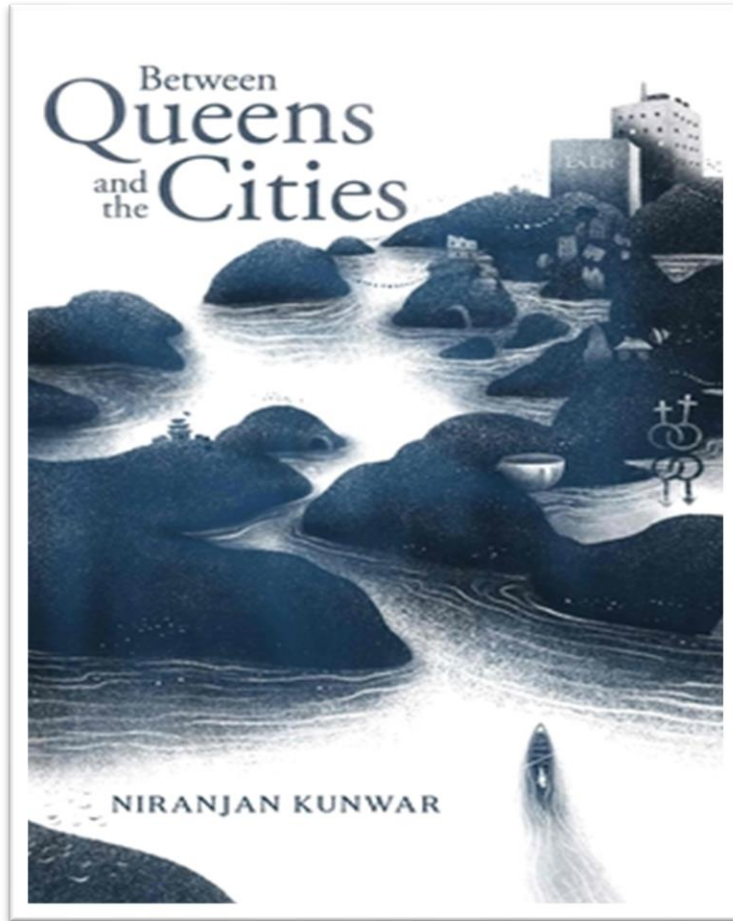


## Book Review on “Between Queens and the Cities”



**Reviewed by: Serchung Lhamo Baiji**

**Roll no: 25070**

**Author: Niranjana Kunwar**

**Date of Publication: December 5, 2020**

‘Between Queens and the Cities’ is the story of the sexual discovery story of a 19-year-old Nepali gay man between various cities like New-York City and Kathmandu conveying the struggle of a gay person in Nepali society.

The memoir starts with the author turning 18 when he finished his high school and got accepted by an American college receiving a scholarship to study at Sarah Lawrence College in Westchester. There, afraid of being rejected because of his sexuality, he would stay away from the Nepali students at Bennington. Killing lonely hours chatting with men on the internet and plopping

himself in front of the computer logging on to websites targeting gay men, going on dates with men, exploring many parts of the city. Gradually he found his voice.

Back in Nepal, him not being able to articulate emerging ideas related to society and identity, afraid of being ostracized due to his sexuality even though his family was loving towards him. It was difficult to open his thoughts and feeling over long-distance phone conversation to his family, after finishing the seventh semester, he decided to go to Nepal. He sensed a lot of things have changed in Nepal. The environment where he used to explore with the children of the neighborhood shopkeeper was changed, population had increased, awkwardness was in the air yet the frame of mind of the Nepali people was the same.

Unable to explain his interest of being a classroom teacher to his dad, the feeling and the dream was never shared and was left unopened. After so much of the freedom and peace he got in New York, he was still afraid and panicking that he might get stranded in Kathmandu, left alone to navigate the potholes of the dusty, gloomy city. On returning back to NY, days passed and his best friend Dinesh was actually leaving him their newly decorated apartment and Shelton behind for Kathmandu. Things changed rapidly after Dinesh's departure that created an irreplaceable vacuum in his social life. All those days, people came and went. Months slid by and then the years. His days were full; often tired. As Astoria became quieter and colder so was he. Stuck between freedom and loneliness of his life as a teacher in New York, after his green card is rejected, he decides to move back to Nepal.

The second half of his memoir is about his return, finding himself. Trying to overcome the fear of being stuck in Nepal and the frame of mind of Nepalese people. Soon he begins liking the city. He builds himself as a figure in the literacy scene, getting involved in organizing art exhibitions, contributing to literature about gay life and more. In the memoir's final chapter, Kunwar spends a few pages narrating the story of each LGBTQI+ person he meets through BDS (Blue Diamond Society) that he interviews. The concept seems to be placing Kunwar's personal experiences in the context of other gay life stories in Nepal, providing an orchestra of LGBTQI+ voices alongside Kunwar's. His perspective of Nepali culture and his family drives him away from who he is. Kunwar is ready to tell a stranger who he is, but he holds back from confronting his family for half of the novel. Making a psychological impact on him, and since he feels smothered, his connection with his parents deteriorates and becomes complex. Kunwar's complicated relationship with his

father, however, is profoundly rooted in a generational ideological divide, that of a conservative man and a liberal, unmethodical young man.

However, his connection with his parents represents a common trait among Nepali families: they are not comfortable addressing their emotions. Parents dismiss awkward confrontations, including emotional outbursts.

The strength of this book is that in the world of being of common, normalizing similarities, it discusses about the emotion, unusual feeling of being unique, different than others. It speaks about the judgment of people towards LGBTQI+ community which has expressed his emotion into his writing very well. The language is simple, steady which helps people to understand easily. Since this book is memoir of Kunwar's, we can see the character development of the him. How he overcame his fear, became calmer, happy with himself and how he no longer looks for acceptance in the world of judgment in a very slow pace.

With the symbolic and poetic title of the book, the book is related to more of today's generation which is also the main reason for readers to look forward to this book. Since the story is slow paced, it might make people left out at the middle but as you continue you may find yourself drawn into. I would not suggest this book to people who do not enjoy slow-paced novels.

With story of coming of age, this book is all about finding the author knowing himself between the cities. So, the book is for readers specifically people who do not have a specific identity, belonging and the search for a sense of self.