in plainspeak

TALKING ABOUT *sexuality* IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

2008, Issue 2

Cover:
Unfurling I
by Tejal Shah

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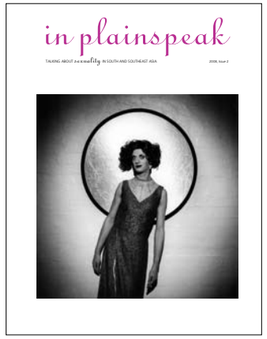
Welcome to this issue of *In Plainpeak*. Yes, we have a new look, thanks to Tejal Shah allowing us to use her provocative work on the cover and in Art Space. We continue with the theme of provocation through the articles in this issue. This issue of *In Plainspeak* has several articles on transgender issues. The idea is to provoke you, dear readers, into thinking harder about issues of gender, sexuality and rights. So jump straight in …

Please do continue to send us your contributions and feedback at resourcecentre@tarshi.net. And stay well, happy and safe.

Radhika Chandiramani

Radhika Chandiramani
Executive Director



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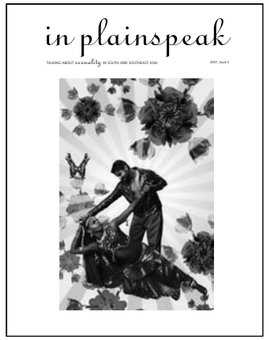

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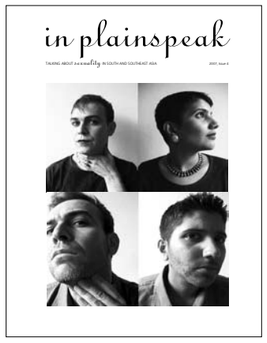

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Tejal Shah

Tejal Shah is a visual artist who works in Bombay, India.

The South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality is hosted by TARSHI (Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues) in New Delhi, India. TARSHI is an NGO that believes that all people have a right to sexual wellbeing and a self-affirming and enjoyable sexuality. The Resource Centre aims to increase knowledge and scholarship on issues of sexuality, sexual health and sexual well being in this region. It specifically focuses on sexuality related work in China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, The Philippines, and Vietnam. The Resource Centre is part of the Ford Foundation's Global Dialogue on Sexual Health and wellbeing. Similar centres are based in Africa, Latin America and North America.

The Resource Centre has developed a range of programmes to enhance scholarship, increase access to information, and further dialogue on sexuality issues. Just recently, The South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality together with its host organisation TARSHI conducted a Regional Training on Sexuality, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights on February 11 – 16, 2008 in New Delhi, India. There were 29 participants from 10 different countries in the region.

Check out our website (www.asiasrc.org). It hosts online moderated discussions on sexuality, news and announcements from the region, links to resources on sexuality and the library catalogue. A Directory of Institute Alumni is also available on the website. It provides information about human resources available in the region and also provides alumni with a sense of solidarity/community. The Resource Centre houses a library with over 3000 books and material on sexuality. You can also download an electronic version of *In Plainspeak*. For more information on our programmes and events, please visit www.asiasrc.org.

patience pays off

SUNIL BABU PANT

Sunil Babu Pant is the Founder / President of the Blue Diamond Society (BDS), a network of 20 groups and organisations working on HIV/AIDS, human rights and social justice for sexual and gender minorities in Nepal. Sunil Pant was key to filing the writ petition in April 2007 at Nepal's Supreme Court and on December 21, 2007 Nepal's Supreme Court made a historic decision ordering the government to defend and protect the rights of LGBTI people as natural people. Sunil Pant and his colleagues at BDS carried out this work under the threat of arrest and imprisonment, with the security forces and militia cracking down on LGBTI networks throughout the country.

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF AND BLUE DIAMOND SOCIETY. WHERE DID THE NEED FOR SUCH AN ORGANISATION ARISE?

I was born in 1972 and grew up in Gaikur village, Gorkha District in Nepal. I went to school in my village. I always thought everyone is like me and everyone is different with diverse sexuality and gender identities/expression. My sexual identity never bothered me or anyone else.

I didn't have a plan to start Blue Diamond Society in the beginning. I was curious to find out about the local lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intra-gender (LGBTI) culture and to meet other LGBTI people. After I discovered so many problems faced by LGBTI people like rape, exclusion, blackmail, beatings, discrimination and lack of proper understanding and knowledge on LGBTI rights and health, I thought we must get together, organise ourselves and stand up to the situation for the betterment of Nepal's LGBTIs. If we were to end the continuous marginalisation that we faced, we had to be prepared to struggle for our own rights and concerns. So, in 2001, we registered The Blue Diamond Society. The colour Blue represents sexual minorities in Russia and in Buddhism enlightened and compassionate people are called diamond beings (Bodhi-Sattva) which I was very fond of and so named the organisation Blue Diamond Society (BDS).

TELL US MORE ABOUT THE SEXUAL DIVERSITY THAT EXISTS IN NEPAL. FOR INSTANCE, WHO ARE THE METIS?

Metis are biological males who see themselves as feminine and third genders (other than man and women). They generally identify themselves as distinct from the gay/bisexual community in Nepal. They are generally marginalized because of their socio-economic status as well as their gender identity. While some *Metis* marry women, they often have sexual relationships outside of marriage with men and identify as third genders with a feminine orientation. *Metis* are called *Kothis* or *Maugias* in Terai and *Singarus* or *Strain* in some part of the hilly regions and *Phulumulu* in the mountain regions. *Marunis* are biologically males who perform dances in female attire. *Mardana* and *Baranths* are females who see themselves or are perceived as masculine. *Samalingis* or *Lingis* are male/female homosexuals in the Nepali language.

WHAT WERE THE EARLY YEARS OF BDS LIKE?

Initially, BDS had to struggle against many taboos and mores. The first attempt at registering the society was denied because officials objected to the very concept of homosexuality. We were pressurised to change the organisation's objective into 'correcting' homosexual

behaviour, but finally found a loophole that allowed us to work in the area of male health.

We were then faced with the challenge of coaxing men having sex with men (MSMs) and Third Genders (TG) to join the Society because they were afraid of being targeted by homophobes. BDS estimates that about 95 percent of MSMs and TGs are forced into heterosexual marriages by their families who don't want scandals. They suffer from depression, low self-esteem and social ostracism.

BDS is now a network of 20 groups and organisations working on HIV/AIDS, human rights and social justice for sexual and gender minorities and MSM in Nepal. It

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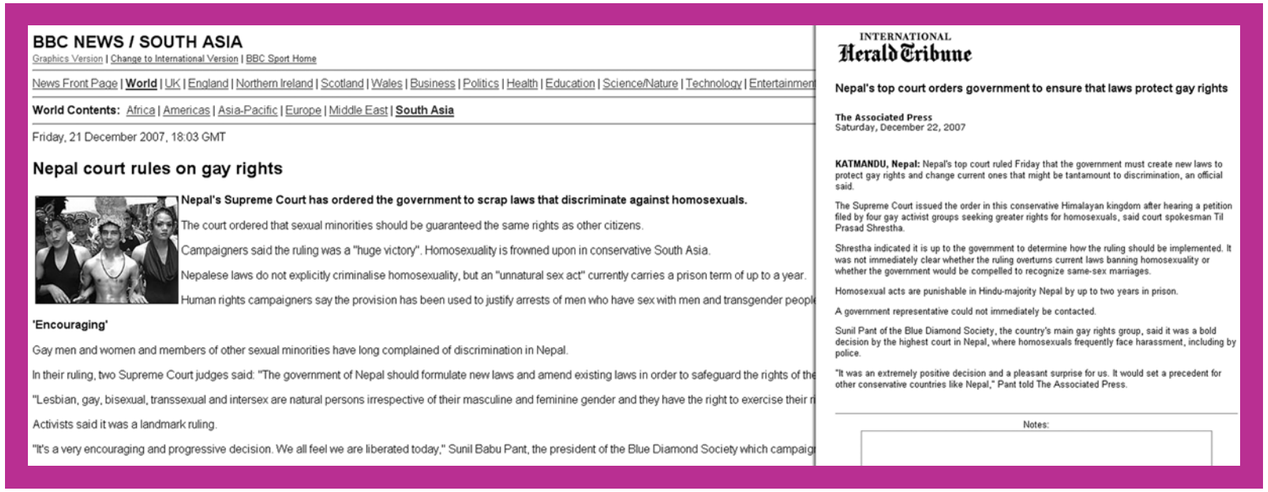

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Friday, 21 December 2007, 18:03 GMT

Nepal court rules on gay rights

Nepal's Supreme Court has ordered the government to scrap laws that discriminate against homosexuals.

The court ordered that sexual minorities should be guaranteed the same rights as other citizens.

Campaigners said the ruling was a "huge victory". Homosexuality is frowned upon in conservative South Asia.

Nepalese laws do not explicitly criminalise homosexuality, but an "unnatural sex act" currently carries a prison term of up to a year.

Human rights campaigners say the provision has been used to justify arrests of men who have sex with men and transgender peopl

'Encouraging'

Gay men and women and members of other sexual minorities have long complained of discrimination in Nepal.

In their ruling, two Supreme Court judges said: "The government of Nepal should formulate new laws and amend existing laws in order to safeguard the rights of the

"Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex are natural persons irrespective of their masculine and feminine gender and they have the right to exercise their n

Activists said it was a landmark ruling.

"It's a very encouraging and progressive decision. We all feel we are liberated today," Sunil Babu Pant, the president of the Blue Diamond Society which campaig

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Nepal's top court orders government to ensure that laws protect gay rights

The Associated Press
Saturday, December 22, 2007

KATMANDU, Nepal: Nepal's top court ruled Friday that the government must create new laws to protect gay rights and change current ones that might be tantamount to discrimination, an official said.

The Supreme Court issued the order in this conservative Himalayan kingdom after hearing a petition filed by four gay activist groups seeking greater rights for homosexuals, said court spokesman Til Prasad Shrestha.

Shrestha indicated it is up to the government to determine how the ruling should be implemented. It was not immediately clear whether the ruling overturns current laws banning homosexuality or whether the government would be compelled to recognize same-sex marriages.

Homosexual acts are punishable in Hindu-majority Nepal by up to two years in prison.

A government representative could not immediately be contacted.

Sunil Pant of the Blue Diamond Society, the country's main gay rights group, said it was a bold decision by the highest court in Nepal, where homosexuals frequently face harassment, including by police.

"It was an extremely positive decision and a pleasant surprise for us. It would set a precedent for other conservative countries like Nepal," Pant told The Associated Press.

Notes:

was the first and only organisation of its kind when it was established as no one else was working on these issues. All the organisations that are in the current network arose from BDS in the last 7 years.

Since founding BDS, I have focused on advocacy and the need for HIV intervention among MSM and TGs along with the need to address violence against sexual and gender minorities in Nepal. BDS now has HIV and human rights programmes in more than 20 cities in Nepal and continues to expand rapidly.

HOW DID BDS WORK AGAINST VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION?

Through documentation of such violence, reporting to the police, National Human Rights Commission, OHCHR, Government Ministries and other relevant Human Rights organisations including the Special Rapporteurs at the UN. We try and sensitise the police as much as possible by orientations, discussions, meetings. We empower LGBTI communities by training and orientations on rights and how to tackle violence and abuse. Media campaigns and much more… Our key activities include health promotion for sexual minorities, psycho-social counselling, raising awareness of HIV/AIDS, promoting human rights and sexual health, documenting human rights violations and providing support to those whose rights have been violated.

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES YOU FACED?

My colleagues and I at BDS carried out this work under the threat of arrest and imprisonment, with the security forces and militia cracking down on LGBTI networks throughout the country. Coupled with a lack of legal protection and the beliefs of a traditional society, the environment in which LGBTI rights defenders work is a volatile one. Many of the BDS staff have been arrested and imprisoned; transgender people face extortion, blackmail and rape and other forms of violence.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER AS MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS FOR BDS?

BDS has made major accomplishments in only a few years in protecting the human rights of sexual minorities, improving sexual health and promoting HIV prevention, and raising awareness in society. BDS provides daily social support to Nepali citizens who have been harassed, attacked or abandoned. Protection and support extends to different sexual and gender minorities. This creates a safe space, a major, ongoing accomplishment, fostering an atmosphere where people can meet and address the issues and challenges of living in a society where stigma and discrimination is rife. They discuss and understand their sexual and human rights.

Men who have sex with men, sex workers, LGBTIs and other community members, often from low economic, educational and caste status, mingle with each other and the benefits and service to marginalised communities in Nepal are clear.

I have also been involved in working for HIV infected/affected communities with the Global Fund, WHO, UNAIDS, and on human rights with Front Line, IGLHRC, AP-Rainbow, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other international and regional networks and organizations. The Utopia Award 2005 and the Felippa De Souza Award 2007 recognized the organization's work on HIV and Human Rights. I am one of the petitioners who

> We, all LGBTI Nepalis, are very happy and proud of the Supreme Court whose decision is extremely progressive on such a difficult issue for our society, especially on the matter of gender identity. This is the first time any Supreme Court has ever spoken in such a positive manner on gender identity issues in the world.

What this decision means is that Third Gender people will now have Citizenship ID, Passport and other documents recognising them as 'Third Gender'. LGBTI will have equal rights and opportunities as heterosexual men and women. No discrimination will be allowed against LGBTI on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identities for getting a job, education, health care, parental property, mobility, political and social participation, travel, etc. The judgement of the Supreme Court now offers protection from violence and discrimination for LGBTI by the law.

filed the writ petition on 18 April 2007 at Nepal's Supreme Court and on December 21, 2007 Nepal's Supreme Court made a historic decision by ordering the government to defend and protect LGBTI rights as those of 'natural people'.

CONGRATULATIONS! IT IS INDEED A LANDMARK DECISION.

It's a great decision and TGs as well as gays, lesbians, bisexuals and inter-sex peoples' rights are also ensured by this decision.

Great victory of Nepalese LGBTI !

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WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP TO GET TG PEOPLE THEIR RATION CARDS, PASSPORTS, BANK ACCOUNTS, ETC?

We will help the government to implement the decision. Government administration is positive about the implementation of these orders. We are just waiting for the full written decision to come and be formally communicated to the government by the Supreme Court. In the meanwhile, one of the private banks – Everest Bank – has changed its account opening form and included 'other' apart from male and female under the gender column.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT IN NEPAL IN TERMS OF WORKING ON SEXUALITY AND RIGHTS?

The socio-political environment has become much easier, more accommodating and inclusive not just for LGBTI but for others as well. Social transformation that's going on in Nepal proved to be such a good opportunity for us to stand together and also to contribute towards democracy and human rights. Our active participation during the 2006 popular People's Movement against the autocracy brought us into the middle of activism for change in Nepal and we have many alliances since then.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE POINTS OF LEARNING FOR YOU AND BDS?

Any challenges can be opportunities as well. The most deprived proved to be the most powerful. *Metis* and other LGBTIs are excluded and believed to have no capacity to contribute to society, which has been proved to be wrong. Anytime is the right time to fight for justice. Small injustices must not be overlooked. Small, incremental progress adds up over time and we should learn to see significance over time. Don't expect big change or any change yesterday… patience pays off.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE SCOPE FOR FUTURE WORK IN NEPAL?

We will work closely with the government and political parties now on implementation of the Supreme Court decision and to improve the LGBTIs living standards. More work is needed to empower LGBTI communities. We are and will be happy to continue to work with other networks, organizations and coalitions across the region on LGBTI rights, advocacy and empowerment. We must also support and work on other issues of marginalisation and oppression.

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questions of **visibility**

WHAT PRICE DOES VISIBILITY INCUR? IS THIS PRICE AN INEVITABLE PART OF A RIGHTS-SEEKING ENTERPRISE? DOES VISIBILITY ENHANCE THE POTENTIAL OF GAINING EQUALITY? CAN VISIBILITY, AS FOUCAULT SAYS IN DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH (1979), BE A TRAP?

OISHIK SIRCAR

Let's not talk about Section 377 this once. I know that is a contentious proposition, since in many ways this archaic law remains at the core of the disadvantage that the sexually marginalised face in India. Activist, academic and popular engagements have given Sec. 377 a celebrity status in the realm of 'queer' issues in India, which has overshadowed the many other realms of conservative sexual morality that govern the lives of the sexually marginalised. I don't mean to take away our focus from the immediate need to challenge and defeat the violence of law that Sec. 377 unleashes. That challenge demands all our solidarity. Yet simultaneously we might want to look at processes beyond the law that discipline and disadvantage the sexually marginalised in India in more insidious ways than the law – processes from which the law derives its strength to criminalise.

I HAVE A FRIEND WHO IS BIOLOGICALLY MALE, BUT 'FEELS' LIKE A WOMAN. NOW THIS WOMAN WHO HE FEELS LIKE HAS SAME SEX PREFERENCES. SO WHEN HE SEEKS OUT SOMEONE TO HAVE SEX WITH THAT PERSON WILL BE A WOMAN. BUT WHEN WE LOOK FROM A DISTANCE, WHAT DO WE SEE?

Activism around Sec. 377, increasingly open representations of the homosexual (albeit several times problematically) in commercial cinema, Pride Marches in cities like Kolkata, and endorsement from the likes of Amartya Sen and Vikram Seth, have indeed created a much needed political and cultural visibility for the queer population in India. Thanks to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, focus on the sexually marginalised as 'high risk' groups has also led to a pathologised visibility. One way to understand this visibility is to weigh its political potential as a counter-hegemonic development that confronts heteronormativity in its face. Yet another way of understanding this is to measure the costs of this visibility – who all are benefiting from it, and who is losing out? What price does visibility incur? Is this price an inevitable part of a rights-seeking enterprise? Does visibility enhance the potential of gaining equality? Can visibility, as Foucault says in *Discipline and Punish* (1979), be a trap?

Visibilising What?

When we talk about creating visibility as a means of political recognition – who/ what is it that we want to make visible?

Do we want to make visible queer people, or do we want to make visible non-heteronormative practices? One could say that the visibility of queer people automatically foregrounds practices that subvert heteronormativity. I would like to complicate this causal connection. For instance, Butch-Femme lesbian relationships have on several occasions been characterised as hetero-mimicries. Though a highly contested stand that understands heterosexuality as an *a priori* condition of human existence, such characterisation continues even within queer circles. Here we have the coming together of a particular kind of identity (lesbian) accompanied by a particular kind of practice/ performance (Butch-Femme), which when open to varied interpretations, subverts, but also conforms to heteronormativity.

Let's take another example. I have a friend who is biologically male, but 'feels' like a woman. Now this woman who he feels like has same sex preferences. So when he seeks out someone to have sex with that person will be a woman. But when we look from a distance, what do we see? We see a heterosexual couple having sex. In actuality, however, if the woman she is having sex with is a lesbian – they are having lesbian sex. If the woman is heterosexual then we fall short of our vocabulary to characterise the kind of sex they are having. This example makes clear the indeterminacy of both sexual identities and practices and cautions us of avoiding the trap of equating one with the other.

The need to distinguish sexual practice and identity becomes important if we are to work on a 'visiblising' project. In our attempt at breaking the silence around queer sexualities do we sometimes end up further calibrating already existing sexual hierarchies? The concept of 'sexual hierarchy' was introduced by American anthropologist Gayle Rubin in her influential essay 'Thinking Sex' where she discusses how hierarchies of sexual value function in the same ways as ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism and religious orthodoxy: 'They rationalize the well-being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexually rabble'. Rubin outlines the rules of sexual conduct which currently have created a sexual hierarchy which places heterosexual, monogamous, married, reproductive sex at the top – what she calls the 'charmed circle'. Anything deviating from this position is placed below in varying degrees – referred by her as the 'outer limits'.

THE CONCEPT OF 'SEXUAL HIERARCHY' WAS INTRODUCED BY AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST GAYLE RUBIN IN HER INFLUENTIAL ESSAY 'THINKING SEX' WHERE SHE DISCUSSES HOW HIERARCHIES OF SEXUAL VALUE FUNCTION IN THE SAME WAYS AS IDEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS OF RACISM, ETHNOCENTRISM AND RELIGIOUS ORTHODOXY: 'THEY RATIONALIZE THE WELL-BEING OF THE SEXUALLY PRIVILEGED AND THE ADVERSITY OF THE SEXUALLY RABBLE'.

Rubin draws up her hierarchy on the basis of sexual acts and not identities. But what happens when we infuse the notion of identity into a sexual hierarchy? Gay men are generally lower in the hierarchy because it is assumed that they have homosexual sex. However, what happens to a Gay man who is forced into marriage, and thus has heterosexual sex with his wife? Where will he be on the hierarchy? Will he be considered heterosexual because of his practice and placed on top of the hierarchy, or will be considered Gay because of his identity and pushed down? Or will he be considered bisexual, if he carries on having homosexual sex while being married to a woman? What would happen to a heterosexual man who falls in the 'men who have sex with men' (MSM) category? Where will my friend be on the hierarchy – will 'he' be identified as a lesbian, or a heterosexual? What would we consider Sita and Radha from Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* to be – lesbians in a marital fix, or frustrated housewives having sex with each other because their husbands wouldn't?

A possible approach to answering these questions will be to raise the issue of 'coming out' – the powerful political act of making visible your own sexuality. One could say that a person's position on the sexual hierarchy gets determined by what he/ she articulates as his/ her sexuality. Thus, while coming out could be a powerful assertion of self-identity, it also results in exacerbating the incidence of disadvantage on the sexually marginalised. However, coming out is enmeshed in its own politics.

A couple of years back I had noted in an article that as a queer person I did not ever feel the need to come out – and asked if that will act as a disqualification for me to be a part of the queer movement, because coming out is looked at as a kind of baptism that all queer people should take on to join the movement for claiming rights. I had critiqued that understanding stating that the term 'queer' though all-encompassing of a whole range of non-heteronormative sexualities has an in-built process of creating its own normative standards.

THUS, WHILE COMING OUT COULD BE A POWERFUL ASSERTION OF SELF-IDENTITY, IT ALSO RESULTS IN EXACERBATING THE INCIDENCE OF DISADVANTAGE ON THE SEXUALLY MARGINALISED. HOWEVER, COMING OUT IS ENMESHED IN ITS OWN POLITICS. A COUPLE OF YEARS BACK I HAD NOTED IN AN ARTICLE THAT AS A QUEER PERSON I DID NOT EVER FEEL THE NEED TO COME OUT – AND ASKED IF THAT WILL ACT AS A DISQUALIFICATION FOR ME TO BE A PART OF THE QUEER MOVEMENT, BECAUSE COMING OUT IS LOOKED AT AS A KIND OF BAPTISM THAT ALL QUEER PEOPLE SHOULD TAKE ON TO JOIN THE MOVEMENT FOR CLAIMING RIGHTS.

While I stand by my critique, I do realise that my ability to disavow the importance of coming out had so much to do with my class and sexual preference. Although I consider myself to be queer, I still am a practicing heterosexual, and from a higher socio-economic class – a position that buttresses any possibility of disadvantage that I might face because of being queer. This might not be the case for several queer people for whom the feeling of liberation and self-confidence that accompanies coming out is worth the price that needs to be paid for becoming visible – in the eyes of a homophobic society and the criminal law. Yet, I would still tend to believe that the practice of coming out does remain a preserve of those who have the currency of a language that defines and temporally situates 'coming out' as a moment in time that queer people are expected to go through, much like all educated people are expected to graduate.

When class and caste intersect with sexuality, this might not be the case. The so-called 'indigenous' Indian sexualities of *Kothis*, *Panthis* and *Hijras,* among others, face an existential

disadvantage in comparison to the contemporarily articulated identities of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT). And this disadvantage exists even when *Hijras* haven't had to ceremonially come out in the way those identified as lesbians and gays have had to. Further, the disadvantage faced by *Hijras* seems more connected to their class status than sexuality, or rather because of the coming together of both.

There is a certain level of passive tolerance regarding *Hijras* in Indian society. They've always been more visible in comparison to the LGBT – as harem keepers of kings, to singers at childbirths and weddings, to beggars on the train. We seem to have accorded them a liminal space on the margins of society as neither men nor women. But while their sexual identity has been 'normalised' as deviant, their class and caste identity situates them much below the LGBT on a sexual hierarchy. This is because the hierarchy is not only representative of a scale of most and least legitimate sexualities, but one that shows how, if one goes down that scale, a whole host of fundamental citizenship rights – like employment, education, shelter etc. – deplete. While Sec 377 can be interpreted to directly criminalise Gay men, it is still *Hijras* who routinely face incarceration and police violence because of their hypervisibility in public spaces like streets. Their visibility thus becomes an existential trap for them. Unlike lesbians, gays or bisexuals who have to articulate their sexuality for making them visible, for *Hijras* it is written on their body.

WHILE SEC 377 CAN BE INTERPRETED TO DIRECTLY CRIMINALISE GAY MEN, IT IS STILL HIJRAS WHO ROUTINELY FACE INCARCERATION AND POLICE VIOLENCE BECAUSE OF THEIR HYPERVISIBILITY IN PUBLIC SPACES LIKE STREETS. THEIR VISIBILITY THUS BECOMES AN EXISTENTIAL TRAP FOR THEM. UNLIKE LESBIANS, GAYS OR BISEXUALS WHO HAVE TO ARTICULATE THEIR SEXUALITY FOR MAKING THEM VISIBLE, FOR HIJRAS IT IS WRITTEN ON THEIR BODY.

Our position on the sexual hierarchy gets further complicated when we confront some more troubling questions like: can there be a right-wing homosexual? Or are these identities diametrically opposite to each other? Could we have had several queer people voting for Modi in Gujarat? If yes, what would these people foreground as their identity – Hindus or homosexuals? Or can they 'come out' as Hindu homosexuals who are voting for a Hindu nation? Where will their place be on the sexual hierarchy if religion also gets infused in the determinants of calibration and scale?

In the case of the Fascist queer – will the project of making visible entail a responsibility on others to 'expose' their fascist ideology, or will it mean to invisibilise their sexuality, because it if becomes visible they will be persecuted by the very ideology that they espouse? Can there be a lesbian woman, a senior executive in a multinational, who hails Tata for manufacturing the Nano, blames Medha Patkar for stalling India's economic growth, and chastises her heterosexual sister for falling in love with a lower caste man? Where will her place be on the hierarchy, what will be her stakes in making visible her identity?

The reasons for raising these questions is not to discredit the power of visibility, but to come to terms with the fact that visibility means different things for different people across the queer spectrum, and does not necessarily have an unqualified emancipatory potential. It also becomes important for us to question whether we can assume that by the virtue of being queer one can respond favourably to other experiences of exclusion – especially when issues of class and caste related privilege intersect with queerness. As I write this article, it is imperative on my part to question whether the very label of 'queer', and my fluent use of the term, can in itself be a signifier of privilege and access.

VISIBILITY MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE ACROSS THE QUEER SPECTRUM, AND DOES NOT NECESSARILY HAVE AN UNQUALIFIED EMANCIPATORY POTENTIAL. IT ALSO BECOMES IMPORTANT FOR US TO QUESTION WHETHER WE CAN ASSUME THAT BY THE VIRTUE OF BEING QUEER ONE CAN RESPOND FAVOURABLY TO OTHER EXPERIENCES OF EXCLUSION – ESPECIALLY WHEN ISSUES OF CLASS AND CASTE RELATED PRIVILEGE INTERSECT WITH QUEERNESS.

Privatising Visibility

It has been a queer feature of queer rights movements across the world that the articulation of the power of visibility has co-existed with the demand for the right to privacy. While the contents and consequences of visibility and privacy might be understood as being antithetical to each other, there is a logic that informs this strategy. The need for creating visibility arises from the imposed invisibilisation of queer people, which serves as the reason for their exclusion from rights guarantees. The claim for privacy rights is to say that what people do in private spaces – what kind of sex they have – is not the business of the state, and cannot be a ground for criminalising the act or the persons engaging in them just because they don't meet standards of heteronormativity.

The right to privacy has been a ground on the basis of which the UN Human Rights Committee, in the 1994 case of Toonen vs Australia, declared that anti-sodomy laws infringe upon human rights; it has been the basis for challenging the controversial 1993 'don't ask, don't tell' policy for the armed forces in US; and in India it has been used as a ground for demanding the repeal of Sec. 377.

In 2001 the Naz Foundation, a group working with MSMs and other sexually marginalized people, filed a petition in the Delhi High Court (still pending) asking for the section to be 'read down'. Looking at the petition closely what emerges as a concern is the demand of the petition to read down the section and de-criminalise consensual, adult and *private* sex. Though ostensibly representative of the entire community of the sexually marginalised, the petition openly attempts at giving legitimacy to private sex, excluding many people who can only or would like to engage in acts of sexual intimacy in public. In effect, communities like the *Hijras*, are squarely excluded from the ambit of the petition's demands. The issue here is not whether the petition should have demanded for 'sex in public', but that it wasn't attentive to the slippery slope of the privacy claim – the fact that access to private space is a matter of privilege. What plays out is a process through which the 'outer limits' of Rubin's sexual hierarchy gets further calibrated – and *Hijras* are pushed further down by the queer community itself. The notion of visibility here gets privatised by those within the movement who are higher up on the queer ladder of privilege.

The Price of Visibility

In January 2005, a stall set up by Amitie – a collective that works on issues of alternative sexualities and HIV/AIDS in Chandannagore, West Bengal – at the Rishra Book Fair was forcibly evicted from the fair because they had displayed posters and pamphlets on issues of homosexuality, safe sex and HIV/ AIDS awareness and were selling magazines and other literature on issues of sexual diversity, health and rights. The fair organisers alleged that public sentiment was hurt because of the 'obscene' materials that were on display at Amitie's stall. Amitie challenged this arbitrary eviction in the Kolkata High Court, but their petition was dismissed on the ground that the material displayed at the stall was about homosexuality, and not about HIV/ AIDS.

Only recently on February 4, 2008, the police in Bombay raided a private party and arrested six men, and seized liquor bottles and condoms. The police crackdown was planned because details of the party were allegedly advertised on a gay web site and circulated through cell phone text messaging.

What do we make of these incidents? All those who were 'busted', were paying a price for making themselves visible. Clearly, one of the major perils of visibility is the resultant infringement on the freedom of speech and expression. Interestingly, it is not information on HIV/ AIDS or safe sex that is necessarily under the scanner of the law, but it is information that 'promotes' (read: makes public) homosexuality – where suddenly their 'high risk' health status is transformed into 'high risk' criminality. The fact that a private party was busted in this case, and the private premises of an organization like the Naz Foundation in Lucknow were raised, suggests that in the eyes of the law, those were public incidents that had to be clamped down on. In case of the book fair, it was an attempt at erasure of public visibility, in effect shrouding it under the cloak of silence, or privacy. Thus, both visibility and privacy can get used as justifications to delegitimise and criminalise queer collectivisation, association and expression.

BEING PART OF THE UPPER CLASS 'QUEER' COMMUNITY IN INDIA, I BELIEVE THAT WE NEED TO CHALLENGE NOT JUST DOMINANT HETERONORMATIVITY, BUT ALSO OUR OWN DISCOMFORT WITH DIFFERENCE. WE CANNOT PRIVILEGE SEXUAL ORIENTATION/ PREFERENCE/ IDENTITY AS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AMONG US. OR ELSE WE ARE IN DANGER OF CREATING OUR OWN SEXUAL 'LOWER ORDERS'.

One way to read the incidents is to consider the repercussions of their visibility as a price worth paying. The other way of reading it is to ask whether the political plot of gaining recognition through visibility has gone awry, because it has become inextricably linked to issues of health and hygiene – links that have also been reinforced by the queer movement. One could say that an almost singular engagement with the repeal of Sec 377 by the movement and accompanying claims around the right to privacy has led to privacy and visibility working against each other.

Towards a Politics of 'Counter-Heteronormativity'

Should invisibility be a way to avoid the Foucauldian trap? Or is there a need to conceptualise visibility differently? Being part of the upper class 'queer' community in India, I believe that we need to challenge not just dominant heteronormativity, but also our own discomfort with difference. We cannot privilege sexual orientation/ preference/ identity as the most significant sexual difference among us. Or else we are in danger of creating our own sexual 'lower orders'.

What is an immediate need in the present context of living as queer people, in a highly sex-phobic nation, is to historicise sexuality – not only to invoke the 'past' but also to document what Foucault calls the 'histories of the present'. I do not, however, suggest a project that will exclusively excavate the 'truth' about the plural traditions of 'Indian' sexuality and thus lend legitimacy to the rights claims of the sexually marginalised, simply to avoid engaging with a counter-cultural move against the argument which says that homosexuality is a western import. Because that might, in the long run, impose fixated meanings to 'Indian' sexualities, thus excluding many more emerging forms of 'post-modern' sexualities. Instead, what might be a more useful means to capture the 'histories of the present' will be to identify those political assertions that can understood as 'counter-heteronormative'. By 'counter-heteronormative' Nivedita Menon, professor of political science at Delhi University, refers to 'a range of political assertions that implicitly or explicitly challenge heteronormativity and the institutions of monogamous patriarchal marriage'. These assertions travel through the corridors of law – when 377 is being challenged; on the streets – when *Hijras* come out to protest against police atrocities; and in conferences, where a sole panel on sexuality attempts to disrupt the peace with which we intellectualise, and through the daily negotiations for survival that the sexually marginalised engage in.

WHAT IS AN IMMEDIATE NEED IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT OF LIVING AS QUEER PEOPLE, IN A HIGHLY SEX-PHOBIC NATION, IS TO HISTORICISE SEXUALITY – NOT ONLY TO INVOKE THE 'PAST' BUT ALSO TO DOCUMENT WHAT FOUCAULT CALLS THE 'HISTORIES OF THE PRESENT'

When liminality offers cruel possibilities of invisibilisation at every step, the queer person's travails of existence demand a redefinition of 'resistance' – not just as political participation in rallies, films on queer desire, challenges to Sec. 377 – but the daily negotiations and choices about conformity and transgression. This is where 'counter-heteronormative' histories get written. What then gets foregrounded are layered realities of 'deviant' lives – married homosexual men, *hijra* sex workers, Muslim lesbians and Dalit *kothis*. The potential of such a politics is the emergence of languages of resistance out of the very existence of the sexually marginalised – as a subject that disrupts the dominant norms of heterosexuality, queer sexuality and as well as the law.

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R (EMOVAL) for REAL

All is not black and white... and we want to explore the shades of grey. Feminism is diverse and we don't always agree totally with one another, though we may share a similar perspective. While we don't want to silence other viewpoints, we want to focus on the finer distinctions between arguments used by people who are on the same side of the table.

Even in progressive circles, there is often discomfort with including trans people for a number of reasons. The most common one cited is 'Oh, but he is not a real man' or 'She is not really a woman'.

Here's what we asked Satya Rai Nagpaul:
Who is a 'real' man or woman?
What makes this reality?
And, what does it say about gender?

shades of grey

SATYA RAI NAGPAUL

Who are we?
What is this urge to maleness?
Is it real?
Is my father's maleness 'real'?
Why is it more 'real' than mine?
Why is my physicality less legitimate than his?

It must not be the Delhi winter sun which keeps my mother for endless minutes on the terrace, her sharp jaw thrust upwards in the most inhuman angles, looking in a mirror that was her mother's, aiming for the roots of almost invisible hair strands, that she knows will 'appear' again. I see an act without keenness. A silent act. A mechanical act done in isolation. An act that has thoughts she'll never utter and I'll never ask.

When her hand tires from either holding the mirror for too long or from the frustration at not being able to dig out that tiniest and most colourless of strands from deep within her skin, she calls for help. Usually it is my sister who is extended the invitation, but this time, my mother called for me.

At that distance, and in that act, I saw again a lesson of many years ago, a lesson about the meaning-making power of 'appearance'. Ten years ago, when I started testosterone, I watched with deep concentration, every morning, in front of my father's mirror, every strand of hair, that had any promise of 'appearance'. It seemed to me that if I looked really hard and really long, at least one new hair will come to life, and I would have taken another step to the maleness that was only, my father's preserve.

As I got a grip on one of the strands and pulled it right up, my mother released **a sound of pain, relief and**

My hair was real. It was not just the testosterone I fed my body, but my dormant chromosomes slowly waking from their dreamless sleep. At the end of it all, they said I looked so 'natural'…so 'real'… that no one could, 'tell'…

approval and I was strangely satisfied. That sound from her was not only my reward, but the act of removing the hair, and the visual sight of its exposed root travelled far within me. I felt one with my mother. A strange sense of triumph and inner peace came over me.

It must have been the same pleasure of removal that my father enjoyed in that daily ritual of shaving, that I yearned to inherit from him, and knew the impossibility of, at the same time. Only that this pleasure was unshared and belonged solely to him. Just like mine, when my breasts were finally removed. Or perhaps the surgeon had some deep satisfactions that I could never have imagined then, or else, I would have liked to make some sounds, despite my anaesthesia, to convey **my pain, relief and approval……**

When the beard finally 'appeared', I was my own father. I even took his name. Without asking. Like I took his cameras. In anger. That removal from his universe was as real as the hair that started appearing all over my body, masculinising me in ways that perhaps he could negotiate only through silence.

My hair was real. It was not just the testosterone I fed my body, but my dormant chromosomes slowly waking from their dreamless sleep. At the end of it all, they said I looked so 'natural'…so 'real'…that no one could, 'tell'…

But I could tell…so could some others…not everything was as 'real' as my new hair. It was turning out, that what was 'real', was that which was 'present'. And that which performed, what was 'known'. But for all outward appearances and daily life and living, feminist friends thought I was **too male**, non-feminist men thought I wasn't **a real enough male**, lovers couldn't mention to their fathers **such a male.** Feminist-abhorring but autonomy aspiring women thought I was an exemplary female.

……the earliest person to see it was my grandfather. When I took pleasure jumping up and down the carpenter's table in the car park area of our house, he got annoyed with my mother and told her to 'throw that naughty boy out of the house'…….my mother could not make him believe that, 'it was only our *gudiya* (a generic Hindi name meaning 'doll', used for female-bodied children)……'

The nuns would have called upon their gods, had they known that behind the assembly stage, of the all girls' convent school, my lover saw herself kissing a male who wore a hairband and a shirt tucked inside a skirt. How did she see what my grandfather did? How could the doctors need so many years of telling?

When I finally met him, he could not bring himself to show me his constructed phallus; in a moment he got up saying he wanted to pee; he went into the loo, without closing the door behind him; within a few seconds he called out 'do you want to come and see'……in the villages of Punjab, he passed for a real man; he could urinate where he wished and he could do it standing; only…..he deeply yearned to go back and live in the open fields and the clean air of his village but knew that the small town was his only real chance to anonymity and a life without threat from his and his partner's family, who had chased them to the last town, they then had to flee from overnight.

Who are we? What is this urge to maleness? Is it real? Is my father's maleness 'real'? Why is it more 'real' than mine? Why is my physicality less legitimate than his? My mother could have been my father; with that sharp jawline and chiselled face, all she needed was some beard and body hair, a flat chest and a working phallus.

Perhaps, I am her unlived desire for maleness?…….

But I could tell…so could some others…not everything was as 'real' as my new hair. It was turning out, that what was 'real', was that which was 'present'. And that which performed, what was 'known'. But for all outward appearances and daily life and living, feminist friends thought I was **too male**, non-feminist men thought I wasn't **a real enough male**, lovers couldn't mention to their father's **such a male.** Feminist-abhorring but autonomy aspiring women thought I was an exemplary female.

This paper was presented at the 12th Indian Association for Women's Studies [IAWS] Conference at the subtheme: Generating New Knowledge around Sexualities and Genders in February 2008.

Satya Rai Nagpaul is a Transman. Satya established 'Sampoorna', a network of Asian and Diasporic-Asian Trans People in the year 1998. He moderates an e-list by the same name since 2004. He is a professional Cinematographer with training from The Film & Television Institute of India (FTII). He can be reached at: ekdoorbeen@yahoo.co.in

Photo by Anissa Hélie

TEJAL SHAH

photography

It was a first for both of us. You had never dared to dress in front of another person and I had not yet been exposed to anything trans-. I sensed your difference immediately. When it was dark and silent, hidden from the eyes of the world, you would transform. Huddled at the back of your father's shop, I watched in awe and wonder. You feared the streets, both full and empty. Finally, we walked out.

Tejal is a visual artist working with video, photography and installation. Her work, like herself, is feminist, queer and political. She has exhibited widely in museums, galleries and film festivals. In 2003, she co-founded, organised and curated Larzish – India's 1st International Film Festival of Sexuality and Gender Plurality. She works out of her laptop and Bombay city.

art space

UNFURLING I, 20" X 20", 2000

UNFURLING II, 20" X 20", 2000

UNFURLING III, 20" X 20", 2000

UNFURLING IV, 20" X 20", 2000

UNFURLING V, 20" X 20", 2000

BACK TO FRONT I & II, 16” X 20” each, 2000

BACK TO FRONT III, 20” X 24”, 2000

love and longing inside the bell jar

sexuality among women with mental illness

the bigger picture

There are four important issues that women with a mental illness face in their sexual lives – problems in acquiring and sustaining meaningful relationships related to symptoms of the mental illness; being vulnerable to coercive sexual experiences much more than other women; the impact of psychotropic medications on sexual health, and finally, the lack of specialised, reliable and safe spaces to discuss sex.

PRABHA S. CHANDRA

"I am a woman with normal needs even if I am abnormal in other ways. My voices talk to me about sex and I feel tortured by them because they tell me they will do bad things if I think about sex. I do feel better when I have no voices and am on medication. But once I am better, I feel the need to be loved and held, which is not possible. I wonder then, which is a bigger torture – the voices or not being ill?"
– Words from a 26 year old woman living with schizophrenia.

There was a time when women with mental illness were institutionalised and only a minority went on to have a partner or get married. Advances in psychiatric treatment have enabled women with mental illness to lead more functional lives and fewer women are now in long term institutionalisation. However, this has thrown open many more challenges for women battling with mental illness including that of handling their own sexuality. A study done at Bangalore among 360 women being treated for a psychiatric disorder revealed that nearly 77 % were sexually active ever in their lifetime while 85 % were sexually active within the last five years. This indicates that even when fighting a serious mental disorder, women continue to have a sexual life associated with its rewards and problems.

This article will focus on some of the issues related to their own sexuality that women with mental illness grapple with, often without solutions or help. Mental illness for

the purpose of this paper is being defined as schizophrenia or bipolar illness (including cycles of both mania and depression).

How does mental illness influence the sexual experience of women?

There are enough studies to indicate that women with mental illness have partners, get married, have pregnancies and are sexually active almost at the same rates as women in the general population. However, negotiating this path is often tumultuous and difficult.

There are four important issues that women with a mental illness face in their sexual lives – problems in acquiring and sustaining meaningful relationships related to symptoms of the mental illness; being vulnerable to coercive sexual experiences much more than other women; the impact of psychotropic medications on sexual health, and finally, the lack of specialised, reliable and safe spaces to discuss sex.

"I don't have anyone to call my own and no one cares for me. At-least for a physical relationship, men will agree to be part of my life. I know it is momentary and brief, but for that moment, I am the most important thing to this man. I can live with a chain of such moments of people wanting me and me feeling that I belong to somebody. I know that no one in their right senses will have a long term relationship with a woman with mental illness."

Problems in acquiring and sustaining meaningful relationships related to symptoms of the mental illness.

There are two ways in which symptoms of mental illness might interfere with a woman's sexual life. The first is related to poor judgment and social skill deficits resulting in inadequate sexual negotiation.

The following scenario illustrates the point. M is a 29 year old woman with schizophrenia who wants to have a boyfriend. She talks about wanting to be held, nurtured and touched. M often fantasises of being pretty, smart and having a boyfriend. However her parents do not want to get her married and do not feel that she needs a partner. M herself is also unable to talk to boys in the neighborhood or interact with males at the rehabilitation centre. She gets tongue tied, feels she cannot understand social nuances and becomes awkward. She feels helpless and alone in her predicament.

What M is facing is called a social skill deficit which is part of a schizophrenicillness.Recenttheories of schizophrenia indicate that one of the major dysfunctions that inhibit persons with schizophrenia from interacting normally with others is deficits in social cognition.

Social cognition is an important aspect of all social relationships; particularly the art of getting to know another person, communication and negotiation. It is that part of thinking which makes a person sensitive to nuances, gestures and subtle indications of acceptance and rejection. Women (and men) with schizophrenia, depending on the nature of the problem, may become either over-sensitive and hence suspicious of any gesture or may not be able to pick up subtle social cues, which are important aspects of any relationship.

So while M would like to have partner, a romance, and maybe even sex, her illness precludes her from approaching potential partners or makes her over-sensitive to cues.

Poor judgment and loneliness

P is a 25 year old woman with bipolar disorder whose family has abandoned her. Her illness is well controlled with medication; however, P has had two abortions and has had several tests for STDs and HIV. She has multiple sexual partners and occasionally has sex for money.

P says –
"I don't have anyone to call my own and no one cares for me. At least for a physical relationship, men will agree to be part of my life. I know it is momentary and brief, but for that moment, I am the most important thing to this man. I can live with a chain of such moments of people wanting me and me feeling that I belong to somebody. I know that no one in their right senses will have a long term relationship with a woman with mental illness."

As the above self-disclosure indicates, women with mental illness grapple with immense loneliness and solitude. This is imposed on them by society which often alienates them and prevents them from joining the mainstream of social life and networks. Abandoned (often even while living within the family), women may get into relationships without thinking of the consequences, just for a few moments of connection with another person. This may result in trauma through subsequent abandonment or consequences like violence, STDs and HIV.

Illness exacerbations and sexuality

Women with bipolar illness will often report feelings of excessive sexual desire as part of their manic illness and will identify it as being responsible for indiscreet sexual liaisons that might have negative consequences.

The above three situations are often not discussed or dealt with by professionals and patients find it difficult to bring it up- leading to much of the trauma and angst that women with mental illness face.

Medication and sexuality

Several of the second generation of antipsychotic drugs and anti-depressants have an impact on sexual functioning, particularly on sexual desire and orgasms (causing anorgasmia). In addition, by causing weight gain, they have a negative impact on self image and on attractiveness further influencing a woman's sexuality. However, in most situations, an improvement in overall functioning and decrease in symptoms actually enhances one's self esteem and persons with psychiatric illness have mixed feelings about medication.

Sexual abuse and coercion

Several studies have shown that women with mental illness are extremely vulnerable to sexual coercion. A study done among female inpatients in Bangalore indicated that 30 % of women psychiatric inpatients reported being sexually coerced. The most commonly reported experience was sexual intercourse involving threatened or actual physical force and the most commonly identified perpetrator was the woman's husband or intimate partner or a person in a position of authority in her community. In contrast to the 30% of women who reported sexual coercion, only 3.5 % of the 146 records indicated that the coercion had been discussed with the doctor or mental health professional.

A study done among female inpatients in Bangalore indicated that 30 % of women psychiatric inpatients reported being sexually coerced. The most commonly reported experience was sexual intercourse involving threatened or actual physical force and the most commonly identified perpetrator was the woman's husband or intimate partner or a person in a position of authority in her community.

What was also disturbing was that majority of the women reported repeat victimisation. Western studies have indicated that mentally ill women who are most prone to abuse are those who are homeless and use substances. However, this was not substantiated in our study, where women were living with their families and in their homes. Thirty of the 50 coerced women (60%) reported that they had not disclosed their experience to anyone, and that they had not sought help. Women revealed a sense of helplessness, fear, and secrecy related to their experiences.

"Three years ago I was in my sister's house for a few days. My brother-in-law is not all right. He is very crazy about women. I think even my sister is aware of this, but she keeps quiet. She has two children and has to bring them up. She does not work and that is why I think she is scared. He had an eye on me also. But I never realised. One day I was alone at home. My brother-in-law came. That day he got an opportunity. He did not care, however much I requested. He raped me."
(22-year-old, psychosis not otherwise specified)

"Another time, a few people took me to a school. They opened my mouth and forcefully poured alcohol. Then they all raped me one by one. In the morning I was lying there. No one has ever asked me these questions earlier, so I have never told anyone. Now I feel OK and don't feel distressed about these experiences."
(42-year-old, obsessive-compulsive disorder)

"This I have not told anyone until now. But today you are asking me, that is why I told you. But I am not scared. Let anyone come to know about it. I will only say it loudly."
(23-year-old, bipolar disorder, mania with psychotic symptoms)

"Our people are all like that. They get their children married early. There will be many children. There are so many people like me. But no one talks about such difficulties. They tolerate all this with their mouths shut. If we tell anyone, we will be losing our own respect. They would say, 'Is she the only person suffering like this?' That is why I have not told this to anyone."
(33-year-old, acute psychosis)

Being `mad' they feel makes them a victim, makes them helpless and also leaves them with a sense that people will not believe their experiences because they come out of `madness'.

Reactions to coercive sex

Women reported a variety of reactions towards their sexual experiences. One woman explained her sexual experience this way:
"My mind is not all right for the past 3 years. My mother always says that I roam around everywhere removing all my clothes. I don't remember now. But I like new clothes and jewelry. I like to dress up well. Once I was in the house alone in the night. Maybe I had not closed the door properly. Some 3 to 4 people just barged in removed my clothes, played with my body and 'did it' one after the other. One fellow pressed my breast hard, biting it and my face. But I don't know who they are because it was very dark. I think they do not belong to our town. They are some rogues. After that, my stomach has become somewhat big. I feel I have become pregnant."

"If I tell anyone, they will scold me only. As it is, they always scold me and call me 'mad.' Everyone looks down upon poor people like us. Also, if I tell anyone, they will not believe me. What is the use of telling anyone now? Is it not wrong whatever men do? They only blame us. My husband has left me. From here I have to go to my mother's house. He will not let me stay with him. But I want to go there and live. But everyone thinks I am mad. So will he allow me? If I stay alone also it is a problem. When a woman lives alone, men try to take advantage. (With) a woman like me, it is very easy for them. I am very scared."
(25-years-old, bipolar disorder, mania with psychotic symptoms).

The stories above which have been extracted from an earlier article by the author indicate the poignancy and dilemmas facing women with a mental illness. Being `mad' they feel makes them a victim, makes them helpless and also leaves them with a sense that people will not believe their experiences because they come out of `madness'.

Under these circumstances, possibly the only space they have available is with a mental health professional. However there is often a lack of discussion on sexuality with mental health professionals even in the framework of recovery.

Positive stories.

A study exploring sexual lives of people with schizophrenia using a grounded theory approach, found that sexuality was more meaningful when it was not limited to only its physical aspect. Such factors as the presence of intimacy, less confusion about sexual orientation, previous positive sexual experiences and relationships, the quality of current intimate relationships, and opportunities for sexual expression were identified as important contributors to satisfying sexual lives. Men and women living with a mental illness reported that dealing with their sexual lives made them feel more complete as a person and that discussing and resolving their sexual concerns was an important part of reintegration into society.

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Reclaiming sexual lives in one's journey through mental illness

We all need to understand that like everyone else, women with mental illness too need to experience sexual wellbeing. This might not necessarily be only through a sexual relationship but through acknowledging and validating the woman's sexuality and discussing her concerns related to it. It is also important that families, friends and most importantly mental health professionals realise this in their attempts at helping a mentally ill woman reintegrate into society. Providing a safe place where a woman with mental illness does not feel vulnerable and can express herself freely without having to worry about exploitation is probably the foremost need of today in India.

"There is something demoralizing about watching two people get more and more crazy about each other, especially when you are the extra person in the room."

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, Chapter 2, pg. 14

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the Nepal supreme court judgement

The landmark judgement of the Nepal Supreme Court has directed the Government of Nepal to give gender and sexual minorities in Nepal equal rights as any other person and protect them from violations on the basis of them being 'natural persons'. Below are some excerpts from the judgement as well as consequences that the judgment has already had.

The Court has also ordered the government to set up a committee to look into the issue of same-sex marriage, study it, and follow the recommendations of the committee.

How did this happen?

Blue Diamond Society, *Mitini* Nepal, Crusaid and *Parichaya Samaj* filed a writ petition with the Supreme Court of Nepal on April 18, 2007 against the Government of Nepal, Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and Parliament of Nepal.

They wanted the government to end the violent, degrading behaviour by State and society on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identities; to give citizenship ID reflecting the gender identity of 'third gender' people; to remove discriminatory laws and change the law by involving sexual and gender minorities to ensure equal rights and protections for them.

The case was heard three times in eight months and on December 21, 2007 the Court passed its historic judgement.

The Court said 'Though, lesbian, gay, bisexual, third gender and inter-sex or LGBTIs are not heterosexual man and women in terms of sexual orientation and/or gender identities, they are natural persons. The Articles from 12 to 32 of the Chapter Three of the Interim Constitution of Nepal has bestowed each Nepali citizen all fundamental rights. Though they are in minority, by virtue of being Nepali citizens, to enjoy those rights on their own identity are the fundamental rights of petitioners…'

It went on to say, 'The fundamental rights set forth in the constitution and the human rights enshrined in the international human rights treaties in which Nepal is a party, cannot be interpreted in a way that only heterosexual men and women can enjoy it just because men and women genders are mentioned in the constitution. Aside from the heterosexual men and women, LGBTI are as well natural persons and therefore LGBTI are entitled for enjoyment of the rights provided by constitution, law and the human rights conventions. The State has the obligation to create such environment and formulate laws in that line; interpretation cannot be made in such a way that only male and female can enjoy those rights and being LGBTI they cannot enjoy the same rights. The right to freedom has been set forth in the Article12 (2). This Article should be regarded as right to life. The terms woman and man have not been included in this Article 12. The freedom provided in this Article is for everyone. The term person refers to natural person. As LGBTI also are Nepali natural persons, they should be allowed to live in Nepali society with dignity through enjoyment of all freedoms.'

The judgement refers also to relevant articles from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which Nepal is legally bound to comply with.

The writ petition had also demanded the right to same-sex marriage. The Court took a more cautious view of this and ordered that a seven member committee be formed to learn about the practices and jurisprudence that has been developed in other countries at the regional as well as the global level.

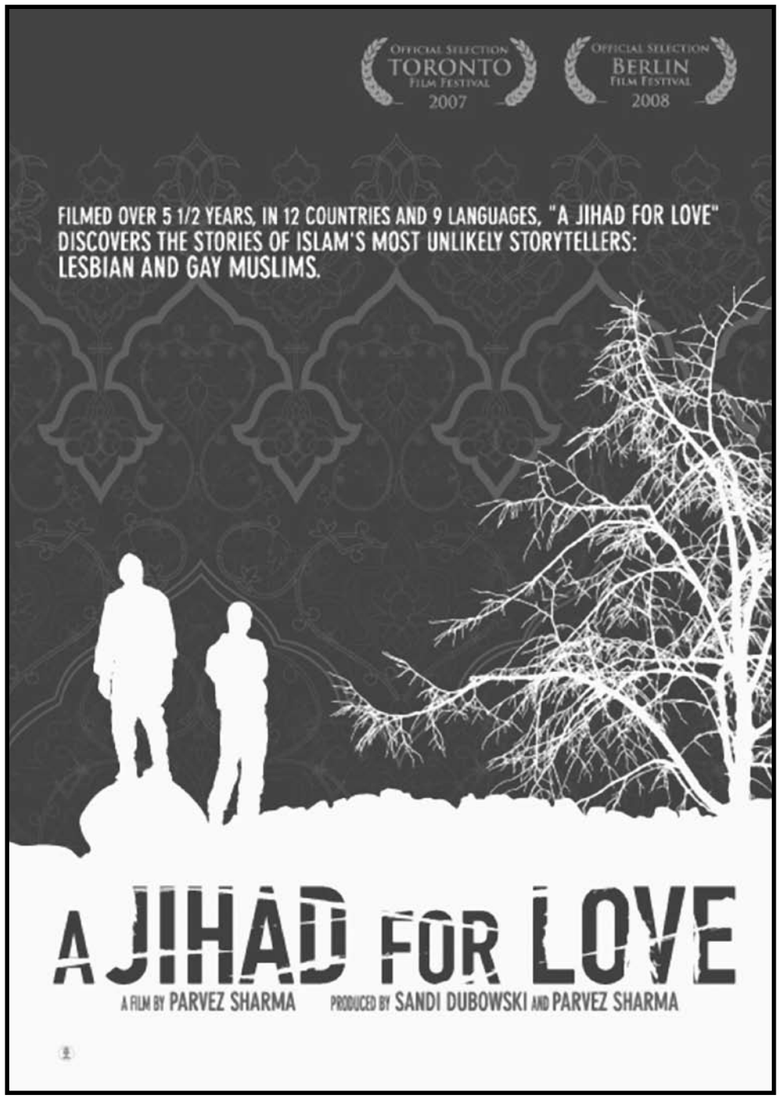
The Government of Nepal will, after receiving the recommendations of the committee, take the necessary legal steps in line with the recommendations of the committee. The Court also ordered that a copy of the report of the committee be submitted to the Court.

So, what are the implications of the Supreme Court's judgement?

Already, there is less violence and discrimination against LGBTIs in Nepal. More people are open about their sexual orientation and gender identity, and their self esteem is improving. More political parties, leaders, and civil society are openly advocating LGBTI rights and inclusion. Representation of LGBTI in politics will increase and they have begun to contest local elections. The UN gender policy will be revised and third gender people will be included and treated equally for all UN business.

Passport, visa forms and other forms will be changed to recognise the third gender. Third gender people will be allowed to travel with their passport freely. There will be equal opportunities for jobs and access to public services for LGBTI. This ruling can be a good example for other countries in Asia to promote LGBTI rights in their own countries.

love
thy neighbour



reel review

A review of JIHAD FOR LOVE
Parvez Sharma / 9 languages with English subtitles / 81 minutes /
Produced by Sandi DuBowski

GEORGINA MADDOX

Reinventing *Jihad* as a struggle of love over war and reclaiming the identity of queer Muslims, Parvez Sharma takes a leap of faith.

It was with baited breath and a few niggling doubts that a segment of the city's queer population and those 'cool' individuals who consider themselves queer-friendly, gathered at the National Centre for Performing Arts, Mumbai, to watch Parvez Sharma's directorial venture *Jihad for Love,* in January 2008. After all, such a daring film on the Muslim gay and lesbian population had never been screened in India and it was with a little trepidation that people trooped in to watch the film.

Sharma and DuBowski had kept the event low profile, and the press was kept out of it, a strategy that seemed to have worked well, since there were no interruptions during or after the screenings. Sharma's five and a half year's labour of love, and personal *Jihad* went off without a hitch. After the screening, Sharma made himself available for a chat with his audience and there were both brickbats and bouquets. While almost everyone loved Sharma's brave endeavour to tackle a subject as wide and difficult as this, some felt that in his attempt to encapsulate several viewpoints he did not give the viewers a chance to get into any one story in-depth and they were left with a cursory understanding with the dilemmas of being a religious Muslim who is also a homosexual. Others were happy to see the inclusion of lesbian voices, despite the fact that in the film, most of the women were not comfortable facing the camera, while most of the men were. Usually this inability to show faces leads to a total exclusion of a woman's point of view, but Sharma's dogged pursuit to include them shows up well in the film. 'I spent a lot of time with the women till they got comfortable to speak on camera and it was a friendship that lasted well beyond the film', said Sharma.

The film moves across twelve countries, engages with nine languages and has its fair share of cinematic moments, it is an attempt in Sharma's voice, to 'look beyond a hostile and war-torn present, the film se eks to reclaim the Islamic concept of a greater *Jihad*, which can mean 'an inner struggle' or 'to strive in the path of God'. In doing so the film and its remarkable subjects move beyond the narrow concept of *Jihad* as holy war.'

We meet a young Mazen, who was beaten and arrested when the police stormed the floating gay nightclub on the Nile. We see his courage and defiance that overcomes the public shaming at a trial on 'habitual debauchery', and after

four years in jail, he continues to embrace Islam and live and love as a gay man, albeit in Paris away from his mother and family.

At the very onset of the film we are introduced to the radical and resilient Mushin Hendricks an *Imam* who was cast out from his community and divorced by his wife when he came out as gay. His little girls are, however, supportive and loving and it is during this short visit of his life that we learn that embracing *Allah* does not mean one cannot be queer. In fact Hendricks has started a group that discusses the possibilities of interpreting the holy texts differently.

'All the people in my film are coming out as Muslims,' says the 34-year-old filmmaker who took a conscious decision to not speak to atheists since the focus of the film was on believers. 'Islam is the heart of this film. They are proud to be gay, but fundamentally they're coming out as Muslims and saying they're as Muslim as anybody else, and their Islam is as true as anybody else's'. He also found that being Muslim post 9/11 had very different connotations and to see Islam depicted as a faith of violence was very difficult for Sharma. The struggle is to follow the dictates of love and not war.

We see that while the struggle for the men in the film has been fraught with violence and hyper-visibility, the lesbians have a harder time dealing with internalised homophobia and invisibility. Maryam a Moroccan lesbian in Paris whose partner lives in Egypt finds that she still feels the need to be 'punished' for her sexuality and it was only till recently she was able to use the term lesbian for the first time.

A contrasting voice comes through another couple of older women who are out and visiting one of the women's mothers for dinner. There are others who proclaim their love for God and their same sex partner in one breath, but the indication that there is pressure and guilt underlying these bold acts in some cases is brought out well through not just the voices of the protagonists but the manner in which these sections have been portrayed.

The India section is, however, disappointing. It begins with a celebration of two Sufi saints who were openly involved in a love relationship. It proceeds to show several drag-queens getting ready for a *mujra* night and has a few camera bites from some *kothi* boys who lead a dual life of being married to women and continuing to have sexual relations with other men. On the surface, India comes off as a liberated and seemingly cool place to be gay. This, we know is far from true. Indians are constantly encountering homophobia, and the kind of violence and oppression that occur as a result of being out, and this oversimplified film segment does more damage than good to a film that is otherwise quite comprehensive.

It is perhaps because Sharma himself had a secular upbringing in India, where 'Islam was all around me'. As a gay man, he was acutely aware of his country's stance on homosexuality. But he chose not to march around proclaiming his sexuality which is why things were fine. 'India is a culture that tolerates same-sex behaviour in men and women, but it can't be in-your-face,' says Sharma. Perhaps that is yet another Jihad and yet another film.

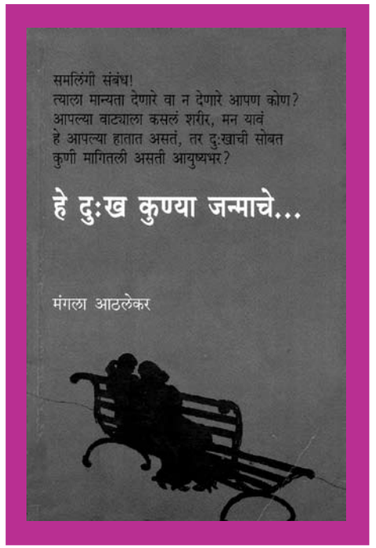
Georgina Maddox is a creative writer, artist, musician and maker of short films. She is currently working with the *Indian Express* newspaper in Mumbai. Her art work has appeared in queer magazines and she has performed as a singer/musician in several cities in India. Her short film, *Bombay Longing* has been screened all over India and the US. *No Fixed Address* was screened at the World Social Forum in Mumbai.

Hee Dukha Kunya Janmache | MANGALA ATHLEKAR

Rajhans Publication
2004

SEEMA GAIKWAD AND KETKI RANADE

Hee Dukha Kunya Janmache, literally translated as 'These sorrows are from which lifetime?' is a book written in Marathi by Mangala Athlekar on lives of women with same-sex desires. This is one of the first books in Marathi that puts forth narratives of lesbian-identified women and describes their concerns in their own words. Rajhans publication is a well-known publishing house among Marathi readers and is considered to be of great repute among writers and intellectuals in Pune city. This is significant because a couple of years ago, a gay friend and activist, who runs a gay organisation and support space in Pune was looking for publishers for a biographical account written by him on growing up gay in a heterosexist world, had approached the same publishing house among many others. His work was rejected stating that it does not conform to the literary standards of this publishing company. He finally had to fund the publication himself, despite the fact that his work would again have been one of the first mainstream publications in Marathi on gay life.



To see the same Rajhans publishers publishing Athlekar's book makes one wonder whether this choice is based on the fact that this book has been written by a writer of repute, who has written books such as *Gargi Azun Jeevant Ahey* (Gargi is still alive) in the past. Also, the fact that this book engages with the issues of same-sex desire more from a social, political and intellectual perspective and not so much from an experiential, narrative style may have influenced the decision.

To write a book in Marathi on such an invisible and almost 'prohibited' issue such as same-sex sexual desire and relationships is commendable. Although there are several gaps and many instances of oversimplifications and naïve generalisations, one of the most significant achievements of this book has been to make visible lives that are unseen, voices that are unheard, and experiences and desires that are (un) named.

I heard about this book for the first time from a client who approached our psychotherapy centre. She had been married for four years and had a three year old child. She said that, she had always been attracted to women and had had her share of rejection from a straight best friend in

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, A GAY FRIEND AND ACTIVIST, WHO RUNS A GAY ORGANISATION AND SUPPORT SPACE IN PUNE WAS LOOKING FOR PUBLISHERS FOR A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT WRITTEN BY HIM ON GROWING UP GAY IN A HETEROSEXIST WORLD, HAD APPROACHED THE SAME PUBLISHING HOUSE AMONG MANY OTHERS. HIS WORK WAS REJECTED STATING THAT IT DOES NOT CONFORM TO THE LITERARY STANDARDS OF THIS PUBLISHING COMPANY.

college, and so on, before getting married. She had always known this about herself but thought that she was 'the only one' and never voiced her desires to anyone. She had also done all the routine of praying to God and asking for forgiveness of her 'sinful' desire etc. So after four years of marriage, she happened to find this book, which not only gave a 'name' to her feelings but also the discovery of a community of women with the same desires. That to my mind is the relevance of a book like this.

The book has a clear intent of providing information on issues and perspectives on same-sex desire to the general reader. It deals with issues such as: what being lesbian means, the process of the self-discovery, that a lesbian relationship or any same-sex relationship just like any other romantic relationship does not necessarily exist merely on the physical-sexual plane, that this identity may develop at any age and that it is possible that an individual may acknowledge this aspect of their being at any age. The author has effectively used examples from narratives of lesbian women to get this information across.

That same-sex relationships are not merely a western phenomenon or a fad of upper class, urban young women has been brought out well by Athlekar. Through citing examples of urban, rural, upper class, lower class, literate, and illiterate women the writer makes a valid case for the above claim. In order to further this argument, the writer has cited about fifteen reports from several local newspapers in the country.

The writer has described individual narratives of lesbian women in their own words. These women belong to various age groups, and socio-economic backgrounds in the cities of Pune and Mumbai in Maharashtra, India. What these women would like to say about their own identities, about how they view their own selves is brought forward in their own language. However, more in-depth information, especially on an experiential day-to-day level does not come through very clearly. A lot of the writing style is political in nature. This might be due to the fact that the women the author spoke to have been activists and leaders of organisations and support groups working on issues of same-sex sexuality. It may also be a reflection of the fact that while most of these activists have spoken primarily about queer politics, identities etc. the nuanced everyday realities of these women's lives, often in the form of subtexts to the main narratives, have not been brought out clearly by the writer, who has for the first time in her writing career attempted to write about the subject of same-sex desire and identities.

The book does not dwell much on the many complex and positive or even celebratory aspects of same-sex desire and relationships. One of the biggest problems with the book is that, at the outset, the writer presents an analysis of patriarchy as well as family systems in order to understand and situate choices of 'same-sex sexuality'. However, in her attempt to provide a commentary on women's oppression within patriarchal systems, the author situates the choice of women to be 'single' as a way of rejecting male power. The discussion of single women, widowed women, divorced women alongside lesbian-identified women becomes very confusing. Also, in an attempt to draw upon similarities of experiences of women with various other intersecting identities, there is an oversimplification and conflation of many issues. There is an implication that all women face similar kinds of problems in living out their lives in a male-dominated world. Moreover, the aspect of sexual control placed upon individuals, especially women in patriarchy does not come through clearly. Instead a lot of analysis sounds like individual interpretation rather than a comprehensive commentary on patriarchy and its tools of control.

Many lesbian women, whose interviews are presented in the book, have talked of their sexuality as being their choice. Despite this, the writer writes on the cover page,

'Same-sex relationships! Who are we to accept or reject? Who would have chosen this kind of a body, this kind of a mind, if she had a choice would she choose this kind of a pain as a companion for a lifetime…' A quote like this on the cover page along with the title, *'These sorrows are from which lifetime?'* epitomises helplessness, deficit, shame and anything that maybe associated with the negative.

Seema Gaikwad, a psychologist, is Programme Co-ordinator with Seher, a psychotherapy and counselling centre in Pune, India. She has been associated with several women's groups and feminist organisations as a trainer, mental health professional and activist.

Ketki Ranade, a trained psychiatric social worker, started Seher. Seher is an LGBT-friendly mental health service and programme informed by feminist and human rights principles. A Research Fellow on the HPIF Fellowship of the Population Council, India, Ketki is conducting research to understand the mental health concerns of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals, as well as the perspectives of medical personnel about same-sex desires.

THE BOOK HAS A CLEAR INTENT OF PROVIDING INFORMATION ON ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES ON SAME-SEX DESIRE TO THE GENERAL READER. IT DEALS WITH ISSUES SUCH AS: WHAT BEING LESBIAN MEANS, THE PROCESS OF THE SELF-DISCOVERY, THAT A LESBIAN RELATIONSHIP OR ANY SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIP JUST LIKE ANY OTHER ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP DOES NOT NECESSARILY EXIST MERELY ON THE PHYSICAL-SEXUAL PLANE, THAT THIS IDENTITY MAY DEVELOP AT ANY AGE AND THAT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT AN INDIVIDUAL MAY ACKNOWLEDGE THIS ASPECT OF THEIR BEING AT ANY AGE. THE AUTHOR HAS EFFECTIVELY USED EXAMPLES FROM NARRATIVES OF LESBIAN WOMEN TO GET THIS INFORMATION ACROSS.

... on how sexual rights affect one personally, and how they are affirmed and/or violated in one's local cultural setting.

ANONYMOUS

I was born male, am 32 years old, and single. During weekends you will catch me cooking, washing, gardening or giving a bath to my pet dogs. Enough for my community in Kathmandu to raise eyebrows where an individual's choice and behaviour are factors for others to decide his/her sexuality and sexual preference. My father was usually out-stationed due to his duties and my elder brother was in another local hostel. I was close and in constant communication with only the female members in my family including my grandmother, two elder sisters and my mother.

All along I have grown up with 'different' choices. In the early 80's when I was in a coeducational school hostel, I became friendlier with the senior boys. They used to take me out and I learnt many 'sexual activities' including masturbation in their company. I was not only enjoying the phase but I also loved the idea of being adored and wanted by my seniors as this made me 'happening'. Although I was unaware of it then, now, I feel my behaviour might have been a catalyst for them to think that I was 'available' to them.

After I joined college for higher studies I was still confused about my sexual preference. With few opportunities for exploring my sexuality, I got into a relationship with a girl. After sleeping with her, I came to understand myself and my desire for men. I began to ignore my girl-friend and took up a job in a local 5-star hotel to reduce the frequency of meeting her so that the relationship would die a natural death. I met her along with her husband and son many years later at a musical event. Though we shared sweet conversations, I am still haunted with the feeling that in the process of exploring myself, I may have 'used' her.

In Nepal, the whirlwind in the use of internet and cyber outlets is a saving grace for people like me who are confused or have a low level of confidence. It has helped me in understanding other 'like-minded souls' in terms of their sexuality. I had a serious and an open relationship, with a foreigner I met in a night club, for more than three years. I will name him A. He is still in Nepal and our relationship ended in February 2004. He is a manager at a reputed educational institution and is nine years older to me.

With him, I really enjoyed every nuance of being in a same-sex relationship, which later on developed into a monogamous one because I could not handle the pros and cons of sharing a third man in bed. Initially I prompted A for a threesome, both for experience and fun. While it was okay for me with some foreigners, I used to throw tantrums whenever there was a Nepali guy in our room and in our bed. I realise that, out of jealousy, I have discriminated against both A and the other guys at various points.

Post our break-up, which A suggested, due to his personal responsibilities, we tried to meet up as friends but it was not easy for both of us. At present, we just share major happenings of our lives.

In terms of my work, I had been volunteering for an NGO active in control/prevention of HIV/AIDS amongst men who have sex with men in Nepal. In 2004, I joined the same organization. I have experienced a high level of discrimination within the community due to lack of knowledge, education and information.

In Nepal, a person is labelled not only because of one's appearance, choice of dressing but also because of one's preference in sexual roles and choice of partners. The community often attributes labels to an individual before understanding or realising his/her choice of identity. *Hijra*, *chakka*, *kothi* are some of the terms used by the community in Nepal.

I have never identified with cross-dressing in feminine outfits and accessories. I tried it out once out of curiosity and peer pressure. The result was horrifying and I never tried it out again.

My community members treat me with respect and non-discrimination due to my age, appearance, education and my professional association despite the sexual choices I make. But, I realise it will not be the same for me as a transgender person decked up in a sari and out in the streets of Kathmandu, Nepal.

Anonymous lives and works in Nepal. We know him. We appreciate his courage in writing this and support his decision to remain anonymous to our readers.

trans talk

We live in a world where gender is socially constructed. It is conceived of and practised as a 'binary'. Only 'two' genders are considered legitimate: 'male' and 'female', though in some cultures, there are people who identify as *hijras* (in India), *warias* (in Indonesia), *baklas* (in the Philippines), to name just a few gender non-conforming people.

However, fortunately, the understanding of gender is expanding and there are many new terms that have been formed, and many more that are forming at this very moment and older meanings are being challenged, as the words and concepts below show.

TRANSGENDER PERSON

Is an umbrella term for someone who identifies, acts or thinks in a manner not socially approved for the gender assigned at birth. Examples of specific variants within this would include: Transvestite, Transsexual, Transman, Transwoman, etc. It is common to use just the word Trans, as well.

TRANSSEXUAL PERSON

Is one whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned at birth who may or may not desire to alter the body through hormonal and/or surgical procedures like Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). The person may or may not go through any/the whole gamut of medical procedures available towards this, depending on their own conceptions of their identity, as well as, factors like their health, finances, social situation and other such constraints. FTM stands for Female-to-Male transsexual person or Transman and MTF stands for Male-to-Female transsexual person or Transwoman.

CROSSDRESSER

Is one who dresses, for any of a number of reasons, in clothing usually worn by the other sex, but one who does not identify as the other gender.

INTERSEXED PERSON

Is one in whom the process of biological sex differentiation has been non-standard. Such individuals are often surgically reassigned a sex at birth and this practice has come to be questioned by intersexed persons themselves as a violation of their body, agency and well being.

SEX REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Any/all of a range of medical procedures that a transsexual person undergoes to allign their body with their gender identity. For FTMs the range of procedures available include: hormone therapy, mastectomy, shaping of a 'male' chest, removal of internal reproductive organs and lastly, phalloplasty or the construction of a penis. For MTFs, the range of procedures available include: hormone therapy and hair removal, augmentation mammoplasty or construction of breasts, non-genital surgeries like shaping the nose, revision of the thyroid cartilage and other such surgeries for a 'feminine' appearance, and lastly, genital surgery for the removal of the penis and testicles and construction of a vagina. Some additional interventions like speech therapy for voice modulation are also sometimes undertaken.

SRS is preceded by a psychiatric evaluation where the benefit of such a procedure is ascertained for the person desiring it. Evaluation and counselling may take any time between a year to two. Certification by two independent mental health professionals is often a requirement before undergoing SRS.

The legal status of the reassigned gender is different in different parts of the globe. Even within India e.g., Tamil Nadu has been the first state to recently grant an official status to the third sex. The ration card has a sex column marked T, instead of M or F.

TRANS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Trans people can be of any sexual orientation - heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual. Trans refers to gender identity whereas sexual orientation refers to the gender of the person whom one is attracted to. Many people think that Trans people will only be sexually attracted to members of the other sex, but this is untrue. So a person can be a Transwoman and lesbian, or bisexual or heteresexual.

TRANS NETWORK

It is useful for Trans people to know that there are networks, e lists and support groups where they can share resources and experiences.

Sampoorna is a network of Transgender/Transsexual/Intersexual/Questioning persons who are Asian or Diasporic Asian and Non-Asians who have professional and/or social links with Asia. The network keeps connected through an e-group by the same name. This is a moderated e-list. Occasional group meetings are held in Mumbai and Delhi. The e-group came into being in April 2004 and there are currently 65 members from various parts of India and also from Sri Lanka, Canada and the United States of America. Sampoorna is a platform for networking, support and information on Trans issues specific to the Asian and Diasporic Asian experience. Membership can be requested by writing to: sampoorna@yahoogroups.com

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Calling all Writers! We want your ideas and stories! We are inviting submissions for the next issues of *In Plainspeak*. Please indicate which section of the magazine you think your article best fits. Send in your articles to resourcecentre@tarshi.net. Remember we use gender-neutral and non-judgmental language. To write for the I column, please begin your first sentence with 'I…'.

Calling all Artists! We hope to showcase a diverse range of images throughout the magazine in each issue. *In Plainspeak* is calling for images on sexuality for inclusion in the magazine. Poetry is also welcome. Submissions should be sent to resourcecentre@tarshi.net.

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The South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality library hosts a collection of classic and contemporary books on sexuality, fiction, newsletters, CDROMs, newsletters, organisational material, electronic files, conference papers, journals and other periodicals, on sexuality, reproductive health, and rights. The library is open to use by professionals working in the field, NGOs, academics, researchers, and students.

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What did you think of this issue of *In Plainspeak*? We welcome your comments, suggestions, and ideas. Please send your feedback to resourcecentre@tarshi.net. We look forward to hearing from you!

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The South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality aims to increase knowledge and scholarship on issues of sexuality, sexual health and sexual wellbeing in this region. The Resource Centre specifically focuses on sexuality related work in China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, The Philippines, and Vietnam. The Centre serves as a space for activists, advocates, practitioners, and researchers, to better understand, examine, and expand upon the complex issues surrounding debates on sexuality.

The South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality is hosted by TARSHI (Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues).

TARSHI, a not-for-profit organisation based in New Delhi, India, believes that all people have the right to sexual wellbeing and to a self-affirming and enjoyable sexuality. TARSHI works towards expanding sexual and reproductive choices in people's lives in an effort to enable them to enjoy lives of dignity, freedom from fear, infection, and reproductive and sexual health problems.

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