

## **LAW, SPACE, AND SEXUALITY: READING JERRY PINTO'S *MURDER IN MAHIM* AS A SOCIAL NOVEL**

**Dr Santhini M.A.**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of English,  
Vardhaman College of Engineering,  
Shamshabad, Hyderabad – 501218,  
Telangana, India

### **Abstract**

Jerry Pinto's *Murder in Mahim* (2017) explores the urban underbelly of Mumbai to expose how state power, social prejudice, and economic precarity intersect to marginalise gay men. Set during the enforcement of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, the novel unravels the double lives forced upon homosexual men by legal and cultural taboos. Reading the novel as a social text, this paper analyses how Pinto portrays the city as a site of both repression and resistance, where queer individuals claim their "right to the city" through the subversion of heteronormative spaces. The study situates *Murder in Mahim* within post-liberalisation urban culture and queer spatial politics, arguing that Pinto's narrative functions as a call for social reform and moral re-evaluation in contemporary India.

**Keywords:-** Murder in Mahim; queer space; Section 377; right to the city; Jerry Pinto; social novel; urban sexuality; Mumbai fiction.

### **Introduction**

Jerry Pinto's *Murder in Mahim* (2017) is one of the most significant post-liberalisation Indian novels that confronts the uneasy coexistence of morality, modernity, and marginalisation in the metropolis. Set in Mumbai—the city often celebrated as India's cosmopolitan and liberal heart—the novel delves beneath the façade of progress to reveal a world marked by fear, hypocrisy, and exclusion. What begins as a murder mystery soon becomes a layered social narrative that interrogates the city's moral and spatial geography during the enforcement of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, the colonial law that criminalised homosexual acts.

The novel's central event—a murder in a public toilet near Mahim railway station—opens up questions about sexuality, law, and the politics of space. Pinto uses this site, both mundane and transgressive, to expose how urban spaces become instruments of surveillance and punishment. The novel's characters—Peter Fernandes, a retired journalist; Inspector Jende, a policeman; and Sooraj Patel, a closeted homosexual—move through these spaces negotiating shame, secrecy, and the yearning for acceptance. Through their intersecting lives, Pinto captures the contradictory nature of Mumbai as a city that promises anonymity and freedom yet continues to stigmatise non-normative sexualities.

Reading *Murder in Mahim* as a social novel allows us to understand how Pinto extends beyond the individual story of crime to a larger social critique. As M. H. Abrams defines it, the

social novel focuses on “the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era on shaping characters and determining events,” often embodying a “thesis recommending political and social reform.” Pinto’s narrative clearly aligns with this definition. His portrayal of homosexual men as victims of both the law and society exposes the structural violence embedded within urban modernity.

This paper examines how *Murder in Mahim* functions as a social novel that critiques institutionalised homophobia and explores the intersections of law, space, and sexuality. Using theoretical insights from Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey, the paper investigates how Pinto maps queer experiences onto the geography of Mumbai, transforming the city into a text of power, resistance, and desire. The study situates the novel within post-liberalisation urban culture, arguing that Pinto’s work humanises queer existence by reclaiming the right to live and love in a city that criminalised their very being.

### **Section 377 and the Criminalisation of Desire**

To understand *Murder in Mahim* as a social novel, it is necessary to situate it within the legal framework that governed sexual conduct in India for more than a century and a half. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, introduced by the British in 1861, criminalised “carnal intercourse against the order of nature,” thereby pathologising homosexuality and collapsing the distinction between consensual and non-consensual sexual acts. The law was not merely punitive—it defined what constituted “natural” and “acceptable” sexual behaviour, shaping public morality and legitimising discrimination against sexual minorities.

Alok Gupta, in his landmark essay “Section 377 and the Dignity of Indian Homosexuals,” explains that the law’s primary effect was not widespread prosecution but pervasive fear and stigma. It enabled the police and other authorities to harass and blackmail individuals merely on suspicion of their sexuality. Gupta observes that the police often arrested men “merely on the basis of suspicion that because of their appearance, they are indulging in homosexual sex” (4820). The law, thus, created a climate of vulnerability, where desire itself became incriminating evidence.

Pinto’s *Murder in Mahim* powerfully dramatizes this atmosphere of fear. The novel’s murder investigation reveals that the victim, a male sex worker named Proxy, was part of a network of gay men who met in public toilets, beaches, and parks—spaces that simultaneously offered anonymity and risk. The killer’s motives and the circumstances surrounding the murder are linked to police blackmail and extortion, underscoring how Section 377 facilitated exploitation by those meant to uphold the law. The two constables who manipulate Sooraj Patel, a closeted gay man, weaponise the law to strip him of both dignity and agency.

Sooraj Patel’s tragedy—his secret marriage, his internalised shame, and eventual suicide—exemplifies the destructive consequences of criminalising sexuality. His life encapsulates the experience of many queer men who were forced into heteronormative conformity while living double lives under constant threat. Jean Genet’s reflection that “I had no more choice in my sexuality than a Negro has in the colour of his skin” (qtd. in Merchant *Forbidden Sex, Forbidden Texts*) resonates deeply here. Sooraj’s sexual orientation is innate, yet the social and legal structures compel him to mask it, making his existence itself a transgression. Section 377 did not merely punish acts; it institutionalised the policing of desire. It rendered homosexual men hypervisible to law enforcement and invisible to society at large. Pinto’s novel exposes this paradox—how the state’s moral gaze intrudes into private spaces and criminalises intimacy, thereby producing what Foucault calls a “disciplinary society.” For Foucault, power

operates not only through repression but also through the creation of norms and identities. The law thus becomes an instrument that constructs homosexuality as deviance, legitimising surveillance and social exclusion.

In *Murder in Mahim*, Pinto reimagines this historical oppression through individual lives that intersect with the structures of law and morality. The novel becomes an act of witness, documenting the emotional and social costs of criminalising desire. Through his empathetic portrayal of gay men as victims rather than deviants, Pinto challenges the moral codes that shaped postcolonial India's understanding of sexuality.

The Supreme Court of India's historic 2018 judgment that struck down Section 377 vindicated decades of activism and resistance. Yet Pinto's novel, published a year before the verdict, anticipates that moment by exposing how the law's violence is embedded in everyday life. His narrative reminds readers that the repeal of a statute does not automatically dismantle the deep-rooted prejudices that sustain exclusion.

### **Economic Liberalisation and the Urban Gay Subculture in Mumbai**

The 1990s marked a watershed moment in India's socio-economic and cultural history. Economic liberalisation, globalisation, and the rise of a consumerist middle class fundamentally reshaped Indian cities. Mumbai, the financial capital, became the most visible symbol of these transformations. Alongside the new economy emerged new subjectivities, desires, and identities—including the increasing visibility of gay men who sought spaces of freedom and belonging within the modern cityscape.

As Parmesh Shahani notes in *Gay Bombay: Globalization, Love and (Be)longing in Contemporary India*, the post-liberalisation period witnessed the rise of an urban gay subculture made possible by global media, the Internet, and transnational queer discourses. Shahani attributes this visibility to “an amalgamation of multiple advancements that occurred in the 1990s such as economic liberalization, media proliferation, the emergence of the Internet, the growth of the middle class, and the establishment of a pan-Indian culture” (41). Mumbai, with its cosmopolitan ethos and English-speaking elite, became a laboratory for this emerging identity politics.

Pinto's *Murder in Mahim* is deeply embedded in this socio-economic context. His Mumbai is a city of contradictions—a metropolis that promises anonymity and opportunity but also intensifies class and sexual divisions. The novel depicts how economic freedom does not necessarily translate into social liberation. While liberalisation enabled the formation of virtual communities and gay networks, it also fostered new forms of commodification and marginalisation. The “pink economy,” which refers to the economic influence and consumer potential of LGBTQ+ individuals, thrived primarily among the middle and upper classes, leaving working-class gay men vulnerable to exploitation and criminalisation.

Characters like Proxy, Himal, and Unit represent this precarious underside of the liberalised city. They inhabit the margins—public toilets, railway platforms, and seedy lodges—that remain outside the sanitized, corporatised vision of Mumbai. Their economic vulnerability makes them easy targets for blackmail and police violence. Pinto shows how capitalism and criminalisation intersect to reinforce social hierarchies: while globalisation introduces discourses of freedom, the law continues to mark certain bodies as deviant and disposable.

Phil Hubbard's *Cities and Sexualities* offers a crucial insight here. He argues that urban theory must recognise the city as a sexualised space where “freedom and repression are co-constitutive” (xv). The very anonymity that allows queer men to express desire also exposes

them to danger. Public toilets, for instance, double as spaces of both intimacy and risk. In *Murder in Mahim*, these sites function as “counter-spaces” that queer the city’s geography, embodying the tension between concealment and visibility.

Moreover, the cultural nationalism of the 1990s—fuelled by the rise of the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance in Maharashtra—reinforced heteronormative ideals by framing homosexuality as a Western import. Shahani observes that “being gay or queer is positioned as being non-Indian—it is marked as a Western import and something against Indian culture” (280). Pinto’s novel subtly critiques this moral policing by juxtaposing the private suffering of gay men with the public hypocrisy of those who uphold such values.

The privatisation of urban space also played a key role in restricting queer visibility. As the state encouraged private real estate development, accessible public spaces dwindled, reducing the opportunities for gay men to gather and form communities. Jordi Borja’s concept of the city as a “place of freedom and potential adventures” (29) becomes ironic in Pinto’s narrative, where freedom is always shadowed by surveillance and shame.

In depicting Mumbai’s queer subculture, Pinto captures the paradox of the liberalised city: a site that produces both desire and exclusion. His novel thus becomes not only a study of sexuality but also a critique of neoliberal urbanism that privileges capital over compassion. By situating the personal within the political economy of the city, Pinto demonstrates that the struggle for sexual freedom is inseparable from the struggle for equitable urban citizenship.

### ***Murder in Mahim* as a Social Novel**

The category of the **social novel** refers to a literary work that not only mirrors social realities but also exposes and critiques the moral and institutional structures shaping them. M. H. Abrams defines the form as one that “gives primary importance to the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era in shaping characters and determining events” and frequently embodies “a thesis recommending political and social reform” (193). Jerry Pinto’s *Murder in Mahim* fulfils these conditions through its vivid portrayal of Mumbai’s social underbelly and its interrogation of the moral codes that criminalise desire. Beneath the surface of a crime thriller, the novel functions as a sociological and ethical document that calls for compassion and change. The novel begins with the discovery of a body in a public toilet at Matunga Road Station—an event that immediately shifts attention from the crime to the lives that surround it. The murdered youth, known as Proxy, is a male sex worker whose death unravels a complex network of relationships shaped by secrecy, shame, and survival. Through the investigative efforts of the retired journalist Peter Fernandes and Police Inspector Jende, Pinto constructs a panoramic view of urban life under Section 377. The investigation leads into spaces of marginality—railway stations, slums, and night-time meeting points—where class, sexuality, and legality collide.

At the centre of the plot stands Sooraj Patel, a married man who conceals his homosexuality to maintain social respectability. His double life is emblematic of the pressures imposed by law and convention. Unable to express his identity openly, he becomes ensnared in a web of blackmail orchestrated by corrupt policemen who use Section 377 as their weapon. His suicide becomes a grim metaphor for how legalised morality destroys lives. Pinto presents Sooraj not as a deviant but as a victim of social hypocrisy—a man crushed by a system that denies him authenticity.

In contrast, the heterosexual couple Peter and Millie Fernandes serve as a moral counterpoint. When they discover that their son, Sunil, may be gay, their initial shock gives way to acceptance. Their journey from confusion to empathy represents the possibility of moral



progress within a conservative society. Through them, Pinto models an inclusive vision of parenthood that recognises love above prejudice.

The social dimension of the novel also manifests in Pinto's portrayal of institutional corruption. The police, expected to uphold justice, emerge as exploiters of the very citizens they are meant to protect. The two constables who extort money and sexual favours from gay men embody the perversion of power sanctioned by discriminatory law. Pinto thereby transforms the murder mystery into a broader critique of systemic injustice, implicating not only individuals but the state apparatus itself.

Jordi Borja describes the city as “simultaneously a personal experience and a collective action . . . a place of freedom and potential adventures” (29). Pinto's Mumbai, however, reveals how this promise of freedom is stratified by class and sexuality. For the affluent, the city offers liberation; for the marginalised, it becomes a labyrinth of danger. By focusing on male sex workers, closeted middle-class men, and police officers who exploit them, Pinto exposes the uneven distribution of urban rights. The city's public toilets, stations, and bars become heterotopias where law, desire, and danger intersect.

Pinto's novel thus performs the dual task that characterises great social fiction: it humanises the marginal and indicts the structures that produce marginality. His realism is compassionate but unsparing, rooted in the conviction that empathy can be an instrument of reform. Through his narrative, readers are compelled to confront uncomfortable truths about their own participation in systems of exclusion. The novel's ultimate message is not merely the decriminalisation of homosexuality but the decriminalisation of empathy itself—of the right to live truthfully within one's own skin.

### **Queer Space, Power, and Resistance**

Space, in *Murder in Mahim*, is not a neutral backdrop but an active participant in the making and unmaking of identity. The novel's social critique emerges through Pinto's mapping of Mumbai's geography—its stations, public toilets, chawls, and beaches—as sites where power is both exercised and contested. These are the spaces where the homosexual subject negotiates visibility, desire, and danger, transforming the city into a cartography of resistance.

Michel Foucault's seminal argument that “where there is power, there is resistance” (*History of Sexuality* 95) aptly frames Pinto's portrayal of the urban landscape. The spaces that police and society seek to regulate—the public toilet, the railway platform, the dark alley—become counter-sites of desire where queer men reclaim fragments of agency. In these hidden corners of the city, Pinto locates what Henri Lefebvre calls the “lived space,” a space shaped not by planners or institutions but by the everyday practices of those who inhabit it (*The Production of Space* 39).

The toilet at Matunga Station, where the novel's opening murder occurs, epitomises this paradoxical spatiality. Ostensibly a public utility, it doubles as a site of sexual encounter, a heterotopia in Foucault's sense of the term—a space “outside of all places, though it may be possible to indicate its location in reality” (“Of Other Spaces” 24). It is a refuge for those denied private space by social and economic structures, yet it is also a site of surveillance, vulnerability, and violence. Pinto's choice of this location for the crime underscores the precarious nature of queer existence: even spaces of intimacy are haunted by the threat of exposure and punishment. The novel is replete with other “counter-spaces” that subvert the heterosexual order of the city. Proxy and Unit, two working-class gay men, earn their living in such spaces—public toilets, parks, and beaches—where they both perform and negotiate their identities. These spaces are

fleetingly autonomous, what Hakim Bey calls “Temporary Autonomous Zones,” moments of freedom within a repressive structure. By representing these marginal geographies, Pinto reclaims the city for those who have been erased from its dominant narratives.

R. Raj Rao, in *Criminal Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics in India*, describes such urban sites as “monosexual or non-heteronormative male single-sex spaces,” which function simultaneously as spaces of exclusion and empowerment (46). Pinto’s depiction of Mumbai resonates with Rao’s theorisation: the city’s underbelly becomes a network of coded spaces where men seek connection, pleasure, and recognition outside the bounds of legality. These “queered” spaces are performative—they exist only through repeated acts of transgression that defy the spatial logic of heteronormativity.

The act of cruising itself—men seeking other men in public places—can be seen as a performative production of queer space. Gregson and Rose argue that “space too needs to be thought of as brought into being through performances” (434). Pinto’s novel captures this performativity through subtle narrative gestures: a glance, a coded word, or a shared silence in a crowded compartment. Such moments transform ordinary urban spaces into what David Harvey terms “spaces of hope,” where the marginalised briefly experience belonging (184).

Yet, Pinto does not romanticise these spaces. He recognises their fragility and the violence that often accompanies them. The police officers who patrol these sites embody the coercive power of the state, transforming places of desire into traps of humiliation. Nevertheless, the persistence of these spaces signifies a politics of endurance. As Gavin Brown observes, “public sex environments are not simply places of risk but also of community formation and political meaning” (98). Pinto’s narrative thus situates resistance not in organised activism alone but in the everyday acts of survival performed by queer men in the city.

By reclaiming the city’s hidden topographies, *Murder in Mahim* challenges the heteronormative mapping of urban space. The novel redefines what Harvey calls the “right to the city” as the right to inhabit and transform space according to one’s desires and identities. In doing so, Pinto inscribes the homosexual subject into Mumbai’s cultural geography, asserting that the right to love is inseparable from the right to belong.

### **Sexual Fluidity and the Limits of Labels**

One of the most striking aspects of Jerry Pinto’s *Murder in Mahim* is its nuanced portrayal of sexuality as fluid, situational, and resistant to rigid categorisation. The novel dismantles the binary understanding of sexual orientation as either heterosexual or homosexual and instead presents sexuality as a continuum shaped by social, emotional, and economic circumstances. Through its diverse cast of characters—from closeted middle-class men like Sooraj Patel to working-class sex workers like Himat and Unit—Pinto illustrates the complexity of desire in a city where the boundaries of identity are constantly negotiated.

R. Raj Rao’s discussion of Alfred Kinsey’s research in *Criminal Love?* provides a useful framework for reading Pinto’s sexual politics. Rao notes that Kinsey’s study in the 1940s and 1950s proposed a six-point scale of sexuality, ranging from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality, with multiple gradations of bisexuality in between (21). This continuum challenged the belief that human beings can be neatly classified into fixed sexual categories. Pinto’s characters embody this fluidity: their sexual choices are influenced not only by desire but also by circumstance, opportunity, and the need for survival.

For instance, Unit and Himat engage in same-sex relationships primarily for economic gain. Their sexuality, shaped by class and necessity, cannot be easily labelled as gay or straight.

In contrast, Sooraj Patel's homosexuality is innate and repressed; his tragic marriage to Himali underscores how social conformity demands self-erasure. Between these poles lie characters like Sunil, Peter and Millie's son, whose affection for Roosh—a trans woman—reflects a broader human capacity for emotional connection that transcends gender binaries. Through Sunil's confusion and introspection, Pinto suggests that sexuality is not a fixed identity but an evolving narrative of desire and discovery.

Madhavi Menon, in her work on queer theory, argues that identity categories limit rather than liberate human desire. In "The Politics of Desire," she asserts that "the idea of bodies, of names, of categories, of being able to identify and define who we are and everybody else around us, is a way of really shrinking the available horizons of our desires." Pinto's novel vividly enacts this idea. His characters resist stable identities; they inhabit the interstices between definitions, where emotion, pleasure, and shame coexist.

Sunil's declaration to his father—"I don't think you should equate sex with self" (Pinto 98)—captures the essence of this philosophy. The novel thus participates in a broader queer discourse that separates sexuality from identity, allowing desire to exist beyond the constraints of definition. Foucault's concept of sexuality as a "discursive construct" is equally relevant here: sexuality is not a biological constant but a social narrative produced through language, law, and power. Pinto's characters speak and act within this discursive framework, exposing how identity categories are imposed and internalised.

Moreover, *Murder in Mahim* challenges stereotypes about masculinity and emotional expression. In a powerful closing scene, Peter and Unit—two men from vastly different social worlds—weep together without shame: "They wept together then, man and man, and were not ashamed" (Pinto 227). This moment subverts the gendered expectation that men must suppress emotion, suggesting that vulnerability itself can be an act of resistance. By queering masculinity, Pinto reclaims tenderness as an ethical and political gesture.

Pinto's representation of sexual fluidity also reveals the intersections between gender, class, and morality. Men who sell sex in public spaces are simultaneously condemned and desired; they occupy what Homi Bhabha might call a "liminal position" within the urban order—visible yet disavowed. The transactional nature of their relationships complicates moral binaries of purity and corruption, suggesting that sexuality, like the city itself, is always negotiated in the space between legality and longing.

Ultimately, *Murder in Mahim* insists that human sexuality cannot be contained within linguistic or legal boundaries. As Menon reminds us, desire "overflows the constraints of identity." By depicting sexuality as relational rather than categorical, Pinto invites readers to rethink morality not as adherence to fixed norms but as empathy toward difference. In doing so, he expands the moral imagination of Indian fiction and contributes to an ongoing discourse that challenges the politics of naming and exclusion.

### **Creating Space through Discourse**

In *Murder in Mahim*, Jerry Pinto's act of writing itself becomes a form of social intervention—a reclaiming of narrative and spatial agency for those silenced by law and stigma. When physical spaces are policed, literature becomes a discursive space where marginalised voices can exist, speak, and be heard. This transformation of discourse into space resonates with Michel de Certeau's assertion that writing is "a practice that invents spaces" (xvii). By narrating the lives of gay men in contemporary Mumbai, Pinto does more than document reality—he creates a new moral geography where empathy replaces criminalisation.

The city in Pinto's novel is governed by a heteronormative spatial order that privileges the family, the home, and the marketplace as "legitimate" sites of existence. Public spaces like toilets and parks, which queer men temporarily inhabit, are rendered illegitimate by moral and legal codes. However, as Henri Lefebvre posits, space is socially produced—it is not fixed but constantly redefined through social interactions and discourses (*Production of Space* 38). In that sense, *Murder in Mahim* performs the very act of producing queer space through its language and representation. By articulating the lived experiences of homosexual men, the novel brings into public consciousness what society seeks to conceal.

Ruth Vanita's *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West* reinforces this idea that social practice precedes legal reform. She argues that "change in written law is always preceded by change in practice," and that literature and media often serve as the testing ground for these moral evolutions (5). Pinto's novel exemplifies this pre-legal activism. Published just a year before the Supreme Court's 2018 judgment striking down Section 377, the novel contributes to the cultural groundwork for legal change by rehumanising the homosexual subject. Through characters like Peter and Millie, who learn to accept their son's identity, the novel models social acceptance as the first step toward institutional reform.

This idea of "creating space through discourse" also aligns with Nancy Fraser's concept of "subaltern counter-publics," which she defines as alternative discursive arenas where marginalised groups "invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (67). Pinto's *Murder in Mahim* belongs to this counter-public discourse: it constructs a narrative space that resists the silence imposed by law and moral conservatism. In doing so, it helps to normalise conversations around homosexuality, turning what was once taboo into a legitimate subject of literary and social reflection.

At the same time, Pinto underscores that legal acceptance does not automatically ensure social inclusion. Even after the repeal of Section 377, queer individuals in India continue to face discrimination, ostracisation, and limited citizenship rights. Diane Richardson calls such individuals "partial citizens," noting that despite legal progress, they are often denied "the full rights and recognitions available to heterosexual citizens" (88). Pinto's novel anticipates this reality, suggesting that the struggle for equality must extend beyond decriminalisation to the pursuit of social legitimacy and emotional belonging.

The novel also engages with the debate surrounding same-sex marriage and family rights. As Vanita points out, marriage, in both Eastern and Western societies, has historically evolved to accommodate shifting ideas of love and companionship (4–5). By portraying Sunil's parents as capable of embracing their son's sexuality, Pinto gestures toward the possibility of a redefined family—one that is founded not on conformity but on compassion. This reimagining of family and intimacy constitutes another form of spatial reconfiguration: the transformation of the domestic sphere from a site of repression into one of acceptance.

In this way, *Murder in Mahim* extends the idea of queer space beyond physical geography into the domain of discourse and affect. The novel creates a moral and imaginative space where difference is not merely tolerated but understood. Through storytelling, Pinto enables readers to inhabit the emotional worlds of those historically rendered invisible, thereby transforming literature itself into a political act of inclusion.



## Conclusion

Jerry Pinto's *Murder in Mahim* stands as one of the most significant Indian novels to explore the entanglement of law, morality, and sexuality in the post-liberalisation city. What begins as a murder mystery evolves into a profound social commentary on the criminalisation of desire and the denial of belonging. Through his empathetic portrayal of gay men struggling to survive under the weight of Section 377, Pinto exposes the human cost of a law that transformed private affection into public crime. His novel functions not only as literature but as social documentation—an act of bearing witness to lives rendered invisible by legal and cultural violence.

By reading *Murder in Mahim* as a social novel, we see how Pinto uses the conventions of realism to indict systemic injustice. The narrative dramatizes how institutions—the police, the family, and the media—collude in policing desire and enforcing heteronormativity. Yet, it also reveals the cracks within this structure: spaces of solidarity, empathy, and resistance emerge amidst repression. Characters like Peter and Millie, who accept their son's sexuality, and even Unit, who grieves without shame, represent small but vital gestures toward moral transformation.

From a spatial perspective, the novel reclaims the city as both a site of oppression and possibility. Drawing on Foucault's idea that "power and resistance coexist," and Lefebvre's concept of lived space, Pinto maps the subterranean geographies of Mumbai where queer men carve out fleeting spaces of autonomy. These "counter-spaces"—the railway toilet, the dark street corner, the online chatroom—become temporary sanctuaries in a hostile world. In them, desire resists erasure and articulates its right to exist. As David Harvey reminds us, "the right to the city" is not only a right to inhabit urban space but also a right to remake it in one's own image. Pinto's novel asserts precisely this right for queer citizens.

The text also redefines sexuality beyond rigid binaries. Through characters who embody diverse orientations and emotional needs, Pinto shows that sexuality is not an identity to be policed but a spectrum of human experience to be understood. Echoing Madhavi Menon's argument that desire "overflows the constraints of identity," the novel liberates sexuality from moral and linguistic containment. In doing so, it queers not only the city but also the act of storytelling itself.

Even after the repeal of Section 377, Pinto's critique remains urgent. Legal reform does not erase centuries of stigma or the social hierarchies that sustain exclusion. The novel reminds readers that genuine liberation must extend beyond decriminalisation to recognition—the acceptance of queer lives as equally valuable and dignified. Through his compassionate realism, Pinto humanises the marginalised and calls upon society to expand its moral imagination.

Ultimately, *Murder in Mahim* reaffirms the transformative power of literature as a form of social conscience. It bridges the gap between the legal and the lived, the public and the private, the visible and the silenced. By weaving law, space, and sexuality into a single narrative fabric, Pinto reclaims for the queer subject both the city and the page. His novel is not merely a story about Mumbai; it is a testament to the resilience of those who, even in the shadow of criminalisation, dare to love and to belong.

## Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1999.  
 Aldrich, Robert. "Homosexuality and the City: An Historical Overview." *Urban Studies*, vol. 41, no. 9, 2004, pp. 1719–1737.  
 Bey, Hakim. *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*. Autonomedia, 1991.

- Borja, Jordi. "Democracy in Search of the Future City." *Cities for Citizens: Planning and the Rise of Civil Society*, edited by Mike Douglass and John Friedmann, John Wiley & Sons, 1998, pp. 29–41.
- Brown, Gavin. "Sites of Public (Homo)Sex and the Carnavalesque Spaces of Reclaim the Streets." *Sexualities*, vol. 11, no. 1–2, 2008, pp. 87–102.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 2003.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall, University of California Press, 1984.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume I – An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, 1978. ---. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22–27.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text*, no. 25/26, 1990, pp. 56–80.
- Genet, Jean. *Our Lady of the Flowers*. Grove Press, 1963.
- Gregson, Nicky, and Gillian Rose. "Taking Butler Elsewhere: Performativities, Spatialities and Subjectivities." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 18, 2000, pp. 433–452.
- Gupta, Alok. "Section 377 and the Dignity of Indian Homosexuals." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 46, 2006, pp. 4815–4823.
- Harvey, David. *Spaces of Hope*. University of California Press, 2000.  
 ---. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. Verso, 2012.
- Hubbard, Phil. *Cities and Sexualities*. Routledge, 2011.
- Kinsey, Alfred C., et al. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. W. B. Saunders, 1948.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991.
- Madanipour, Ali. *Public and Private Spaces of the City*. Routledge, 2003.
- Menon, Madhavi. "The Politics of Desire." *Caravan Magazine*, 2019.
- Merchant, Hoshang. *Forbidden Sex, Forbidden Texts: New India's Gay Poets*. Routledge, 2009.
- Pinto, Jerry. *Murder in Mahim: A Novel*. Speaking Tiger, 2017.
- Rao, R. Raj. *Criminal Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics in India*. Sage, 2017.  
 ---. "The Dialectics of Cruising." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2005, pp. 33–48.
- Richardson, Diane. "Constructing Sexual Citizenship: Theorizing Sexual Rights." *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2000, pp. 105–135.
- Shahani, Parmesh. *Gay Bombay: Globalization, Love and (Be)longing in Contemporary India*. Sage Publications, 2008.
- Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell, 1996.
- Vanita, Ruth. *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West*. Penguin, 2005.