” *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, vol. 16 (2009), pp. 316-320.

<sup>5</sup> Mari Ellis Dunning, “Fairy Tales and Freud: Psychoanalysis in Children Story,” *Mari Ellis Dunning*, 20 December (2013). At: <https://mariellisdunning.cymru/2013/12/20/fairy-tales-and-freud-psychoanalysis-in-childrens-stories>.

<sup>6</sup> Danielle Knafo, “For the Love of Death: Somnophilic and Necrophilic Acts and Fantasies,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytical Association*, vol. 63, no. 2 (2015), pp. 857-886.

J. Resnick's medical interpretation of necrophilic desire,<sup>7</sup> and Rebecca May's concept of the "necro gaze."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the article is multi-disciplinary, as it draws theoretical framework from QDS, forensic sciences, cultural studies, psychology, criminology, and literary studies.

### Viewing "The Gang Rape" through the Lens of Necrophilia

The story in question, "The Gang Rape", annihilates homonormativity by showcasing homosexual necrophilic relationship in such a way that it does not come across as a debased perversion. In fact, it documents that how a patriarchal heterosexual culture pushes a woman to commit suicide, while a lesbian woman falls in love with a dead woman, and tries to fight against the injustice done to the deceased. "The Gang Rape" by Rao is the tragic story of the suicide of a woman called Sheetal. Her plight is narrated by a lesbian woman who falls in love with her after seeing her dead body near the river. Sheetal was a middle-class, ordinary-looking girl, who suffered from identity crisis in the college as that space was saturated with ultra-modern good-looking girls who were chased by young men. Sheetal was spurned by a boy and on rebound she had an affair with a college dropout, Ranvir. She fell for his charms and agreed to meet him at his flat where she was gang raped and thrown off the balcony, but survived. She was hospitalized for months. but instead of being empathetic to Sheetal, her father not only turned his back on her but also accepted money to withdraw the police case against the culprits. Unable to bear the social opprobrium, she committed suicide, and when her body was being taken out of the river the lesbian narrator saw her and fell in love with her. Later the narrator tries to discover the truth behind Sheetal's suicide and brings comfort to her grieving mother.

Thus, reversing the paradigm, the story shows how so-called normative 'straight' desire becomes so oppressive for Sheetal that she commits suicide, whereas necrophilic desire, which is considered perversion, forces a lesbian to make great efforts to unearth the truth behind Sheetal's suicide, and to form a bond with her mother. It signifies a kind of coalition politics between lesbianism and feminism, and creates slippages in the exclusive variety of lesbian feminism. Queer people are deemed unfit citizens and unfit parents and thus their erasure even in the form of death is 'ungrievable.' The concept of 'grievable' and 'ungrievable' death points towards the larger politics of biopolitics of disposability that considers some lives dispensable and others valuable to the extent that they should be protected even at the expense of the others. Indeed, aged, queer, non-cisnormative, disabled and immune-compromised bodies are considered unproductive and a drain on the system in the neoliberal concept of citizenship. No wonder there is a systematic erasure of such bodies and thus their deaths are ungrievable. This idea is explored in Judith Butler's<sup>9</sup> and

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan P. Rosman and Phillip J. Resnick, "Sexual Attraction to Corpses: A Psychiatric Review of Necrophilia," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online*, vol. 17, no.2 (1989), pp. 153-63.\

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca May, "Morbid Parts: Gender, Seduction and the Necro-Gaze," in *Sexual Perversions, 1670-1890*, ed. Julie Peakman (London: Palgrave, 2009), p. 169.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of Life: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010), p. xix.

Marietta Radomska's works.<sup>10</sup> However, in this story Sheetal's heteropatriarchal father is an unfit parent and an equally unfit citizen, as he not only indirectly pushes his daughter toward her death but also behaves corruptly by taking money from her rapists. As opposed to this, queer necrophilic desire in this story operates as an affirmative stance that gives impetus to the annihilation of patriarchy and grounded itself in queer feminist ideology. While documenting classification of necrophilia, Anil Aggrawal identifies ten kinds of necrophilia; this case falls between romantic necrophilia and platonic necrophilia. It is a slightly twisted take on romantic necrophilia because the lesbian lover of this story falls in love with Sheetal for the first time after seeing her dead body, whereas romantic necrophiliacs usually refuse to part with the dead bodies of their loved ones because they were in relationship with them prior to their death. It also falls on the spectrum of platonic necrophilia. Apropos of this Aggrawal reflects:

Those who never touch the dead but find sexual gratification merely from looking at them have been labeled as platonic necrophilists or platonic necrophiles. All these cases may be termed as cases of latent necrophilia or fantasy necrophilia, with the perverts known as latent necrophiles or fantasy necrophiles.<sup>11</sup>

However, in this story, the rejuvenating and healing power emanating out of queer platonic necrophilia is primarily focused on dismantling of patriarchy. The way a living woman is violated by heterosexual invasion is a stark contrast to how even a dead and decaying body is viewed by a lesbian paramour, as the very first page of the story reveals.

Sheetal committed suicide by jumping into a river; when the doctor arrives to check the pulse, the immediate reaction of the lesbian narrator is that she wished she could squeeze the hands of dead girl. In fact, even the handwriting of her suicide note is seductive for the narrator. The narrator is comfortable with her necrophilic desire, acknowledging it; she does not consider it a perversion:

The policemen examined the girl's belongings in her unisex *kameez* pocket. Again, I jealously wished, I could put my hand into her pocket and reach to her cunt. The psychologists call it necrophilia...The girl was put on a stretcher; as she lay there, I had an uncontrollable urge to lie on top of her.<sup>12</sup>

The sheer ease with which the narrator catalogues her necrophilic feelings and later translate them into ennobling emotion is reflective of how the paradigm of homonormativity is punctured by queering the queer through deviant sexual practices. This story questions normative practices surrounding death at multiple levels, as here queer is used as adjective, noun, and verb simultaneously as it not only refers to necropolitics (politics of erasure of unsuitable subjects) but

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<sup>10</sup> Marietta Radomska, "Non/Living Matter, Bioscientific Imaginaries and Feminist Technoecologies of Bioart," *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 32, no. 94 (2017), pp. 377-394.

<sup>11</sup> Aggrawal, "A New Classification of Necrophilia," pp. 316-320.

<sup>12</sup> R. Raj Rao, "The Gang Rape," in *An Evening Rainbow: Queer Writings in Bhasha Literature*, ed. Kuhu Sharma Chanana (New Delhi: Sanbun Publishers, 2012), pp. 39-40.

also points towards subverting and going beyond norms, and queering normative death practices by evincing the ‘death positivity’ surrounding romantic necrophilia. Consequently, to queer the concept of death means to challenge and widen its contours, to diffuse the binary divides of life/death, living/non-living, and grievable/ungrievable, that are taken for granted assumptions in popular cultural imaginaries. But analysing the female romantic-necrophilic gaze as revolutionary force, it is imperative to understand the various dimensions of necrophilic desire as showcased in popular cultural and literary representations, so that one can understand as how there is a significant departure from conventional necrophilic desire in this story.

### The Cultural and Literary Representation of Necrophilia

In fact, necrophilia, especially the platonic and romantic variety, has been documented by many writers as a sign of undying, lasting love. Although the linkages between love and death drive may seem far-fetched to many, we can find various examples of it in cultural and artistic expressions. In 1930s, Pablo Picasso made many drawings of minotaurs—half-men, half-bulls—some of which portray this half animal and half human creature unveiling or molesting a sleeping woman. The drawings are surcharged with erotic energies. The huge horned man-bull hovers over the sleepy and vulnerable girls, and there is a constant feeling of impending danger. The viewer is left to imagine how he is going to ravish the girl, and whether she still be alive after the act?



Figure 1: Pablo Picasso, *Minotaur Caressing the Hand of a Sleeping Girl with his Face* (1934)

Referring to Picasso’s *Minotaur Caressing the Hand of a Sleeping Girl with his Face* (*Minotaure caressant du mufle la main d'une dormeuse*), Danielle Knafo affirms:

We are referred within if erotically stimulated, for Picasso is depicting something deeply primal—the complex relationship between predator and prey, the one who overcomes death by dishing it out and the one who is served on the dish. Importantly, the mythical minotaur did in fact murder its maidens.<sup>13</sup>

Knafo further asserts that numerous paintings and performances depict a living person embracing the skeleton of a dead person such as the “Death and the Maiden” paintings by Hans Baldung, P. J. Lynch, Edvard Munch, and Egon Schiele. There is also performance art by Ana Mendieta and Marina Abramovic in which the artists embrace actual skeletons.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in 2002 the Spanish director Pedro Almodovar released *Talk to Her*, a film that focuses on the love and sexual attraction of two men for their comatose lovers.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, one of the better-known of romantic necrophilia is of strange case of Count von Cosel, born Karl Tanzler in Dresden, who fell in love with Elena Milagro Hoyos, around 1930, a beautiful twenty-year-old of Cuban descent who was dying of tuberculosis.<sup>16</sup> After her death, for seven years he treated her as his wife, including keeping her in a wedding dress. Also, Jonathan P. Rosman and Phillip J. Resnick examine necrophilic tendencies as exhibited in some heavy metal music and the fairy tale, “The Sleeping Beauty.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Necrophilia and Sexism**

Yet most of the literary and cultural representations of necrophilic desire is saturated with deep rooted sexism. In analysing the story of “Snow White” through a necrophilic gaze, Mari Ellis Dunning reveals the necrophilic desire as evinced in “Snow White” and “The Sleeping Beauty.” According to Dunning the Prince finds the Princess (Talia) asleep and cannot wake her up, and gradually becomes drawn to her. To quote her words:

He actually sexually abuses her comatose body presumably as a means to claim her for himself. As a near-dead body, she cannot elude him as she may choose to do in her waking life. This bears similarities to the Prince who purchases the Princess’ corpse/casket in “Snow White”. The Princess goes on to give birth to twins following this assault...The traditional story of Snow White isn’t a far cry from the Disney interpretation. At the end of the tale, the prince purchases Snow White’s body from the seven dwarves, having fallen for the Princess when he first lays eyes on her—despite the fact that she is, in fact, dead. This

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<sup>13</sup> Danielle Knafo, “For the Love of Death: Somnophilic and Necrophilic Acts and Fantasies,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytical Association*, vol. 63, no. 2 (2015), pp. 857-886.

<sup>14</sup> Silvia Marin Barutcieff, “Death and the Maiden in 20th Century Literature and Visual Arts,” in *Death Representations in Literature: Forms and Theories*, ed. Adriana Teodorescu (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 389-409.

<sup>15</sup> Pedro Almodóvar, *Talk to Her* (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Anna Kashcheeva, “In Bed with Death: The Story of a Man Who Lived with the Body of His Loved One for Seven Years,” 16 April (2020). At: <https://birdinflight.com/en/world/20200416-carl-tanzler.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan P. Rosman and Phillip J. Resnick, “Sexual Attraction to Corpses: A Psychiatric Review of Necrophilia,” *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1989), pp. 153-163.

marginalised aspect of the Fairy Tale demonstrates necrophilial desire and the theory of the death drive.<sup>18</sup>

These literary, artistic and historical instances are of straight desire and are imbued with sexism and misogyny. Sexism and necrophilia seem to be directly proportional; the earliest documentation of methods of saving dead bodies from necrophilic invasions (particularly in Egypt where mummification was a common practice and consequently a non-decaying body could have been a source of necrophilic fantasies), reveals heteropatriarchal subjugation. Quoting Herodotus (484-425 BC), Anand Kumar Vasudevan and Prashanthi Krishna Dharma posit that in ancient Egypt:

When the wife of a distinguished man dies, or any woman who happens to be beautiful or well known, her body is not given to the embalmers immediately, but only after the lapse of three or four days. This is a precautionary measure to prevent the embalmers from violating her corpse, a thing which is actively said to have happened in the case of a woman who had just died.<sup>19</sup>

However, this kind of sense of purity and possession was limited to only female corpses and male corpses were treated differently. They further affirm that male corpses may have been treated differently, “as pseudo-copulation ritual was performed with the mummy to restore the dead man’s virility.”<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, all these necrophilic traditions smack of misogyny, sexism, biases and prejudices. As noted, the proprietisation of a woman is evident from the fact that a husband is ready to let the body of his wife rot (this is contrary to Egyptian cultural norms because preserving a body is a part of their ethos), so that no other man should touch her even after death, whereas the sexual virility is considered so significant for young men that even after death pseudo-copulations rituals are performed on their mummies.

### **Politics of Inversion in “The Gang Rape”**

Overall, it appears that female necrophilia has the potential to disturb and disrupt the repressive module of feminine sexuality and this accounts for such sparse representations of it even in the straight world. The depiction of stringent concept of necrophilia centres around the ‘debase mesmeriser’ who situates his pernicious gaze on ‘controlled’ and ‘docile’ female bodies. Patently, the feminist research has connected male necrophilia to power assertion and the objectifying male gaze on the female body. Apropos of this, it is significant to quote J.G. Adair, S. Berry and Anna Chiara Corradino who affirm:

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<sup>18</sup> Dunning, “Fairy Tales and Freud: Psychoanalysis in Children Story.”

<sup>19</sup> Anand Kumar Vasudevan and Prashanthi Krishna Dharma, “Necrophilia: A Study of the Psychoanalysis in the Characteristics of the Offenders who Sexually Molest the Dead,” *Medico-Legal Update*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2019), pp. 11-21.

<sup>20</sup> Vasudevan and Dharma, “Necrophilia,” pp. 11-21.

The issues raised by research on female necrophilia are varied and lead to some interesting questions that can be profitably addressed through a queer perspective for several reasons: on the one hand, female necrophilia overturns some very specific polarities in gender performances and subverts the normative erotic desire; on the other, it questions the boundaries between body and desire, and their correlated meanings, since the dead body becomes the product of secularised and depathologised subject dissolution. A number of questions also arise in order to effectively analyse female necrophilia today. What firstly needs to be addressed is a still debated question regarding the very concept of necrophilia and female necrophilia that therefore shifts from an active into a passive role, thus deviating from the commonsensical reality that associates femininity with passivity and masculinity with activity.<sup>21</sup>

Hence the reshuffling of gender polarities is quite conspicuous in female necrophilia, and more so when it concerns lesbian necrophilic desire. “The Gang Rape” is a dramatic reversal of paradigm as it not only gives the agency of being a necrophiliac lover to a woman (as in most of the reported cases and even literary instances, the necrophilic invasion is done by a man to a woman), but also twists the straight tale into a queer one; and that is too an ennobling one by stripping criminality out of necrophilia and highlighting the cathartic and sublime effect of it. The necrophilic tendencies of Sheetal’s lesbian paramour is of life affirmation that results in the positive outcome at the end of the story. The sublime nature of queer necrophilic desire and the radical lesbian feminist stance of this story are visible from the fact that the disgruntled mother of Sheetal, who despises her husband for pushing her daughter to death and receiving money to withdraw the case - she in fact states that she would have preferred to be widow than to remain married to him - not only finds solace in the company of the lesbian narrator and pours her heart out to her, but also makes a space for the narrator in her home:

Come, Mrs. Jadhav asked, and led me by the hand to the bedroom to show me Sheetal’s things. Her clothes. Her collection of dolls. Her books. Her I-pod and mobile phone. I wanted to put my nose to her undergarments and sniff them, *Brokeback Mountain* style. What will I do with these things now? Mrs. Jadhav asked and began to cry for the umpteenth time. I soothed her, though I’m no good at consoling people. The clock ticked. I was still in Mrs. Jadhav’s house when darkness came, and she made my bed on the iron folding cot in the living room.<sup>22</sup>

This section is of singular significance because as opposed to heteropatriarchal culture, where a sexually abused alive woman was no more than a corpse for abusers and even for her own father. These two women, Sheetal’s mother and the lesbian narrator (who seem to be surcharged with so-called non-acceptable necrophilic desire which is considered a perversion both in straight and queer world) come together to commemorate and extend their love to the dead Sheetal. However,

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<sup>21</sup> Joshua G. Adair, Stacey Berry, Giulia Bigongiari, Mel Hogan and Anna Chiara Corradino, “Writing and Filming Queer Deaths,” *Whatever: A Transdisciplinary Journal of Queer Theories and Studies*, vol. 4 (2021), p. 707.

<sup>22</sup> Rao, “The Gang Rape,” p. 51.



the bonding between Sheetal's mother and the necrophilic lesbian lover takes another dimension when viewed through the lens of psychoanalysis. It postulates the idea of oedipal leanings and 'return to the mother's womb' as discussed by Anand Kumar Vasudevan and Prashanthi Krishna Dharma. They affirm:

Calet and Weinschel (1972) concluded that although necrophilia may appear to have some characteristics in common with somnophilia (sleepy sex), the two syndromes do not necessarily reflect the same underlying pathology. The wish to return to the maternal body, oedipal conflict, pregenital fixations, and castration anxiety may contribute to somnophilia. In addition, Munchausen's syndrome and necrophilia are uncommon disorders which do not appear to be related. It is suggested, however, that both of them center on 'return to the womb' fantasies and may represent variants of each other. Specifically, the Munchausen patient's symptom triad (factitious illness, peregrination, pseudologia fantastica) is seen to reflect a wish for death and reunion with the maternal object... In some of these cases, the wish to re-enter and to explore the interior of the mother's body may be an important ingredient.<sup>23</sup>

Thus 'return to the womb' is a consistent pattern in necrophilia and therefore it is unsurprising that the protagonist of the story returns to the mother of her dead love and stays with her.

Necrophilia many a time is marked by the missing parent syndrome (specially, if the childhood is marked by an absentee mother) and finding affiliation with maternal object seems part of necrophiliac continuum. The narrator of this story also shows these signs when she goes to the home of Sheetal and finds an uncanny attachment to her mother. She says:

My butch feminism evaporated in a jiffy in the presence of this real woman who had been through so much. I suddenly felt the need for the mother I had never known, since my father and she had divorced when I was little. I had then spent my entire life living in hostels, eating off messes. I became a loner.<sup>24</sup>

A plethora of psychologists, including J. S. Biermann,<sup>25</sup> B. Berliner,<sup>26</sup> Hanna Segal,<sup>27</sup> Franklin Klaf and William Brown,<sup>28</sup> and Alessandra Lemma<sup>29</sup> have constantly tried to establish the linkages between necrophilia and separation anxiety or loss of maternal figure to whose womb one wishes to return. Little wonder that the narrator of "The Gang Rape," while talking and spending time

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<sup>23</sup> Vasudevan and Dharma, "Necrophilia: A Study of the Psychoanalysis in the Characteristics of the Offenders who Sexually Molest the Dead," p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Rao, "The Gang Rape," p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> J. S. Biermann, "Necrophilia in a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, vol. 31 (1962), pp. 329-340.

<sup>26</sup> B. Berliner, "A Case of Necrophilia," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, vol. 13 (1944), pp. 382-400.

<sup>27</sup> Hanna Segal, "A Necrophilic Phantasy," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 34 (1953), pp. 98-101.

<sup>28</sup> Franklin Klaf and William Brown, "Necrophilia: Brief Review and Case Report," *Psychiatric Quarterly*, vol. 32 (1958), pp. 645-652.

<sup>29</sup> Alessandra Lemma, "Whose Skin is it Anyway? Some Reflections on the Psychic Function of Necrophilic Fantasies," *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*, vol. 59 (2013), pp. 283-304.

with Sheetal's mother, is reminded of the loss of her own mother through divorce, and of her need for a maternal figure. Giving a further deeper psychoanalytical understanding of a necrophiliac, Knafo states that while writing about the 'dead mother', Andre Green described a repetitive compulsion to identify and reunite with the dead mother.<sup>30</sup> Green was referring, of course, to the depressed mother experienced as dead by the child, rather than to a mother who was actually dead. Thus, the oblique positive force of platonic necrophilia is not only emanating from the imperishable love and union which cannot be mitigated even by death, but also from conquering the biggest fear of human beings, the horror of death. Patently, necrophiliacs are able to transgress one of the most stringent boundaries and establish a fluid negotiation between the dead and the living. This creates a twisted sense of invincibility. Geoffrey Gorer affirms that we cover the human corpse because we want to avoid the identification, hostility and excitation that might exude out of it.<sup>31</sup> Hence convoluted linkages between death and sex as taboo can be established through the trope of decaying bodies which are catalogued by the absence/presence valency and thus are congruous with visible/invisible entities of queers. In fact, Gorer declares that death is pornographic for it has replaced sex as taboo in modern society.<sup>32</sup> Kate Woodthorpe comments:

One principal reason is the way in which dead body before burial even challenges the boundaries of the ideal contained and controlled body. In a society...where bodies are ordered and controlled, the uncontrollable, decomposing person-that-once-was presents an absolute rejection of efforts to order and control the body.<sup>29</sup>

Significantly, the radical potential of dying and decaying bodies is unparalleled. Non-fixities of dead body spaces are coterminous with queer liminality and that is why dead-body spaces and queer desire are compatible in a dubious and strange fashion. Moreover, what makes "The Gang Rape" unique is that perhaps it is the only Indian queer story that deals with lesbian necrophilia. Even within the straight necrophilic spectrum, this desire is usually understood in terms of a male desiring the dead female body. While defining necrophilia, the assumption of gender has been consistent across time and space. However, homosexual necrophilia turns the table because it does not follow the patriarchal trajectory. The perpetrator is not operating out of gender hierarchy and the so-called victim is also of the same gender. Patently "The Gang Rape" punctures the idea of 'norm' at multiple levels. Firstly, it presents the sublime and emblematic effect of romantic and platonic necrophilia that gives impetus to lesbian feminism as opposed to the destruction of female body by oppressive straight desire. It does so by striping criminality out of necrophilic desire. Secondly, it further creates fissures even within the necrophilic spectrum by showcasing a lesbian necrophiliac, especially when homosexual necrophilia was considered such a rare occurrence that Aggrawal has stated that there are no reported cases of homosexual necrophilia.<sup>33</sup> Mark Pettigrew

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<sup>30</sup> Knafo, "For the Love of Death: Somnophilic and Necrophilic Acts and Fantasies," pp. 857-886.

<sup>31</sup> Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (London: Cresset Press, 1965), pp. 55-57.

<sup>32</sup> Kate Woodthorpe, "Buried Bodies in an East London Cemetery: Re-visiting Taboo," in *Deathscapes: New Spaces for Death, Dying and Bereavement*, eds James D. Sidaway, and Avril Maddrell (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Aggrawal, "A New Classification of Necrophilia," pp. 316-320.

has analysed the only reported case of queer necrophilia, but notes that it also centers on male homosexuality.<sup>34</sup> Rebecca May coined the term ‘necro-gaze’ to depict “a masculinized gaze directed at a dead subject or directed as fantasy at a subject whom the gazer wishes dead for his benefit.”<sup>35</sup> May conceives of the ‘necro-gaze’ as perpetuating gender stereotypes to the extreme. Apropos of this, Knafo observes that:

Bronfen (1992) considers the trope of women’s dead bodies as a social symptom, claiming that death, sexuality, and otherness have almost always been located in the female signifying body...with masculinity as possessing, consuming, conquering, invasive, and powerful, and femininity as receptive, submissive, powerless, lacking agency, and dead. The doer/done-to, penetrator/recipient dialectic clearly represents socially encoded models of desire that are present in the necrophile and somnophile.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

QDS is not only about queer deaths but also refers to queering the process of accepted death practices by unpacking and questioning normativities that underpin contemporary discourses on death, dying and mourning.<sup>37</sup> In the context of QDS, ‘to queer’ means to challenge fixities and definitives and consistently dismantle the familiar. In this context *The Gang Rape* creates significant slippages by showing female homosexual necrophilia. Hence, the idea of the so-called neoliberal ‘good gay citizen’ centering around homonormativity is punctured at multiple levels through this short story by exhibiting extreme kind of deviances and that is too in such a way that it comes across as a powerful affirmative force against homonormativity and heteronormativity alike. As Lena Wanggren cogitates “[f]emale necrophilia then might be seen as not only transgressing boundaries of life and death ...but also as transgressing prescribed gender roles.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed *The Gang Rape* exhibits eroticisation of death in such a fashion that it dismantles gender hierarchy pertaining to female passivity and surrender, and creates a tale of radical lesbian feminism out of it by inverting the ‘necro gaze’ and annihilating the violent gender agenda of conquest.

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Pettigrew, “Serial Killing and Homosexual Necrophilia an Exploration,” *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2019), pp. 409-418.

<sup>35</sup> Rebecca May, “Morbid Parts: Gender, Seduction and the Necro-Gaze,” in *Sexual Perversions, 1670-1890*, ed. Julie Peakman (London: Palgrave, 2009), p. 169.

<sup>36</sup> Knafo, “For the Love of Death,” p.879.

<sup>37</sup> Marietta Radomska and Cecilia Asberg, “Doing Away with Life: On Biophilosophy, the Non/Living, Toxic Embodiment, and Reimagining Ethics,” in *Art as We Don’t Know It*, eds Erich Berger, Kasperi Mäki-Reinikka, Kira O’Reilly, and Helena Sederholm (Espoo: Aalto ARTS Books, 2020), pp. 54-63.

<sup>38</sup> Lena Wanggren, “Death and Desire: Female Necrophilia as Gender Transgression,” *Transgression and its Limits*, eds Matt Foley, Neil McRobert and Aspasia Stephanou (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p. 71.