

Queering Togetherness

Digital Solidarity among Drag Personalities of India



WRITTEN BY:

Aparna Vats and Labanya Dey
Students, Department of Media Studies, CHRIST
(Deemed to be University), BRC

COVER IMAGE:

Source: Saumitree Mukherjee
Drag name 'Dark Fantasy' is a
dissent against those who bullied
him for his skin tone.

“Social Media is my biggest support”, said Mr. Black Swan, the winner of Go-Go X-Factor 2025 and Miss Dragalore 2018. As students of media, we are often perplexed with the question of whether the evolution in communication technologies is a, “boon or a bane”. However, the answer to this question cannot be binary, just like our gender and sexual identities. But for many queer individuals in India, especially those who do not fit into heteronormative norms, platforms like Instagram and YouTube have become tools of self expression, spaces for visibility and also modes of resistance.

The phenomenon of ‘Queering Togetherness’ is when many persons undergo a ‘collective sexual awakening’. Today, the role of the Internet, in facilitating this, is undeniable. From the creation of communities without geographical or temporal constraints, to enabling participation from anyone, anywhere and at any time the internet’s ‘virtual communities’ have supported the self-identification and affirmation of individuals falling in the spectrum of the non-normative gender and sexual orientations.

The ‘networked societies’ created by the internet have their own advantages and disadvantages. But when talking to the ‘Dragalores of Bangalore’, the internet and social media has facilitated the discovery, embrace and acceptance of the intersectional identities of the Queer community in Bangalore, and largely India.

And yet these spaces are not universally accessible. By the end of 2023, 52 % of India’s population has internet access, which is around 750 million people. Within 2023, the reach of the internet had gotten deeper by 3% and yet, the usage of social media had seen a dip of 0.5% in the same period. A majority of new Internet users access basic services, often skipping social media entirely due to cost, speed or lack of digital literacy. Even among those online, queer voices are not equally amplified compared to urban, upper-caste creators.



Drag and Digital Resistance

Drag as an art form has particularly flourished in India because of digital platforms. Live streams and curated reels help drag artists to break through algorithmic barriers and perform on their own terms.

Take Destiny Diva, for example, a drag performer and a neuroscientist, who began her journey after watching Rani KoHENur in 2018. “I saw someone from our community owning the stage and I just knew that I wanted to be like that.”

Software Engineer by day and Black Swan by night. Source: Saumitree Mukherjee

But he also recounts how being in Mumbai was all about feeling boxed by a 9 to 5 job and family pressures. “I couldn’t be myself. So I came back to Bangalore, for freedom.” That freedom now plays out both online and on stage, where Destiny performs choreographed routines in elaborate costumes, almost all designed by her closest friend. But even here, there is a pattern. While June brings in show offers from corporates, the other months bring silence. “Pride isn’t just June,” she reminds us.

Into the Queer Hub Of Bengaluru

Bengaluru stands out as a hub for queer digital culture. Performers like Dark Fantasy and Black Swan credit both the city and its online communities for giving them space to grow. Dark Fantasy, a wildlife conservationist by profession, says, “From finding popular drag personalities to taking inspiration for shows, costumes, and concepts, everything has been made accessible”. He also points out the rift within queer communities. “People told me I wouldn’t do well because of my dark skin. So I chose to be Dark Fantasy, to turn that rejection into something beautiful.”



Kitty Ko by The Lalit Ashok organises Drag shows across India. Source: Saumitree Mukherjee

Black Swan is an engineer and MBA student by profession. To him drag is just an extension of his identity. “When I was asked how I wanted to be referred to, I realised that I didn’t want to abandon who I am.” Like others, he also emphasizes the role of social media. “ We got booked because we posted pictures. That’s how people find us. That’s how we find each other.” But he’s also not blind to the politics, “There are people who support you to your face and stall your progress behind your back. That happens everywhere, including online.”

The rise of drag in India depends on incorporating algorithmic survival with performance. Who gets seen? Who gets booked? Who gets featured in Pride month panels, reels and brand campaigns? These questions are shaped by platforms as much as by talent. While social media platforms are central to queer community building, they also reflect India’s existing inequalities. Often those who do not speak the dominant language, do not have aesthetic editing and follower networks, often get sidelined.

Still, for many artists, this reach has a cost. The emotional labour of staying visible, posting content, engaging with followers and navigating criticism can be overwhelming. “If you’re not active, you’re invisible.” Destiny Diva admits.

Decolonising Indian Queerness

We spoke to Dark Fantasy about Indian interpretation of the globally practiced Drag Culture. While praising social media, he gave a note of caution by highlighting the differences between the American and Indian Drag communities and cultures. While inspiration can be found, appropriation and impersonation of foreign artists is what he strictly avoided as it lacks authenticity and fails to associate with the audience, and most importantly, himself.

Most importantly, he talked about how there are intersectional differences within the ‘gay community’, a term generally used to describe the LGBTQIA+ individuals as a collective. James Penny, in his book, ‘After Queer Theory’, writes about the idea of the “gay community” which is actually a stereotype associated with homosexual persons at large, whose lifestyle is a curiosity for others, especially “what gays actually do with one another in bed”.

Dark Fantasy said, “There is no ‘gay community’ because there are so many differences. My dark skin colour was my biggest insecurity since I was young and in my initial years as a drag artist, I was told by the people from the ‘community’ that I won’t do well, that I don’t have what it takes to be a drag artist. This is why my stage name is Dark Fantasy. So, it is not as if everybody is always together and supportive. There are many differences within, and it is not homogeneous.”



With 3.6 million followers on Instagram, Rani KoHENur is an Indian Drag Royalty.
Source: Saumitree Mukherjee

Social Media and 'Desi' Queerness

After the Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018) Supreme Court ruling that decriminalised homosexuality in India by partially striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, online spaces have nurtured a virtual network of global empathy and solidarity. This has not only empowered marginalized groups but also inspired India's younger generations to get involved in the political movement against enforced heteronormativity.

Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become integral to identity exploration and coming-out experiences of India's queer community. Not only have these platforms helped in fuller expression of identities but it has also facilitated the sharing of personal narratives while challenging stereotypes through content creation. Online forums and hashtags have become the virtual sanctuaries for seeking solidarity, and celebrating diverse identities, connecting the Indian queer with individuals globally.

At the intersection of technology and queer activism, social media becomes a crucial tool to protect queer communities from marginalisation while offering affirmation, joy, and connection.

Serving as 'queer utopias', online platforms allow queer individuals to engage in activism, explore alternative politics, gain visibility, test identities, and find solidarity in community.

This queer joy is resistance, celebrating fluidity not despite queerness, but because of it. Drag shows, both onstage and online, are powerful examples of this.

In a world where queer lives are politicised, queer joy becomes protest. As long as artists like Destiny Diva, Dark Fantasy, and Black Swan keep claiming space online, digital togetherness will remain one of this queer community's most vital tools.
