

## **“Stories for adults?” Four stories from *Blue***

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This paper presents a literary analysis of *Blue*, Sri Lanka’s first English language anthology of erotica that publicly went on sale in January 2011. It specifically examines the collection for four stories of eroticism between women. The main question focuses on the subtitle of *Blue*, which frames the contents of the collection as “stories for adults.” The paper asks how it is possible to read these four stories of desire as “stories for adults”, given that in the wider socio-political context, the expression of desire between adult women, in public or in private, and whether consenting or not, is interpreted to be criminalized in Sri Lanka due to the existence of Section 365A of the Penal Code. It addresses this question from the perspective of the notion of “sexual citizenship” which is the view that an individual’s standing, in terms of how he or she is positioned as a citizen, is affected by his or her sexuality, specifically in relation to the enjoyment of civil, political, social, and cultural rights (Richardson, 1998). Of particular relevance to this viewpoint is the idea that citizenship norms, particularly as they are constituted by these rights, are structured by heterosexuality—specifically certain dominant models of heterosexuality (Richardson, 2000).

Thus, the paper claims that these four stories prompt us to consider what it means for a text such as *Blue* to include stories to do with same-sex desiring women in Sri Lanka as “stories for adults”, when those subjects and the expression of their desires appear to be excluded from the frameworks of citizenship. Is “stories for adults” a misleading description? Or is it an illustration of how *Blue*, as a cultural text, invokes cultural rights, one of the axes of citizenship? In other words, is it a bold articulation of the cultural rights of these subjects and their desires, in terms of assigning them representation, visibility, and legitimacy? By cultural rights, this paper refers to “the right to symbolic presence, dignifying representation, propagation of identity and maintenance of lifestyles” (Pakulski, 1997, p. 73). It asks if the subtitle, instead of being a mere description, actually hails each of the four stories as a legitimate cultural narrative of love in Sri Lanka. The paper is premised on the assumption, developed by the scholarly analysis of sexual stories and

storytelling, that the sexual stories told by the members of a given society can powerfully define their culture (Plummer, 1995).

Arguing that *Blue* in fact does hail the stories in this way, the paper explores the question of the significance of a text like *Blue* for the wider intellectual and other engagements on gender and sexuality in Sri Lanka. The paper begins by examining the tensions between the subtitle, the four stories, and the socio-cultural contexts of the production of *Blue*. It acknowledges the multiple meanings of “stories for adults”, including the seemingly absurd (yet productive) idea of “adult” rating implied by the four stories. Its conclusions are that “stories for adults” hails these four stories at multiple levels, chiefly that such stories should be published for adult reading, in full recognition of the contradictions implied by Sri Lankan social contexts; that sexualities—complex, multiple, forbidden, permitted etc.—can be attached to and ‘pass’ under the seemingly innocuous identity of “adult” instead of more socially problematic appellations; and that in each of the stories, “adult” is produced and maintained as a boundary that has implications for the ways in which the collection, as a whole, summons the narratives and presents as “a little book of Sri Lankan erotica”.

**Keywords:** adult, sexual citizenship, sexuality, gender.

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