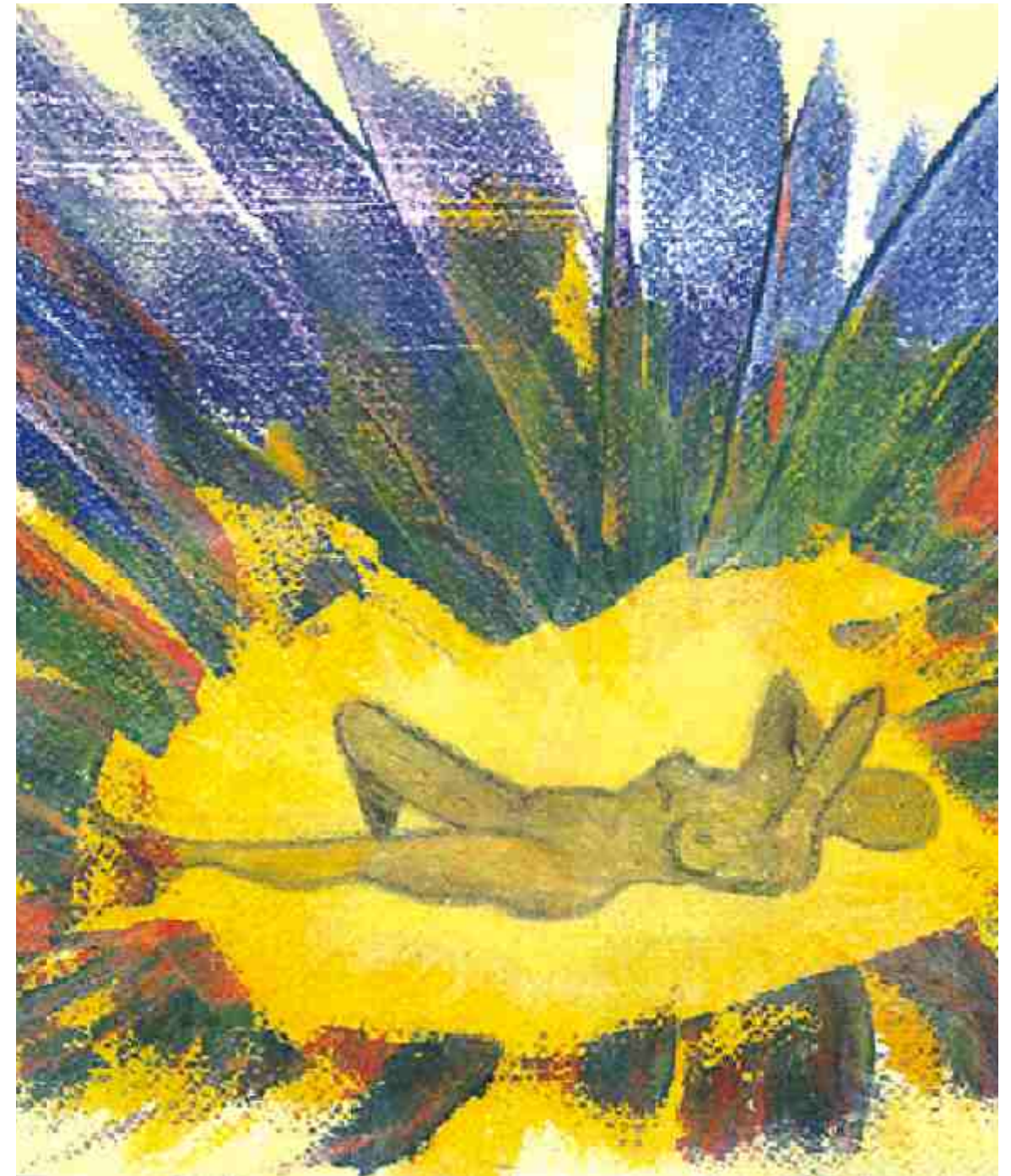
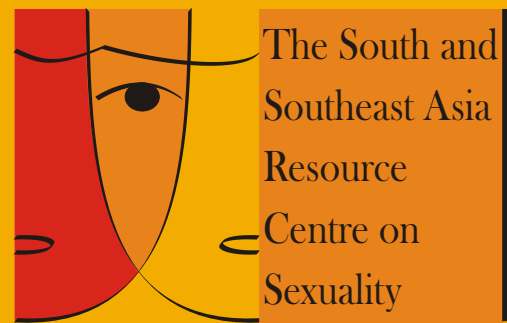


in plainspeak

TALKING ABOUT *sexuality* IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

2006, Issue 4



Cover:
untitled
by Cynthia Chauhan

<i>letter from editor</i>		radhika chandiramani	2
<i>who we are</i>			3
<i>interview</i>	Sexuality in Vietnam	khuat thu hong	4
<i>issue in focus</i>	Queering the Indian Economy: Sexuality, Income and Autonomy	priyanka gupta	10
<i>shades of grey</i>	Versatile Top/Versatile Bottom	anindya hajra	16
<i>brushstrokes</i>	Paintings, Sketches	georgina maddox	21
<i>the bigger picture</i>	Open Letters from Vikram Seth and others, and from Amartya Sen		26
<i>campaignspotlight</i>	Anti-Discrimination Law in the Philippines		28
<i>reel review</i>	Some of the films screened at the Q! Film Festival	michael p. de guzman & germaine trittle p. leonin	30
<i>hot off the press</i>	Review of 'Loving Women: Being Lesbian in Unprivileged India'	maya ganesh	34
<i>did you know?</i>	TransTalk		37
<i>'I' column</i>		marlea pinor munez	38
<i>at the resource centre</i>			39
<i>about the resource centre</i>			41

This publication is for educational purposes and limited circulation only.

Supported by The Ford Foundation

These have been very interesting times for all sexual rights activists in the region. While the LGBT Anti-Discrimination Bill is being debated in The Philippines, here in India the court case to challenge the constitutional validity of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is ongoing. In nearby Hong Kong, 21 year old William Leung has won his case (you may remember that we covered it in the last issue of *In Plainspeak*) and the age of consent for sexual activity for homosexuals has been lowered to 16 years, making it the same as for heterosexuals.

No surprise then that with all of this focus on issues of discrimination based on gender and sexual identity, this issue of *In Plainspeak* reflects the same themes. In the Interview, Khuat Thu Hong talks about issues of sexuality in Vietnam and tells us what she is doing to counter the confines of rigid social expectations of gender roles and sexual behaviour. Issue in Focus looks at whether it is economic independence alone that strengthens young gays and lesbians in today's economically liberalized India to be sexually autonomous.

Shades of Grey, as usual, takes us into fairly uncharted territory by questioning the assumed congruence of gender, sexual and political positions. Does the way we perform and act out our gender predict what we may like in terms of sexual acts? Are our preferences for certain sexual acts always indicative of our sexual identity? Is who we are defined by what we do?

What we may do in bed or in the bushes gets us into trouble with laws that were formulated almost 150 years ago. Not only are such laws used to harass people but they also create a wider climate of fear and prejudice. That is why, in The Bigger Picture we have reproduced two open letters that support the challenge to Section 377 in India. One is by Vikram Seth and many other eminent Indians. Vikram Seth

is a very well known author and created quite a stir when he appeared on TV a couple of months ago as a gay man and stated why he believes Section 377 should go. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has written in support of Vikram Seth's letter. Both letters clearly point out how laws such as these violate basic human rights.

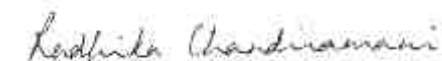
While we are on the issue of the law, it is the police who often use the law for purposes of harassment or extortion, meanwhile acting as moral guardians of society. In Brushstrokes we have a series of images that show the police in a different light.

In Campaign Spotlight read about and join the campaign in The Philippines to end discrimination against people because of the way they appear or what they do sexually. There are also tips in Did You Know for talking with transsexual people, quite simply because sometimes we forget the basics of human courtesy and end up making people feel like specimens.

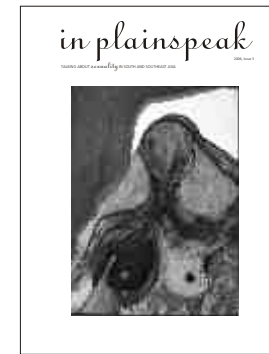
Reel Review tells us about three films screened at the Bali Q! Film Festival this year and takes us through three very different worlds. The book review gives us a glimpse into the rich and complex world of lesbians who live and love away from the bright city lights in India, and, the I column focuses on being questioned about being lesbian in the Philippines.

We hope you will enjoy reading this spread of articles and that they will provoke new questions for you. Do send in your ideas, contributions, feedback and suggestions.

See you again in 2007!

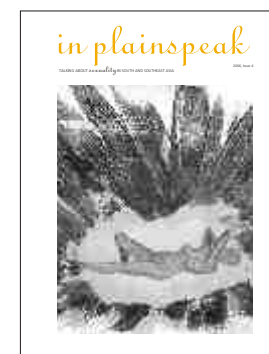


Radhika Chandiramani



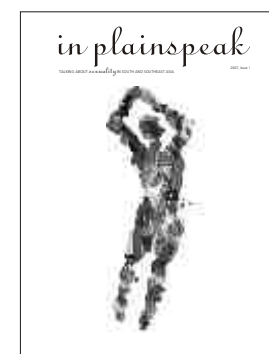
2006 Issue 3

mammogram
Cynthia Chauhan



2006 Issue 4

untitled
Cynthia Chauhan



2007 Issue 1

untitled
Cynthia Chauhan
and Charlie Lavacek

Cynthia Chauhan started drawing and painting five years ago after her second encounter with cancer. She has held several exhibitions of her art and facilitates art workshops.

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 a dialogue on sexuality issues. The Resource Centre conducts an annual Regional Institute on Sexuality, Society and Culture, an eight day long course on sexuality. The next one will be in China in 2007. The Resource Centre collaborated with GAYa Nusantara in Indonesia to conduct the Applied Study Programme on Sexual Diversity from August 23 to September 19, 2006. Five participants from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Myanmar and the Philippines participated in the programme along with five individuals from GAYa Nusantara. The programme focused on the practical implications of working on issues of sexual rights and sexual diversity. The Resource Centre houses a library with over 3000 books and material on sexuality. Our website (www.asiasrc.org) hosts online moderated discussions on sexuality, news and announcements from the region, links to resources on sexuality and the library catalogue. You can also download an electronic version of *In Plainspeak*. For more information on our programmes and events, please visit www.asiasrc.org.

Sexuality in Vietnam

KHUAT THU HONG

PEOPLE WOULD ASK ME WHY I WAS STUDYING SEXUALITY. 'IT'S A DIRTY TOPIC. AREN'T THERE OTHER TOPICS FOR YOU TO STUDY?' THEY WOULD SAY. BUT THE MORE I ENGAGED WITH IT, THE MORE IMPORTANT I FOUND IT TO BE.



HOW DID YOU BEGIN WORKING ON SEXUALITY?

I started working on sexuality in the late 1980s. I had been working on population and family planning and realised that sexuality was important to address. In Vietnam, at that time, it was quite fashionable to study fertility, contraceptive use and maternal mortality but no one dared to pick up the topic of sexuality. So this was the only topic left that was unknown and unstudied.

It was an appropriate topic for me to take on because of my academic background in Psychology. I started with little things like writing about the need to rethink sexuality and sexual behaviour in terms of family planning. It was not easy, in fact it was quite difficult because at that time in Vietnam there were no studies or books about sexuality. Most Vietnamese people knew very little about it. There was a lot of depression, unhappiness and other complex negative things surrounding sexuality – I wanted people to know more.

People would ask me why I was studying sexuality. 'It's a dirty topic. Aren't there other topics for you to study?' they would say. But the more I engaged with it, the more important I found it to be. I gathered material, did translations of short articles from English to Vietnamese, and so on. Then I completed my dissertation on marriage and the family and after I received a Ph.D in Sociology I worked as a research fellow with the Population Council.

With a small grant from the Rockefeller Foundation I wrote a paper on sexuality in Vietnam that people liked very much. This was very encouraging for me because it validated my choice and told me that I was moving in the right direction.

I think I was very lucky because from the mid 1990s the Ford Foundation provided intensive support for capacity building in Vietnam to study sexuality, particularly for research and for advocacy on sexuality and sexual rights. Since then, I have been continuously getting support from the Ford Foundation to continue working on sexuality. We are still at a learning stage but people appreciate that and we know that more people will join us in this work.

... we are the same as people from India, China and other countries in this region who prefer to believe that problems come from outside the country. Talking of other countries, we have the same desires and feelings as people in other countries though we express them differently of course. If we know more about sexuality, we can calm down, we can understand ourselves better and we can learn how to deal with so-called 'problems'.

WHY DO YOU THINK SEXUALITY IS IMPORTANT?

Sexuality is important not just because of health reasons or in order to prevent HIV, it is much more than that – personality, culture, and even political things are included.

People believe that in Vietnam we don't like to talk about sex, that it's not nice to talk about sex, that in some way we are 'pure' if we don't talk about it. There's a belief that things like pre-marital sex, HIV, etc are brought from somewhere else and are a bad cultural influence. In this we share the same concerns, we are the same as people from India, China and other countries in this region who prefer to believe that problems come from outside the country. Talking of other countries, we have the same desires and feelings as people in other countries though we express them differently of course. If we know more about sexuality, we can calm down, we can understand ourselves better and we can learn how to deal with so-called 'problems'.

MSM are members of all social groups –from blue-collar workers to police officers to high ranking government officials – but they are all vulnerable because of stigma and discrimination.

GIVEN THAT YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING IN THE FIELD FOR A FAIRLY LONG TIME, HAVE YOU SEEN ANY CHANGES IN VIETNAM REGARDING SEXUALITY?

In the last ten to 15 years people have become more open. For instance, no one asks me anymore why I work on sexuality; they actually say that the work we do is important and useful. Media people come to ask our opinions on various matters – premarital sex, divorce, same sex relations. We have become a source of information that people appreciate. Even the more ‘conservative’ parts of society like parents, teachers, etc want us to help them build up their knowledge and skills. We can do little but more people are asking questions and are aware about the issues. We lack the skills and knowledge to cater to everyone’s needs so we need more people with us so that we can reach out even more.

TELL US MORE ABOUT HOW ISDS, THE ORGANISATION THAT YOU WORK WITH, CAME ABOUT.

We began as the Centre for Social Development Studies (CSDS) in May 2002. At that time civil society in Vietnam was just emerging. Because it was still so new and weak, not all donors really trusted civil society. But we got a lot of support from some of them – the Ford Foundation, USAID, UN agencies – they helped us grow and I really appreciate them for that.

We changed the name to ISDS – Institute for Social Development Studies – at the end of 2003. Why? Because in Vietnam, the term Centre has implications of being a place where you provide a range of different services including commercial services; the term Institute better defines our mandate and main activities.

WHAT SORT OF WORK DOES ISDS UNDERTAKE?

Our main areas of work are research, training, advocacy and consultancy in Gender and Sexuality, Health, and Social Development. ISDS primarily undertakes research on social issues. We have worked on various issues – HIV/AIDS, children, migration, land rights, and so on. For example, we have looked at gender and land issues, at women’s access to land. Though we have quite a progressive Land Law in Vietnam our Customary Laws are stronger and women do not easily get access and ownership of land. Sexuality and related topics are also a focal area of research for us – we have done research on various aspects of sexuality including MSM issues, condoms, stigma and discrimination related to HIV, drug use, and so on.

WHAT DID YOU FIND THROUGH YOUR STUDY ON CONDOMS?

We conducted this research with men and women, sex workers and their clients, MSM, rural-to-urban migrants, drug users, and people living with HIV/AIDS. We found that most people seem to dislike the condom because they are concerned about sexual pleasure. This is very much a gender issue. Men don’t like it, they feel it affects their male power. Women, to please their male partners, also don’t like it. Many women say that they would like to use a condom because it keeps them clean and safe but they don’t dare to suggest it.

We found that many couples do not discuss sexual matters at all. Men may use a condom with sexworkers or girlfriends but not with the wife. Even if the wife suspects she cannot say anything. If young women suggest condom use they are perceived as being ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘experienced’, instead of being ‘innocent’ and ‘naïve’ as they are expected

to be. There are very high rates of unwanted pregnancies and teen abortions.

YOU MENTIONED A STUDY WITH MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN. WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?

Same sex relations are regarded as a ‘social evil’ in Vietnam, along with prostitution, drug use, gambling, and alcoholism which are regarded as the other ‘social evils’. So there is a lot of prejudice and discrimination. In 2004, ISDS conducted a qualitative study with men who have sex with men in Hanoi. This research was undertaken to provide a better understanding that MSM are not a homogenous group, but that regardless of the subgroups that they may belong to they suffer a lot because of stigma and discrimination due to poor understanding from the people around them. We wanted to provide a more comprehensive picture of their lives, work, and sexuality. They are members of all social groups –from blue-collar workers to police officers to high ranking government officials – but they are all vulnerable because of stigma and discrimination. They have lots of misconceptions about various sexual health issues such as having sex with men is safer than doing so with women, a good looking and clean man has no HIV or STDs, etc. We also found that health providers have no experience working with this group.

IN YOUR VIEW, WHO ARE THE PEOPLE MOST AFFECTED BY STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION?

From our research in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) we found that stigma and discrimination of HIV positive people is very severe, especially in the family and health care settings. Sex workers and drug users are most stigmatised. We did a study on the sub-culture of drug users, mostly Injecting Drug Users (IDUs). Heroin is the most popular drug that young people use. There are lots of myths about drugs – that drugs enhance sexual power, if you inject once there is no addiction, drugs will make you smarter, give you a long life, better health. More and more young women are injecting drugs. Sex work and drugs are closely linked. Young women

engage in sex to keep the habit. Sex workers’ lovers/boyfriends/pimps force them to remain in the trade. It is very painful to see these women who have lost everything except the drug, and yet they can’t quit. But on the positive side, the government now has a new policy of harm reduction and is providing methadone substitute for drug treatment and is also conducting needle exchange programmes.

WHAT’S IN THE PIPELINE REGARDING SEXUALITY RESEARCH THAT YOU ARE INVOLVED WITH?

ISDS has just completed a study on the social construction of sexuality in Vietnam. We have interviewed 300 people from different parts of the country between the ages of 15 – 65 years of different genders, rural/urban locations, and occupations. Through this qualitative research we are looking at the history of sexual life of different people, their sexual practices, knowledge, beliefs, concepts about sexuality and how these change over time. The report should be out by the end of this year.

We found that most people seem to dislike the condom because they are concerned about sexual pleasure. This is very much a gender issue. Men don’t like it, they feel it affects their male power. Women, to please their male partners, also don’t like it. Many women say that they would like to use a condom because it keeps them clean and safe but they don’t dare to suggest it.

We are also hoping to conduct a study on marriage, migration and trafficking.

MARRIAGE, MIGRATION AND TRAFFICKING? PLEASE TELL US MORE.

Marriage, migration and trafficking are all connected. What is happening is that a lot of Vietnamese young women are marrying Taiwanese and South Korean men and leaving the country and we do not really understand the situation. There are almost 100,000 Vietnamese brides in Taiwan. How this operates is that brokers advertise and hold recruitment campaigns for brides. This is popular especially in the South, like in Ho Chi Minh City where there are bride/wife markets. The girls apply, they submit a photo, and are called on a particular day. All the girls sit in a large

In terms of our growth, we don't repeat what happened in the West – it is not a linear movement – the context is different, the issues are different. We are not 'behind' them – our context makes things happen. The scale, the scope of the dialogue are quite different from what happened in the West a few decades ago. In the West, it was about individualism and life-style; here it is more about cultural and political issues as well as rights on a larger scale.

room in lines, men come and inspect them, and then some are short-listed. So a man will inspect around 100 girls and then select ten out of the 100 girls and finally choose one. Of course it's illegal but they do it in hiding. The broker takes a lot of money from both sides but the man gets to select his wife. After the wedding she may join him and go to Taiwan or South Korea. There is also evidence of trafficking within this process. We will collaborate with colleagues in Taiwan and South Korea to get better insights into these issues.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE THROUGH ALL THIS FASCINATING RESEARCH THAT ISDS DOES?

In the past I focused on academic work but now I see that advocacy and applied research are also important. Beautiful books and research reports have their value but most of them remain on the shelves and we also need to contribute to positive social change, while we keep science moving. So now we also work with the media and with women's unions to integrate the issue of sexuality in their work. We also work with many different government agencies – Health, Education, Training, and also with Communist party agencies. They find it useful to work with us because they learn different ways of seeing and understanding the issue, they see different angles and learn different skills of analysing the situation, and the use of participatory methods.

We use our research findings for advocacy purposes. After the research study, we often do a large dissemination among the NGO community, government and donors. We also do public education through the media, through TV programmes, newspaper interviews on social issues, and so on, so that people learn more about these issues and are able to better debate them.

Let me give you a current example. The Ministry of Health is drafting a policy on sex reassignment surgery based on the government's request. So now the media asks for my opinion on this. I share the findings from our study that many transgendered people have to go abroad for surgery and spend so much money. Why can't it be done here in

Vietnam? I hope that once this policy is passed legal procedures will follow and transsexuals can then also get a legal identity in keeping with their gender. So these are the ways in which our research can influence policy and can make a change in people's thinking and their lives.

DO YOU FEEL THAT THE CURRENT DIALOGUE ON SEXUALITY IN VIETNAM HAS ITS ORIGINS IN MOVEMENTS IN THE 'WEST'?

The events of over 30 years ago may have stimulated some of the discussions on LGBT issues in our region, but not the dialogue on sexuality in general. The current dialogue is because of concerns about HIV.

In terms of our growth, we don't repeat what happened in the West – it is not a linear movement – the context is different, the issues are different. We are not 'behind' them – our context makes things happen. The scale, the scope of the dialogue are quite different from what happened in the West a few decades ago. In the West, it was about individualism and life-style; here it is more about cultural and political issues as well as rights on a larger scale.

IS THERE A 'SEXUALITY MOVEMENT' IN VIETNAM?

We do not have a history or tradition of 'movements' in Vietnam but in recent years there have been debates on various issues like should prostitution be legal or illegal. There is an Ordinance on Prostitution that raised many debates when it was drafted a few years ago – the conservative side won, so prostitution is currently illegal.

A movement, if any, to do with sexuality began because of HIV. For instance, HIV gave a reason to start an open discussion about sexuality education or to form a network of MSM on issues affecting them. It is still growing and I think it is too early to call it a movement. Now it is going beyond HIV and safer sex and is more about rights, identity, and freedom. The more they get together, the more they talk, the more they learn. Earlier people had no idea about

I see that advocacy and applied research are also important. Beautiful books and research reports have their value but most of them remain on the shelves and we also need to contribute to positive social change, while we keep science moving.

lesbians, but now they are beginning to talk about them also. The media debates issues more now whereas earlier they regarded same sex relations as a social evil and left it at that. Now they have changed and have more complex debates – some say it is bad, others say it is not bad and at least they are debating it more openly. The discussions are not just health related but related to freedom and lifestyle and the discourse is evolving.

Khuat Thu Hong is the Co-Director of the Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS), Hanoi, Vietnam. She has been a gender specialist with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). She has worked extensively on gender issues and HIV/AIDS, and focuses on social aspects and sexual behaviours of sex workers and their clients related to HIV/AIDS. She has also worked and written a number of papers on reproductive and sexual health of adolescents and young people to influence policy and programs in Vietnam. Hong is also a member of the Resource Centre's Advisory Committee. For more information about ISDS, please visit www.isds.org.vn

Queering the Indian Economy:

IN MOST CASES YOUNG GAYS AND LESBIANS FIND THEMSELVES BARGAINING WITH THEIR PARENTS OVER THEIR ADHERENCE TO SOCIAL NORMS. I ANALYZE THEIR ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO BE OPEN ABOUT THEIR SEXUALITY WITH THEIR PARENTS AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SEXUALITY EMERGES AS A CONSTRAINT IN BARGAINING POWER.

Feminist social researchers have emphasized that economic and social development should be evaluated in terms of the ability of all members of a society to enjoy autonomy and security. The analysis of greater world economic integration from the perspective of gender has brought to light the contradictory outcomes for poor women and other less privileged groups of people. Their well-being has historically been invisible to both economists and policy-makers. A pursuit of the feminist as well as the queer cause in contemporary India necessitates a discussion of queer politics within the context of the rapidly liberalizing economy. The lens of sexuality reveals the various ways in which young gays and lesbians are negotiating their preferences within this setting of social influx and economic change.

This article is an attempt to forward discussions on the dialectic between sexuality, economic independence and social norms. In most cases young gays and lesbians find themselves bargaining with their parents over their adherence to social norms. I analyze their ability and willingness to be open about their sexuality with their parents and the extent to which sexuality emerges as a constraint in bargaining power. In bringing the lens of sexuality to this analysis, I draw on the contributions of feminist political economists such as Nancy Folbre (1994), Naila Kabeer (1994), and Bina Agarwal (1997) who have pioneered the effort to understand how social norms and values act as constraints on individual choice, particularly for those who belong to the least powerful social groups.

Sexuality, Income and Autonomy

PRIYANKA GUPTA

A quick glance at the contemporary state of Indian economy would suggest that liberalization has led to greater foreign investment, creation of jobs and opportunities, and hence an increase in income. The middle class gays and lesbians, who have access to these newly created jobs, might be able to channel their increased income towards their sexual autonomy. They may be able to come out to their parents relatively easily given that they can support themselves financially in a situation where they have to move out of their parents' house or are not supported by them any longer. It can also be argued that with greater access to the Internet and other international sources of information, young people are able to customize their fall-back positions in ways that suit both themselves and their families – this could simply be through living dual lives (at home and outside) or entering into a marriage of convenience (gay men marrying lesbian women), or articulating their sexuality in ways that remain fluid enough to accommodate various preferences.

While some aspects of such a neoclassical framework may be true, human agency, support from other gays and lesbians as well as gender and social norms transcend much of this linear causality. Narratives from young gays and lesbians across the country suggest the need to include the interplay of the 'pink rupee' with other class, culture and identity sensitive factors'. 'Pink rupee' refers to the newly generated disposable income as a result of jobs created through liberalization that is specifically used by middle class gays and lesbians to articulate and perform their sexuality. The

GIVEN THE STRONG GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF THE FAMILY IN INDIA, MANY OF THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN RESULT IN OUTCOMES OF INCREASED MOBILITY, ABILITY TO RESIST MARRIAGE, AND/OR IN ESTABLISHING SUPPORT NETWORKS OUTSIDE THE FAMILY. DURING SUCH NEGOTIATIONS, INCOME DOES NOT ALWAYS FEATURE AS THE MOST CRUCIAL VARIABLE; SOCIAL STATUS, GENDER, CLASS, AS WELL AS ACCESS TO GAY AND LESBIAN GROUPS PROVE TO BE MUCH MORE INFLUENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

phenomenon of the 'pink rupee' as it is catalyzed by the role of language, communication, and the Internet, spreads across the space dimension.

Given the strong gravitational pull of the family in India, many of the negotiations between parents and children result in outcomes of increased mobility, ability to resist marriage, and/or in establishing support networks outside the family. During such negotiations, income does not always feature as the most crucial variable; social status, gender, class, as well as access to gay and lesbian groups prove to be much more influential characteristics. Hence, it is not a surprise that the 'pink rupee' phenomenon can be largely dismissed by outcomes that are far more diverse and arising at the intersection of various social constraints.

STATUS, EARNED INCOME, AND FEMINIST AUTONOMY

What kind of an identity does money buy? Many complexities surround parent-child bargaining over sexuality as we sort through functions of gender, sexuality, socio-economic class, age and networks of support.

According to the *Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power*, women are more likely than men to be out to their parents². One reason why more women are out than men could be the age composition of the sample; women are older than the men in the sample, thus may be better experienced with navigating through social norms against

THE WOMEN INTERVIEWED WERE MORE INCLINED TO VIEW BOTH THEIR GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT WHICH EMPHASIZED COMING OUT AND GAINING SOCIAL VISIBILITY. FOR WOMEN, SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS AROUND SEXUALITY ARE CLOSELY LINKED WITH THOSE SURROUNDING GENDER; THEREFORE, IN RESISTING THE RESTRICTIONS LEVIED BY GENDER, THEY ARE ALSO, IN MANY CASES, ABLE TO WEAVE IN THEIR STRUGGLE AGAINST COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY.

the expression of sexuality. In addition to age, there are also different social pressures facing women and men that may place men in a situation whereby they have more 'at stake' in coming out than women.

Furthermore, the women interviewed were more inclined to view both their gender and sexuality in a political context which emphasized coming out and gaining social visibility. For women, social constraints around sexuality are closely linked with those surrounding gender; therefore, in resisting the restrictions levied by gender, they are also, in many cases, able to weave in their struggle against compulsory heterosexuality.

Men did not have the same gendered constraints on their independence and mobility that women had. For men, in many cases, so long as they were able to find a social niche that was progressive enough for their sexual preferences and lifestyles choices, the need to come out was not of immense concern. As more men

seek support through the Internet, creating new social networks online, they run the risk of being entrapped in the Internet closet. The anonymity and personal space offered by the Internet induces a sense of detachment from the real-life consequences of sexuality as a political identity³.

In the case of those less privileged, a significantly larger percent of women are out as compared to men. Ruth Vanita (2005) in her recent publication discusses cases of lesbian marriages and joint suicide attempts among economically

less well-off lesbians in different parts of India. Vanita describes the joint suicide attempt by two young women from South India who could not bear their imminent separation (Vanita, 2005, p.131)⁴.

Even in my interviews with lesbian women I heard stories of lesbian couples from poor families who eloped despite their unstable financial situation and managed to find support from social networks to eventually gain access to means of survivability. These narratives highlight a distinct sense of agency: an agency that comes from a strong desire to transcend social barriers irrespective of gender or class and from courage that allows them to act without waiting for financial security.

As Bina Agarwal posits, for women, the options may come from their personal determination to exercise agency despite not being able to view their alternative options accurately⁵. Women may prefer to die together rather than living a life of subordination. For these lesbian women, income is not the sole measure of alternatives outside the household. Moreover, the complexity is not limited to sexual behavior or identity, but differs across socio-economic strata. It is the subordination created by their overall vulnerability as female, lesbian, young and dependent that provides the agency for some women to elope or commit suicide. Such agency is not class-sensitive and is beyond the scope of simple linear relationships.

I HEARD STORIES OF LESBIAN COUPLES FROM POOR FAMILIES WHO ELOPED DESPITE THEIR UNSTABLE FINANCIAL SITUATION AND MANAGED TO FIND SUPPORT FROM SOCIAL NETWORKS TO EVENTUALLY GAIN ACCESS TO MEANS OF SURVIVABILITY. THESE NARRATIVES HIGHLIGHT A DISTINCT SENSE OF AGENCY: AN AGENCY THAT COMES FROM A STRONG DESIRE TO TRANSCEND SOCIAL BARRIERS IRRESPECTIVE OF GENDER OR CLASS AND FROM COURAGE THAT ALLOWS THEM TO ACT WITHOUT WAITING FOR FINANCIAL SECURITY.

QUEERING THE MIDDLE CLASS: LOCATING SEXUALITY WITHIN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

The Indian middle class is in an extremely volatile moment given the fast-paced changes taking place in the society, economy and politics of the nation. Much is emergent at the nexus of such global forces as they meet with the cultural forces of the middle class. In this incident of social influx, the discourse about capitalism is decentralized by the gravitational pull of the family, cultural norms and fluid identities. The role of income in determining bargaining power is undermined by the following factors: insecurity of the middle class, right-wing backlash, close ties among family members, as well as gender differences in viewing exit options.

Firstly, liberalization has most strongly impacted the middle class as it has widened income inequality and led the middle class to higher levels of vulnerability and insecurity. Moreover, the middle class is also struggling to filter out what the right-wing labels as 'Western corruption of Indian culture'. With middle class parents dealing with such insecurities, many young gays and lesbians are tempted to go back into the closet so as to avoid heightening household tensions by throwing in the element of alternative sexuality. As an interviewee of mine said brilliantly, liberalization has created a platform for both capitalist and right-wing conservative ideologies.

These ideologies take the form of gay-bashing, cyber-monitoring, as well as the arrests of same-sex couples under Section 377, that prevent gay and lesbian youth from being open about their sexuality.

The second factor that weakens the income hypothesis is the close knit family system. Many of the interviewees described strong connections with their family irrespective of their family's attitudes towards their sexuality. The gay and lesbian youth fear rejection or loss of support from their family members upon coming out. The family becomes the ultimate system of social security, support, and love, and this connection creates barriers for outing oneself. In such a setting, people may choose to negotiate sexuality in different ways whereby income or being out may not be the sole indicator of an individual's bargaining power. One of my interviewees mentioned how he was comfortable in the duality of his lifestyle as long as he was able to make sure his family was not being subject to the consequences of his personal choices. His point highlights a powerful interpretation of priorities and negotiation in ways that work around the cultural norms so as to prevent families from the pressures and insecurities of dealing with a gay or lesbian child.

Another example of compromises made by queer individuals to maintain their close relationships with their family members is of one of my gay male interviewees, Ram⁶. Ram, who has a well-paying job at an American-owned call-center in Mumbai, described his on-going negotiations with his father. Though financially independent, Ram said he preferred living in his father's house, even though his father did

not approve of his lifestyle or his boyfriend. In fact, Ram consulted psychiatrists as well as local 'saints' and 'witches' who all attempted to 'cure' him of his homosexuality, in order to convince his father of its genuineness. Interestingly enough, the father reciprocated by attending gay group meetings to learn more about his son and others like his son. Mutual efforts such as these lead to creative ways of finding a common ground that may work for all involved.

Thirdly, women are more likely to face constraints because of the inherent gendered conceptions that influence bargaining processes. For lesbian women working in this new post-industrial era, the terms of negotiation are different from those for men. Not only are women looking to stall the pressure to have an arranged marriage, they are also seeking mobility through their jobs (especially through night-jobs in call-centers).

By using work as an alibi to get out of the house, lesbian women have greater access to queer socio-political networks, without having to continuously bargain over permission to leave the house. Lesbian women in urban cities are also challenging the gendered hierarchies in queer organizing and in the political rights debates. However, women who challenge norms face tremendous resistance. Even though women are able to gain more independence through jobs and a regular income, they are still considered 'loose' women for going out at night.

Along the lines of gender, there were two very interesting stories by gay men who had come out to their mothers. Both had, in different ways, underestimated their not-so-literate, non-English speaking

mothers for their simplicity and naïveté. When they came out to their mothers, they were surprised and touched by their mothers' brilliant articulation of their sons' sexuality. Not only did these mothers understand their sons' identities, they also came up with ways to take part in the household negotiations by standing up for their sons' preferences. This led me to think about the 'subversive mother' in the Indian middle class who is usually considered ill-equipped to deal with complexities whereas she often emerges as able to consolidate all these seemingly contradictory forces in simple, over-arching and extremely progressive ways. Other factors held constant, the statistical analysis of survey data show that the strongest predictor of being out is household

LIBERALIZATION HAS CREATED A PLATFORM FOR BOTH CAPITALIST AND RIGHT-WING CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGIES. THESE IDEOLOGIES TAKE FORM OF GAY-BASHING, CYBER-MONITORING, AS WELL AS THE ARRESTS OF SAME-SEX COUPLES UNDER SECTION 377, THAT PREVENT GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH FROM BEING OPEN ABOUT THEIR SEXUALITY.

structure; young adults living with their mothers alone are far more likely to be out than those living alone or with both of their parents. This finding resonates with the information gathered from the interviewees, many of whom shared narratives of their positive experiences coming out to their mothers.

While money and income may be important determinants of means of survivability, the 'pink rupee' creates a vision of virtual equality for gays and lesbians that to a large extent transforms itself into the Internet closet. What remains noteworthy is the creativity and effort that goes in locating sexuality within an Indian context, at home and outside, with parents, friends and queer networks of support.

1. This research is based on the 'The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005' and interviews with twenty young gays and lesbians from Bombay, Delhi, Pune and Bangalore.
2. 'The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005' was conducted in 2005 over the Internet and during gay and lesbian group meetings. It featured responses from over 150 gays and lesbians from more than 10 different cities and towns in India.
3. This also is a reason why much of the political movement is carried forth by lesbian women and lower class gay men; they are the ones most visible in public debates, protests, and marches.
4. Ruth Vanita. *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005
5. Bina Agarwal. 'Bargaining' and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household. *Feminist Economics*, 3-1, 1-51, 1997.
6. Name changed in order to maintain confidentiality.

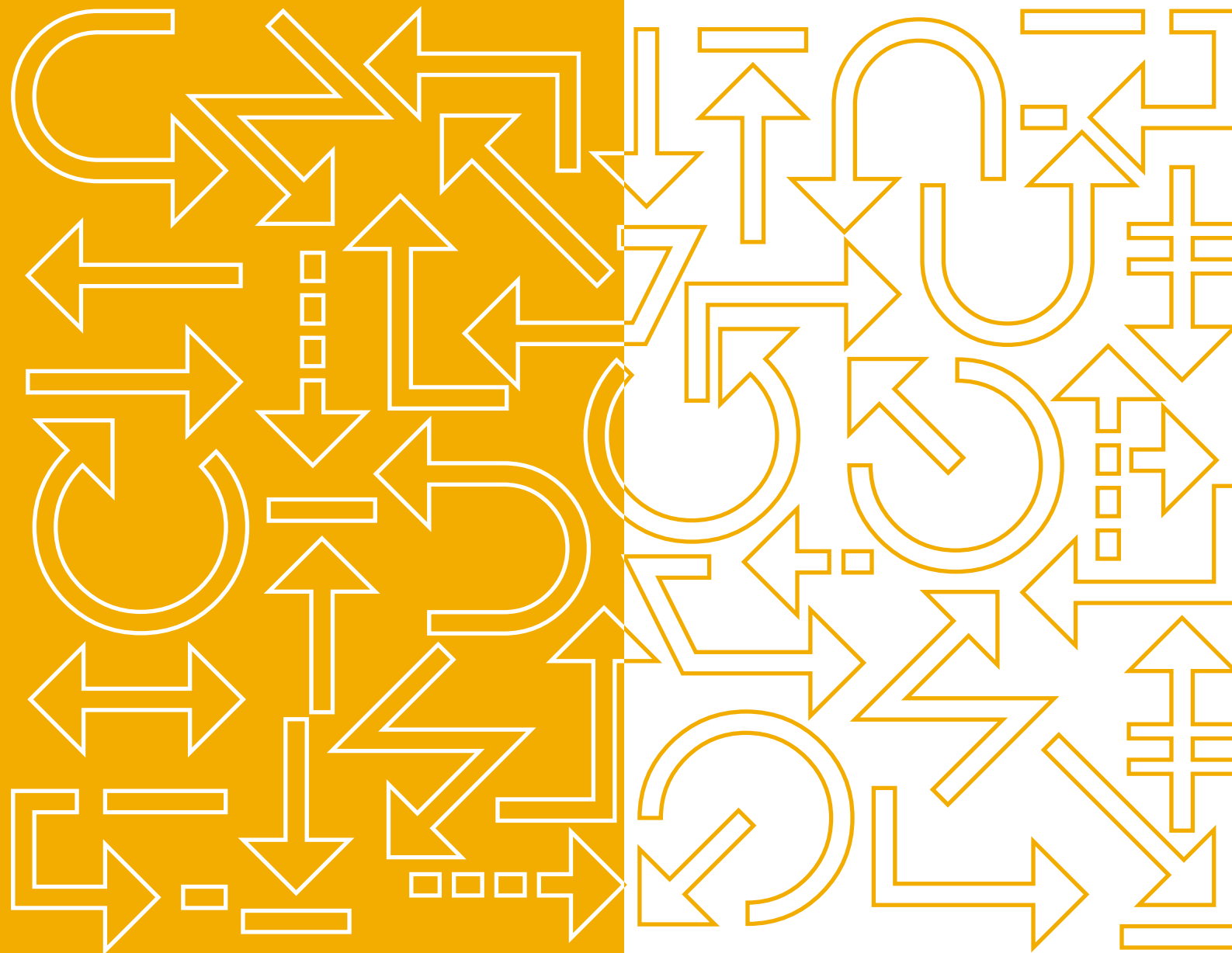
Priyanka Gupta has recently majored in Economics and Gender and Women's Studies in the US and wrote her thesis on Economic Liberalization and the Empowerment of Gays and Lesbians in India.

Versatile Top / Versatile Bottom:

A Set of (continuing) Conversations

All is not black and white...and we want to explore the shades of grey. We don't always agree totally with one another, though we may share a similar perspective.

When it comes to sexual activity, sometimes it is very confusing. How do we identify to others what we like and what we don't? Are there only certain ways of being and doing that are ok? If we like doing something in a certain way, does that become a marker of our identity?



DOES A PARTICULAR PERFORMANCE OF GENDER HAVE TO MATCH A CERTAIN PERFORMANCE OF SEXUALITY? DOES WHAT YOU WEAR TO THE NIGHTCLUB PREDICT WHAT YOU MAY DO IN BED? ARE OUR POLITICAL POSITIONS WEDDED TO OUR SEXUAL ONES? ARE OUR OWN IDENTITY POLITICS RESTRICTING OUR SEXUAL CHOICES?

ANINDYA HAJRA

I don't think position matters. Making the other person satisfied is the important thing

A top's masculinity is what makes me happy. I am happy when a masculine man has a good nice orgasm in me

I've always been a total bottom. I love acting like the woman and being the woman and helping the man get satisfied.

My role, and my enjoyment of being either a top or bottom, has more to do with who I'm with, than what I'm doing.

As a pre-op transsexual, I've wondered why it seems that a lot of men want transwomen to top them? I mean, duh! I'm walking here in heels and hose with a skirt and blouse, long hair and carrying a purse. I'm taking enough oestrogen for three women... What would make you think I would want to be on top? I'm not into other transgender/ transsexual or crossdressing guys either... I want a masculine man who wants to make me his squeeze...

There's a lot of macho types that always pose as and act like tops, but they are really bottoms...I doubt especially the ones that claim to be 'versatile'...

*If I'm sucking how on f***ing earth am I passive?!*

...fragments of conversations over the years with different individuals, including trans/ kothi/ gay/ bisexual/ transinfinite/ straight/ 'heterosexual' individuals on the issue of 'top' / 'bottom'.

Being given to nutty abstract sexual curiosity I've often wondered if the term applies equally to anal sex and fellatio. Many gay tops seem almost 'heterosexual' in their aversion to being penetrated. Are they equally opposed to fellating their partner?

It wasn't until recently when I started using the Web to meet guys that I renewed my curiosity about (gay) male tops and bottoms. Looking for love (or, some days, whatever I could get) online, there were the folks who'd wander into a chatroom and say 'Looking for a top' or 'Are there any tops in here?' On gay.com simply putting the word 'top' in the little one line chatroom personal summary would flood me with chats.

In the idiom of personal ads I've usually described myself as 'versatile', or 'versatile but biased towards being bottom'. Some of my fellow cyber folks simply said they were tops. In the land of online dating amongst queer folk, being a top is like being rich, exhilaratingly handsome, owning a fancy car: makes you an in-demand commodity.

I was proud of my versatility. But it proved bogus. And I wonder why? In my fantasy world, sodomizing posed a thrill. But in real life ...

My sense of 'top' and 'bottom' as it is mostly used was largely limited in distinguishing those who enjoy being inside a guy's bottom from those whose greatest delight is having a man inside them. Being given to nutty abstract sexual curiosity I've often wondered if the term applies equally to anal sex and fellatio. Many gay tops seem almost 'heterosexual' in their aversion to being penetrated. Are they equally opposed to fellating their partner? I've known many men who identify as 'heterosexual' and/or 'bisexual'

and who'd otherwise state their aversion to anything (touch, kiss, hold) but anally penetrating their 'bottom' partner in not so uncertain terms. However many of them boast of how good they are at orally pleasuring their female partners. The closest they might come to their 'male' partner is rimming, but that's rare too.

I've been wondering about the sense of self that gets constructed around sexual roles and personal erotic imagery associated with being a top or bottom. Does the sexual preference encompass slightly more than a liking for having certain nerve endings stimulated?

Memories of a conversation out of many with Heena, a non-castrated *hijra* somewhere in 1998 stand out. I remember him having told me how he loved (I believe maybe he still does) to be picked up by truck drivers. There was a railway yard close to where he stayed, where truck drivers would park their cars for days on end waiting for goods to be loaded and unloaded from goods trains. He would go there every evening for his 'picks'.

Heena lived as a *hijra* by day and in the evenings he sold sex. I only imagined his choice for truck drivers to be 'natural' considering how I perceived Heena's gender construction to be. To me that self-construction could only desire or be desired by 'real' men. And to be desired or desire too had its own set of rules — talking about them both of us would

I've been wondering about the sense of self that gets constructed around sexual roles and personal erotic imagery associated with being a top or bottom. Does the sexual preference encompass slightly more than a liking for having certain nerve endings stimulated?

share our sexual curiosities and giggle like two adolescent girls.

It is only later on that I realised that there was far more than just that to Heena's desire for these swarthy, hulky men. It surprised me to no end to hear that Heena 'didn't quite mind' when his 'clients' failed to pay up after having sex with him. It would happen once in a while and sometimes quite frequently when they would say that they can't pay. It seemed to me strangely that he preferred it that way! When I said this to him, Heena was quiet for a while but then spoke shyly, 'You see then I'd be the one who would be fucking them, if they cannot pay...'

Honestly that information blew me. Public identities — a *hijra*, a sex worker, a trucker, men who are known to fuck only, non-men who are known to get fucked only — and their private interplays. A secret world where roles constantly get reversed, played out, and reversed again. Identities around the existence of a social penis, its shadows and arseholes. In that brief moment Heena taught me a lesson that years of activism and fieldwork couldn't possibly have — the interplay of sexuality and sexual behaviour within gender. Sexual identities suddenly did a somersault and showed their true faces beyond l/g/b/t...

Is there an unspoken taboo against 'heterosexual' men as passive partners in sexual relations with *kothis* or *hijras* ... or are we mistakenly holding this as the litmus test for all cases? Certainly the perceptions of masculinity and sex-roles are more universal amongst men in our communities. The machismo culture is firmly entrenched — from the traditional, patriarchal family unit to the long-standing practice of 'strong-man', authoritarian, non-democratic leadership, which only now is beginning to change (or is it?)

The trappings of masculinity are also highly valued within the *kothi* community. Within this community, attitudes appear to shift and lines of 'transgression' particularly within relationships and sex between *kothis* and *panthis* seem to be privately accepted. But the unspoken (public) agreement is that *panthi* men will assert the active role; *panthi* men who 'bottom' for *kothis* are frowned upon and

are awarded a less prestigious role by *kothis* themselves, if word gets around.

A few weeks ago, I was bar-hopping and clubbing with several friends at one of Delhi's hot nightspots for gay men. Here's the scene: it's prime time — eleven or twelve p.m. and we're loving the moment. Punking out to the DJ's score, in full drag, we were drenched to the skin. Someone feels my back and rubs against my butt. No big deal, right? We're only partying with some hundred odd other men in this cramped space. But it happens again, this time more direct. Turn around and there's an older, dark-haired, circuit-type with a goatee. 'I want to give you a compliment', he said. Okay, I knew what was coming next. In the hotel room, half an hour later, here it was: 'I just want you to bend me over and ...'.

STOP. REWIND. Say what? 'Have I heard correctly?' I ask myself. True, it was just a request and that too within the

The trappings of masculinity are also highly valued within the *kothi* community. Within this community, attitudes appear to shift and lines of 'transgression' particularly within relationships and sex between *kothis* and *panthis* seem to be privately accepted. But the unspoken (public) agreement is that *panthi* men will assert the active role; *panthi* men who 'bottom' for *kothis* are frowned upon and are awarded a less prestigious role by *kothis* themselves

The broad sexual spectrum should suggest that there are men willing to experiment within a wide realm of (sexual) possibilities.

Why does it have to be so binary? Is that really it? Top or bottom?

. . . Is it against some great rule that every queer male must identify his sexual behavior? If I don't make a choice will I never find a lover? Better yet, will not knowing destroy the foundation of queer male culture?

confines of my private hotel room. But I was offended by the remark, frowned and proceeded to salvage what remained of my eminent femininity. What exactly did he say that was so offensive? In all honesty, it's nothing that we *kothis* haven't said — but what was the insult? Even when it was happening in private? The fact that what he wanted was not within the realm of (my imagined) sexual possibilities? Would it have been more acceptable if he were to ask the reverse? Was it the wrong intro? Or did the older, darker, hairy and 'masculine' projections make me believe that what I heard was a deviation from my notion of how a 'top' should market himself?

Let's be honest: the broad sexual spectrum should suggest that there are men willing to experiment within a wide realm of (sexual) possibilities. Why does it have to be so binary? Is that really it? Top or bottom? There is another category for those lucky individuals who do not prefer one over the other — versatile. Although many times placed in league with top and bottom, versatile does not gain the same credence as a choice.

Is it against some great rule that every queer male must identify his sexual behavior? If I don't make a choice will I never find a lover? Better yet, will not knowing destroy the foundation of queer male culture? On the other hand, it might help. It would get rid of the pressure to fit into one of our (sexual) subculture's defined roles.

'Please, don't act like you don't know. Certain traits and roles come with the assumption of being a top or bottom. Tops are considered tall and masculine, while bottoms are short and effeminate'. So, what happens when you get a five foot top with a lisp? Is he a top or bottom? Oh wait, I just realized I forgot 'versatile' again. But what if that person doesn't like to do every position with every lover he has???

I don't think that enjoying bottoming is feminine.

I've been on the top more than the bottom but it certainly struck me how boring being on top can be. It isn't just a matter of motion.

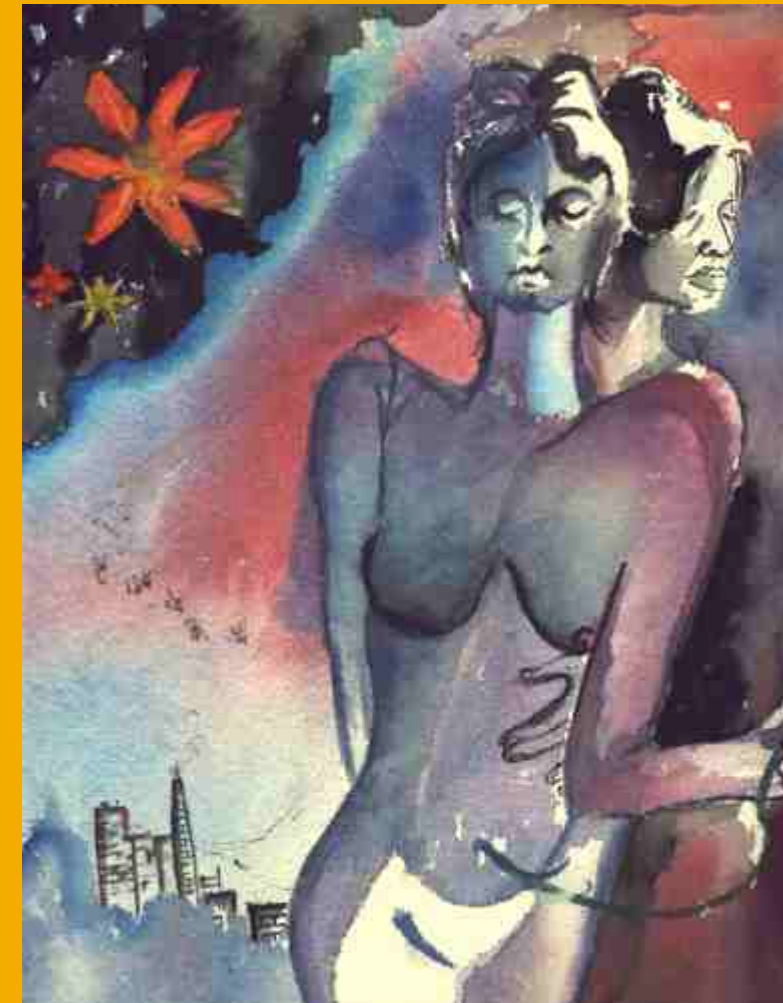
Being a bisexual I can enjoy penetrating my wife but what really turns me on is submitting to a masculine top.

I've always like pretty and feminine guys, and only became attracted to conventionally masculine ones later in life, so the butchness of the guy doesn't matter to me. I like him to be at least somewhat to rather aggressive in coming on, and to know what he wants sexually, so that he directs me to do what he wants, rather than asking, and doesn't mind if I act like I'm enjoying myself.

I completely surrender my body to my top lover. I tune in to his progression during love making, and I think this helps me as I am very orgasmic and it is very easy for my top to make me orgasm without even touching myself.

I further confused myself when I fell in with an older, bisexual (?) woman, who knew what she wanted and how to get it, taught me how to please her. If she had not also had a jealous lesbian lover I might be with her yet

Anindya Hajra works with the Pratyay Gender Trust, a sexuality and human rights advocacy group based in Kolkatta, India.



GEORGINA MADDOX

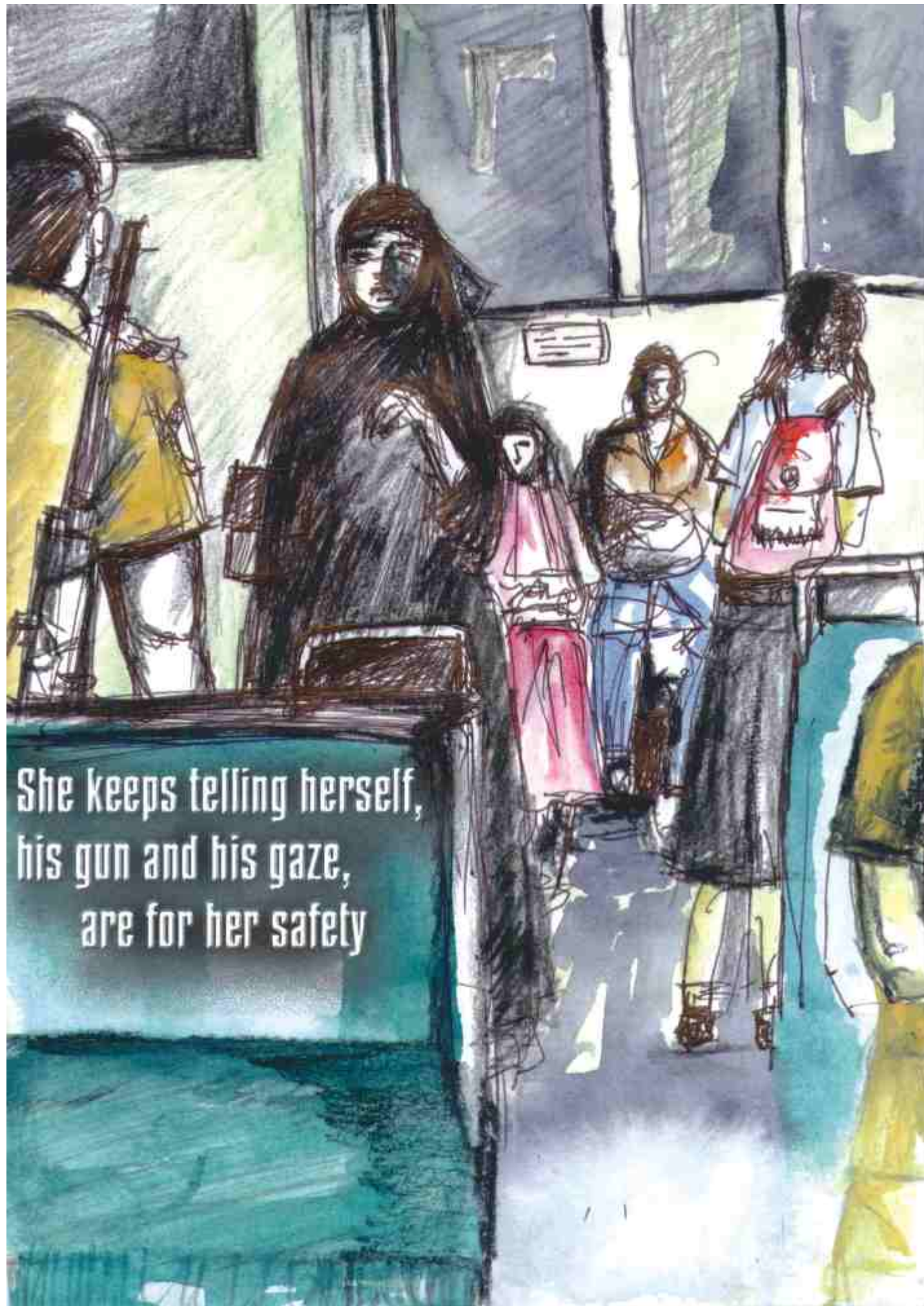
paintings, sketches

Georgina Maddox is a journalist, creative writer, artist and musician.

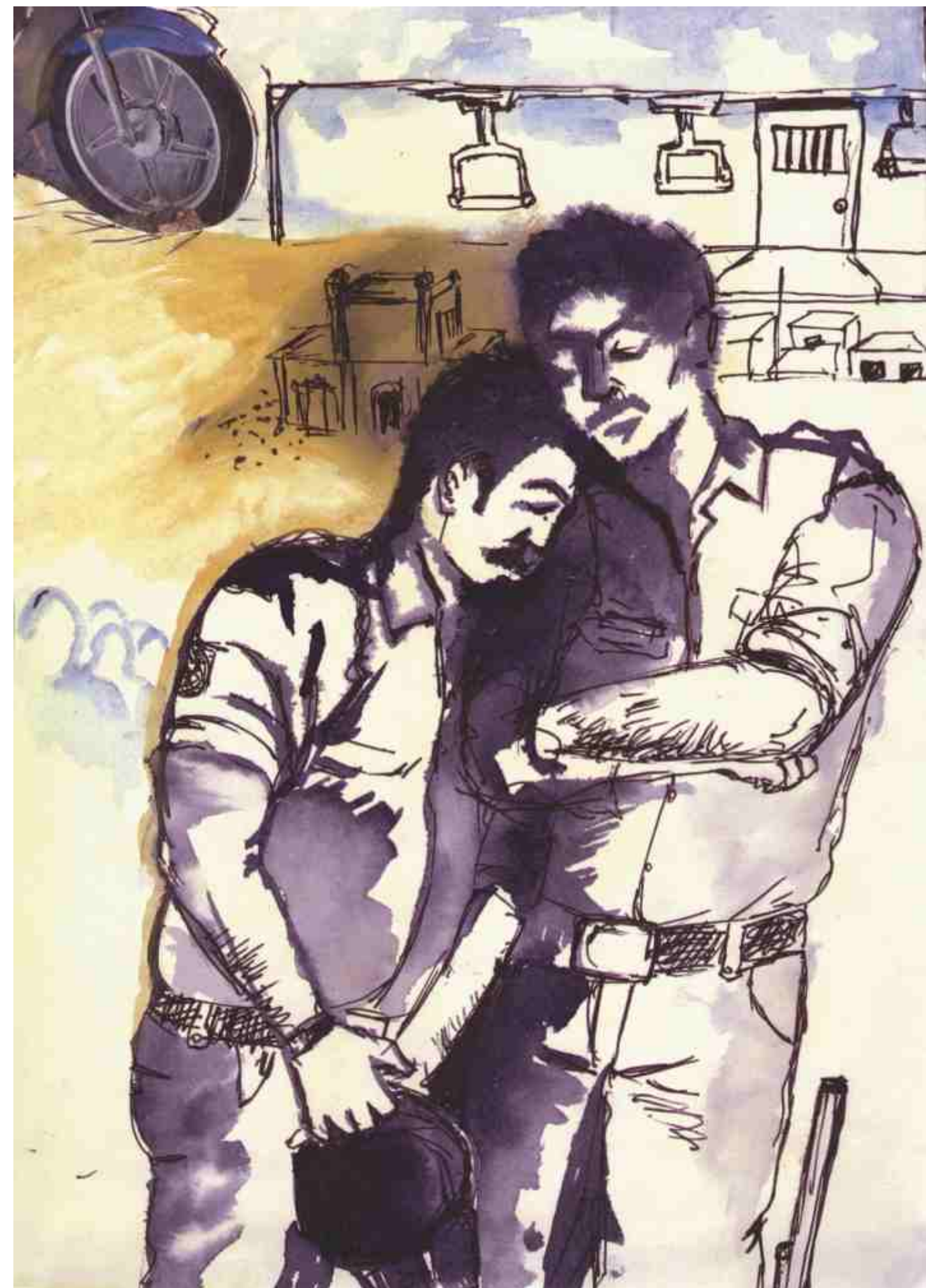
She is currently working with the Indian Express in Mumbai. Her art work has appeared in queer magazines and she has performed as a singer/musician in several cities in India.

Khaki dots the railway station as they try to look official, lolling in their plastic chairs.
Routine checking they say, just in case I was carrying any bombs in my rucksack.
In the ladies compartment they ask me if I'm a boy or a girl.
They collared my lover, for her short haircut wasn't in keeping with their idea of womanhood.
They are the upholders of law and order...the implements to censure homosexual love.
Yet I see them, leaning into each other soft and vulnerable in slumber.
Pressed against each other turning hard, khaki trouser against khaki trouser,
in the late-night ladies railway coach, breathing into each other's necks like virgin boy scouts.
They hold hands as they traipse merrily over their domain, handcuffs at the ready to
imprison the *hijra* who steps out of line tonight.
Their smiles are invincible.
Have they heard of the word...homosocial?





She keeps telling herself,
his gun and his gaze,
are for her safety



open letters

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (1861) states 'Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described.'

Section 377 is being challenged in the Delhi High Court. While the legal process is underway, prominent Indians are rallying around to mobilize public opinion in favour of a more just and pluralistic society.

IN AUGUST 2006, RENOWNED AUTHOR, VIKRAM SETH, ALONG WITH 150 OTHER WELL-KNOWN INDIANS, WROTE AN OPEN LETTER SUPPORTING THE REMOVAL OF SECTION 377. NOBEL LAUREATE AMARTYA SEN WROTE A STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THIS LETTER. HERE IS WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY.

OPEN LETTER FROM VIKRAM SETH AND OTHERS

To the Government of India,
Members of the Judiciary,
and All Citizens,

To build a truly democratic and plural India, we must collectively fight against laws and policies that abuse human rights and limit fundamental freedoms.

This is why we, concerned Indian citizens and people of Indian origin, support the overturning of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, a colonial-era law dating to 1861, which punitively criminalizes romantic love and private, consensual sexual acts between adults of the same sex.

In independent India, as earlier, this archaic and brutal law has served no good purpose. It has been used to systematically persecute, blackmail, arrest and terrorize sexual minorities. It has spawned public intolerance and abuse, forcing tens of millions of gay and bisexual men and women to live in fear and secrecy, at tragic cost to themselves and their families. It is especially disgraceful that Section 377 has on several recent occasions been used by homophobic officials to suppress the work of legitimate HIV-prevention groups, leaving gay and bisexual men in India even more defenceless against HIV infection.

Such human rights abuses would be cause for shame anywhere in the modern world, but they are especially so in

OPEN LETTER FROM AMARTYA SEN

A Statement in Support of the Open Letter by Vikram Seth and Others

I have read with much interest and agreement the open letter of Vikram Seth and others on the need to overturn section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Even though I do not, as a general rule, sign joint letters, I would like, in this case, to add my voice to those of Vikram Seth and his cosignatories. The criminalization of gay behaviour goes not only against fundamental human rights, as the open letter points out, but it also works sharply against the enhancement of human freedoms in terms of which the progress of human civilization can be judged.

There is a further consideration to which I would like to draw attention. Gay behaviour is, of course, much more widespread than the cases that are brought to trial. It is some times argued that this indicates that Section 377 does not do as much harm as we, the protesters, tend to think. What has to be borne in mind is that whenever any behaviour is identified as a penalizable crime, it gives the police and other law enforcement officers huge power to harass and victimize some people. The harm done by an unjust law like this can, therefore, be far larger than would be indicated by cases of actual prosecution.

It is surprising that independent India has not yet been able to rescind the colonial era monstrosity in the shape of Section 377, dating from 1861. That, as it happens, was the year in which the American Civil War began, which would ultimately abolish the unfreedom of slavery in America. Today, 145 years later, we surely have urgent reason to abolish in India, with our commitment to democracy and human rights, the unfreedom of arbitrary and unjust criminalization.

Amartya Sen
Cambridge 20 August 2006

India, which was founded on a vision of fundamental rights applying equally to all, without discrimination on any grounds. By presumptively treating as criminals those who love people of the same sex, Section 377 violates fundamental human rights, particularly the rights to equality and privacy that are enshrined in our Constitution as well as in the binding international laws that we have embraced, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Let us always remember the indisputable truth expressed in the opening articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that "All persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights. . . Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind."

We will move many steps closer to our goal of achieving a just, pluralistic and democratic society by the ending of Section 377, which is currently under challenge before the Delhi High Court. There should be no discrimination in India on the grounds of sexual orientation. In the name of humanity and our Constitution, this cruel and discriminatory law should be struck down.

Vikram Seth and others

Anti-Discrimination Law in the Philippines

one:
Join the flowerpower
campaign!
Send flowers to the House of
Representatives and Senate to
push for the quick approval of the
Anti-Discrimination Bill.



Discrimination based on the status of a person is barred by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in its Articles 1 and 2, and by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in its Articles 2 and 26. Although these provisions do not expressly mention 'sexual orientation', the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) held in the 1994 case *Toonen v Australia* that the ICCPR's anti-discrimination provisions should be understood to include sexual orientation as a protected status. In the same decision, the UNHRC affirmed that the criminalization of same-sex sexual relations between consenting adults violates Articles 2 (equal protection) and 17 (right to privacy) of the ICCPR and Article 12 of the UDHR.

The Committee also held that laws criminalizing consensual, adult homosexual behavior violate the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association which are protected by the UDHR in its Articles 19 and 20 and by the ICCPR in its Articles 19, 21, and 22. The right to freedom of



expression specifically includes 'freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice' (ICCPR 19.2).

The Philippines is a signatory to numerous international agreements that seek to ensure respect for the human rights of all persons regardless of sex, sexual orientation or any other condition. In addition, according to the Constitution in the Philippines, the fundamental law in the Philippines values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights. The Constitution imposes on the State the duty to ensure the fundamental equality of men and women before the law. The equal protection clause in the Bill of Rights also forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or any other status in the enjoyment of rights. The equal protection clause, prescribes the constitutional guarantee of equality of all people before the law. This clause requires that laws operate equally and uniformly on all persons in terms of the privileges conferred and the liabilities imposed under similar circumstances.

Despite these provisions, there have still been cases of discrimination on lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people in the Philippines. LGBT people continue to be oppressed by the iniquitous treatment of society at large, primarily because of misconceptions and ignorance. Although there are no sodomy laws in the

Philippines, unlike in many other countries of South and Southeast Asia, the very fact that there are no laws and policies specific to the group in the country is discriminatory in many ways. Sadly, for a democracy, sexual minorities are still considered second class citizens when they try to exercise the rights to which they are justly entitled as citizens. Instances of abuse and discrimination range from dismissal of LGBT people from schools and colleges, to the demand for 'masculinity tests', to stereotyping and loss of employment opportunities to the usage of anti-vagrancy and anti-public scandal laws to harass and oppress people who do not conform to the 'norms' of sexuality set by society. There is, therefore, a need to define and penalize practices that unjustly discriminate against lesbians, gays and other sexual minorities.

Activists in the Philippines recognize that it is time to call for the passage of a law that provides comprehensive protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, education, as well as medical and public facilities, among other realms.

For the very first time, the Philippine Senate will tackle proposed bills that seek to penalize discrimination against LGBT people. On August 9, 2006, the Senate Committee on Labor, Employment, and Human Resources Development, chaired by Sen. Jose 'Jinggoy' Estrada, held a public hearing on three anti-discrimination bills that provide protection for Filipino LGBT people against discriminatory policies and practices in the areas of employment, education, health care, and public service, among others. Senator Ramon 'Bong' Revilla, Jr. who is the sponsoring senator of the Anti-Discrimination Bill in the Senate is trying to get the Committee on Rules to have it moved to the Committee on Justice and Human Rights chaired by Senator Juan Ponce Enrile. The Committee on Rules has not responded to the request yet and it is not clear still if the Enrile Committee will organize a new hearing for the bill or just use the proceedings from the Labor Committee hearing.

Recently there has been a lot of talk about the testimony by Inday Garutay who was discriminated against because of

cross-dressing. On July 4, 2006, Inday Garutay was reported to have gone to Aruba Restaurant in Metrowalk Pasig City when he was approached by the Restaurant Supervisor, 'Tintin' Aguilar, and told that Aruba had a dress code, and that cross-dressers like Inday are prohibited from entering the establishment. Inday Garutay has since filed a civil case for damages against Aruba Restaurant.

There are many reports of similar incidents in other private or public establishments, but not everyone chooses to come out publicly for fear of reprisal or further abuse. It is necessary then that this kind of discrimination is put to an end. One of the methods could be through the means of legal enforcement. However, any change in the law would not be enough in itself and would need to be accompanied by efforts to change social attitudes.

Meanwhile, at the House of Representatives there are hopes that the bill will be passed at the second hearing by the Committee of Human Rights. The campaign supporting the Bill is still very hopeful about the historical value of the past two Congresses, where the bill was passed at the Committee level without much opposition, and in fact with a lot of support.

Stop Discrimination Now! is an on-going campaign by the Lesbian and Gay Legislative Advocacy Network Philippines (LAGABLAB-Pilipinas) and Amnesty International Pilipinas (AIP) to push for the elimination of discrimination against Filipino LGBT people through the enactment of an anti-discrimination legislation. Two other organisations, Human Rights Watch and the International Commission of Jurists have expressed support for this ground-breaking LGBT legislation in Southeast Asia.

two:
write letters of support
and send them to
Congress.



Some of the films screened at the
Q! Film Festival
 Bali, September 7-9, 2006.

MICHAEL P. DE GUZMAN
 & GERMAINE TRITTLE P. LEONIN

THANK YOU AND
 GOOD NIGHT, MOTHER

60 MIN / INDONESIA / 2006

Ivan Handoyo

JOURNEY TO
 KAFIRISTAN

(Die Reise Nach Kafiristan)

101 MIN / SWITZERLAND / 2001

Fosco Dubini and Donatello Dubini

TAI-CHI FOR TIPPLERS

5 MIN / SOUTH AFRICA / 2005

Jennifer Radlof and Karen Rutter

MICHAEL P. DE GUZMAN

Landing in the island of Bali to watch films at the 5th Annual Q! Film Festival, a song insinuated itself inside my head. It's an old Filipino holiday song; one that my maternal grandmother could be heard singing while she laboured over family dinner. 'There's something in the air,' the song begins. Watching the road as it snakes through the ragged flank of the mountain, hearing the sound of the sea rising and ebbing like the tide, and being brushed by the morning breeze, there really is something in the air. Brine, a hint of chilli, with a spray of sea foam — time caught in a grain of sand.

It touches everything; including my perceptions of the films I watched.

The boys and young men in *Thank You and Good Night, Mother* have been touched by a powerful force; one that marked them so deeply that no amount of time or distance can separate them from its source — the ocean. At the start of the film, tranquil images of the ocean are interspersed with shots of the 2004 tsunami that hit Indonesia. Credits float along sea-foam, kelp, and debris one doesn't usually find underwater.

The film flows like a love letter sent to a distant, sometimes indifferent, lover. It is alternately ecstatic and tragic, mundane and sacred, erotic and poetic.

The boys and young men from the two maritime Indonesian villages of Bandulu and Carita, built like swimmers, skins burnished by the tropical sun, almost literally glimmer when they start talking about surfing. Their happiness is singular, defying social and economic standing, even personal relationships. Even when they're just sitting in front of the camera, one feels their need to just spring from their seats and jump right back into the ocean, in search of that perfect swell.

I'm not sure of director Ivan Handoyo's sexual orientation, but I sensed a strong homoeroticism, not in the way the surfers interacted with each other, but in the way they were shot. There is delicacy in the way the tightest shots are framed, so that eyes appear like planets floating in the dark space that is the skin, not just orbs that stare out of the screen. In another shot, back muscles ripple on the foreground as a surfer paddles towards a huge wave, which fills the rest of the screen. A perfectly composed image of man and nature.

The underwater camera work makes one long to feel the embrace of sea-water on bare skin. It makes the feet appear tender as they stir up sand and kelp, walking towards a deeper part of the beach. And when the waves finally hit, in the silent confusion of bubbles, sea-foam, tossed boards, and glimpsed flailing limbs, little deaths can be felt.

At the end of the film, I felt as if an affair ended. An affair that's so intense, so sexually charged that its end was a mathematical certainty. When a force that powerful touches you there is simply no turning back. No matter where life takes you, a part of you will remain where you found it. Nothing will sever the surfers' connection with nature. Love will bind them together, that much is clear.

The two women in *Journey to Kafiristan* have yet to be touched by the same force I earlier referred to simply because they keep running away from it. In 1939, the threat



Thank You and Good Night, Mother

of war looms like a huge wave in the distance, with the potential to sweep away the world that writer Annemarie Schwarzenbach inhabits. Meanwhile, Swiss ethnologist Ella Maillart, just back from a research trip, can't wait to embark on a new expedition, this time to a fabled land miles ways from Zurich: Kafiristan.

Annemarie is searching for refuge and adventure. Ella wants to establish herself as an esteemed explorer. Before long they're on their way.

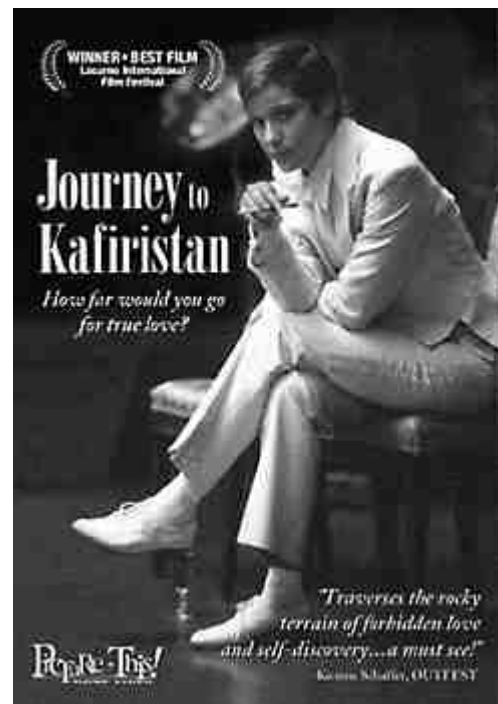
The thing with 'travel' films is one can easily get lost in the sights taken in by the protagonists. In this film, however, the sexual tension between the two women is so palpable that it makes the craggy and rocky surroundings drip with desire.

But even this sexual tension is, for the most part, ignored by both women, because they're not just running away from the realities of the countries they left behind. They're also running away from themselves. Annemarie is struggling with her heroin addiction. Ella thinks she can save Annemarie, in complete denial of her own need to be 'saved'.

Kafiristan, or the land of the non-believers, is an aptly named destination for these women. They are like two dancers lost in a dark ballroom. Each turn, each twist of their bodies brings them closer, but it takes only a brush of skin to drive them apart again.

Things come to a head when it becomes impossible for them to continue their journey because the war has begun. Deprived of the means to achieve each of their goals, they turn on each other. Soon one continues the journey, leaving the other behind.

Yukio Mishima wrote that a man is made cruel by the knowledge that he is loved. I wonder, if Annemarie and Ella knew the things they needed to know, and believed in the things that they needed to believe in, would they have been, still, that cruel to themselves?



GERMAINE TRITTLE P. LEONIN

Based on the life of writer Annemarie Schwarzenbach and Swiss ethnologist, Ella Mallart, *Journey to Kafiristan* assumes a great deal about the personalities of the two lead characters. My gut feel told me much of it may have been mere speculation, but some details may have been dependent on actual accounts of people who knew them, such as the fact that they both had money being from rich families or had husbands with important State jobs. The seeming comfort and outward simplicity of their lives only made their internal desires all the more obvious. These were two educated women, comfortably married and well-off in their own right, but yearning for their own sense of accomplishment. A distinct ownership of their own ideas, pride in their plans and achievements is reminiscent of early feminism. They moved within the usual social expectations of marrying successful men and staying within their own class, but were silently testing the waters for the 20th century woman already.

Early on, at the start of the film, one already got the impression that these women had more emotional baggage than the actual suitcases and luggage they were carrying in their car. It was also apparent that the journey they were embarking on was less of a 'heading towards something' than 'running away' from something. The undertaking meant recognition and prestige for Ella on the professional level. But on the personal level, Ella also hoped to 'save' Annemarie from herself and her heroin addiction by taking Annemarie on this trip across Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Ella's Messianic complex complicates the sexual tension already brewing between them. In the beginning, she believed Annemarie actually handed over control of her life to her. Clearly, it all depended on how much and how often Annemarie would let Ella have power over her.

In one scene, during a formal dinner with various intellectuals and state representatives, Ella speaks of the limitations brought about by boundaries people make for themselves. The concept was shown through the difficulties she encountered in her travel through country borders of Turkey and Iran. This metaphor held more implications for

her and her relationship with Annemarie. While the lesbian angle is too subtle, it is an honest depiction of the beginnings of intimate relations between women — the internal turmoil, the hesitance, the unwillingness to cross perceived limits.

Yet in the end, outside forces always take people to a moment of deep honesty. The last conversation between Ella and Annemarie at the train station allowed them to finally acknowledge their feelings, as well as their decision not to do anything about it. While the actual travel permitted them to journey in their minds and to wonder about possibilities, world events and other circumstances beyond their control made the decision for them and presented them with the only feasible, practical options — be it going to India or moving to America. Ultimately, that sense of ambiguity always saves people trapped in similar situations and gives them the opportunity to deny such complexities later on and simply, figuratively, move on.

Tai-chi for Tiplers is a short film that is part of the 'Out in Africa' LGBT film festival and film workshops. It is a humorous take on the stereotypical perception of lesbians and their chosen occupations. The grim and determined approach to their causes, be it women's rights or environmental concerns, as well as the strain they voluntarily subject themselves to, is acknowledged in a self-deprecating manner and appears as an inside-joke among lesbians themselves.

The portrayal is not derogatory in any way because it focuses on the reality of lesbian lives. If any, the depiction is an honest and funny recognition of lesbians' efforts to apply themselves to worthy causes and to be productive individuals in society. In the movie, these activities unfortunately eventually drive hardworking lesbians to the bottle.

The movie, in all mock seriousness, proceeds to show the available de-stressing effect of tai-chi exercises albeit supplemented by tipping. The movements seemingly try to accommodate the regular activities of lesbian tippers, including their sexual acts. These scenes showed lesbians partnered as tai-chi exercise couples imitating lesbian sex.

They elicited the most laughter from the audience and also managed to satisfactorily answer the perennial heterosexual question of how lesbians have satisfying sex without a penis.

The movie took the form of a documentary-cum-self-help video. It was light and funny, and the subject made it more hilarious while it depicted lesbian activism and angst in lesbian's daily lives. The film succeeded in what it sought to achieve, that is to formally recognize the visibility of lesbians in all walks of life. It ultimately 'placed' lesbians in mainstream society and with the type of activities and causes they apply themselves to, it recognized lesbian identity as well. Films, be they short, documentary movies, or video spoofs like this are now a clear avenue for claiming lesbian visibility and celluloid has become an accepted lesbian 'space'.

Michael P. De Guzman, a self-confessed cineaste, is a freelance consultant in Cambodia. His areas of expertise include technical writing, HIV/AIDS, counselling, sexuality, IEC/BCC and graphic design. He also writes poetry and fiction in English and Filipino. His work has been published in magazines and newspapers in his home country, The Philippines. His first book, a collection of short stories, is set to be released in 2007.

Germaine Trittle P. Leonin is a legal officer for the Philippines' Department of Social Welfare and Development where she works on women's welfare issues and children's rights. An LGBT rights advocate for the past ten years, she is a member of Lesbian Advocates Philippines (LeAP!), the Lesbian and Gay Legislative Advocacy Network (LAGABLAB-Pilipinas), and is the Founding President of the Rainbow Rights Project (R-Rights), a legal and policy think-tank for LGBT issues and concerns.

Review of Loving Women: Being Lesbian in Unprivileged India

Maya Sharma
New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006.

MAYA GANESH



Writing about women's sexualities is bound to be a two-step with silence. The obvious silences of denial and suppression. The silence of as-yet-un-worded sexualities and emotions. Maya Sharma's new volume, *Loving Women: Being Lesbian in Unprivileged India*, opens out another space of silence - the sexuality of working class women. The volume is also a welcome addition on the Lesbian Writing shelf. For the first time here are unexpected, poignant stories of working class women-loving-women. Women who do not know what the word 'lesbian' is. Women who do not have support groups or help lines or getting-to-know-you parties. Women who are simply led by their desire. The simplicity and honesty of this desire, and the struggles to enjoy it, are humbling indeed.

Loving Women is structured as a collection of ten stories of same-sex-desiring women and couples. Clearly being Indian and lesbian is a vast theatre of love played out within the realities of class and caste hierarchies, the pressures of making ends meet, religious conflict, family control, expectations of hetero-normativity, and crushing poverty. The stories here effectively challenge the notion that same sex love between women is a Western or upper class phenomenon, or that working class women are always victimized sexual receptacles. Here are women with full sexual lives and a sense of their own sexual agency.

Clearly being Indian and lesbian is a vast theatre of love played out within the realities of class and caste hierarchies, the pressures of making ends meet, religious conflict, family control, expectations of hetero-normativity, and crushing poverty. The stories here effectively challenge the notion that same sex love between women is a Western or upper class phenomenon, or that working class women are always victimized sexual receptacles. Here are women with full sexual lives and a sense of their own sexual agency.

There is the headstrong angry shirt-pant wearing Vimlesh always questioning and seeking. 'Why create categories, such deep differences between male and female? Only our bodies make us so. We are all human beings aren't we?' There is the fascinating story of Sabo and Razia who have for decades skillfully navigated their families, religious divides, and marriages through the innocuous vehicle of 'female friendship'. Their friendship allows them to care for each other's children, celebrate festivals, mourn their dead, and thus remain enmeshed in each other's social and personal lives. Then there is the story of the snuffed out flame of love

between Menaka and Payal. Teenage school girls who ran away together, only to be found and forcibly brought back to their families, they could not withstand the pressures of their society despite saying 'we love one another and want to live together'. They part, and nothing more is heard from them again. There is Mary, a survivor of horrific domestic abuse who eventually finds comfort in the arms of her special friend. Manjula and Meeta, the 'husband-wife *jodi*' (couple) whose relationship is a transparent, open, equal relationship unlike many husband-wife *jodis* around them... and so on. Each story reveals a different facet of pleasure-seeking-and-giving, of agency, and of hope.

The scope of the introduction in which Sharma has chronicled the history of the lesbian rights movement in India is impressive. From an academic perspective it is a treasure to have this all down in one place. For the uninitiated reader it grounds the book in a specific context. From something as essentially political as 'why we use the word lesbian', to the implications of the *Fire* protests, to the frictions between the lesbian and women's movements, to Maya's own story and her questioning of her identity and privileges, the introduction lays bare all the tensions in being (and researching) Indian and Lesbian.

But are you a lesbian if you don't know or use the word for yourself? The women in this book describe their relationships as deep, intense friendships, but they do not refer to themselves as lesbian. Sharma establishes her position in needing to name these women lesbian, or politicize their sexualities, even if they themselves don't:

However the usage of the word 'lesbian' represents our continual efforts to build a politicized identity... these stories continue to pose an ethical dilemma... one way to confront the socially imposed silence regarding issues of alternative sexuality, as well as mechanisms of sexual policing and censorship, was to 'write in' these stories... subjects' insistent categorization of their homosexual relationships as 'female friendships' can be seen as evasions and deceptions, yet these apparent lies are in fact the existential truth.

Maya's open statement, and the 'evasions and deceptions' she encounters in her research throw up important questions for practitioners in the field of sexuality and rights based activism. These women's right to be sexual is in fact tied in with all their other human rights, most of which are grossly violated because of their social location. The politicization of this struggle is perhaps what bumps up against the women's 'existential truth'. As Maya goes on to say: 'How could they undertake the risk of disclosure and its repercussions without the assurance of external support... no politicization of their issues, no collective demand that their needs be addressed?' This is perhaps why it is Maya's everyday work to organize women to understand the indivisibility of all aspects of their lives and rights, and is what this book and its politics hints at.

But bridging politics with research and with story-telling is a complex exercise. Reading research, even ethnographic research, is usually taxing and at times this text becomes pedantic with the rigours of the investigative process. Writing in details of how, where, and when meetings and interviews occur take away from an appreciation of the stories as stories. 'We entered the threshold, we had tea, we walked out into the courtyard, we wrote letters, there was no contact for three months...' etc. I would have preferred to see extracts from the letters, or Maya's personal notes to herself. Perhaps a poem to a lover, or the words of a song playing in the distance. This structuring of time and place

But are you a lesbian if you don't know or use the word for yourself? The women in this book describe their relationships as deep, intense friendships, but they do not refer to themselves as lesbian.

This structuring of time and place creates a sort of linearity, when in fact really enduring stories are more magical and meandering. Is there a way to write love and politics in a less NGO, less forced sort of way?

creates a sort of linearity, when in fact really enduring stories are more magical and meandering. Is there a way to write love and politics in a less NGO, less forced sort of way? It cannot be easy, but it is an exercise worth attempting. Also, the cadences of sensuality, pleasure, love, and desire have perhaps been lost in translation. The subjects of this book speaking in Hindi or in Urdu might just be that much richer. But this is the limitation of writing intimate experiences in what can often be a flatfooted language.

Loving Women will definitely be a useful reference and guide to anyone working in the area of sexuality. It is also endearing because it is a nod to the magic and loneliness, the bewildering, enchanting, hopeful multiplicities of women's sexual lives. For this I applaud Maya. And for surviving trails gone cold, investigations aborted by families, for hovering on the lip of the 'unspeakable', for writing out the silence, and for the courage this personal journey has clearly entailed.

Maya Ganesh is an independent writer with NGOs working on gender, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS. She is based in Mumbai, and is currently on a one year study-sabbatical in the UK.

Here are some tips to treat someone who you know is a transsexual person as you would any other friend. Not every transsexual person is the same. Like you and I aren't alike, neither are they.

TRANS TALK

The term gender, when used below, always means the gender the person identifies as.

- Treat me as you would any other friend – with respect, dignity, affection and care.
- Being transsexual is not a choice or a decision. It is a simple reality.
- Accept me as a full-fledged member of the gender I identify with.
- A transsexual woman is someone whose gender assignment was male and who wants to live / lives as a woman. A transsexual man is someone whose gender assignment was female and who wants to live / lives as a man.
- Use the language that corresponds to my gender identity, e.g. 'he', 'she', even if my body does not seem to match yet and even when talking about my past. This will help me move forward.
- The changes I make to my body are not just cosmetic, but are reconstructive. Having a body I feel I can identify with and feel good in is vital to my health and my social and physical interactions with other people.
- Don't immediately assume that genital sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) is my priority. Every transsexual person is unique and chooses different steps, based on many factors. Not everyone wants SRS.
- Don't talk about my genitals any more than you would for a non-trans person, unless I bring up the topic myself.
- Don't introduce me as your 'transsexual' friend. Don't ask me to explain my life story or my gender situation to people I have just met.
- Never mention my old name or even ask what it was. Instead of saying, 'Back when you were Ram', say 'Before you came out as female'.
- Gender identity has nothing to do with my sexual identity. Whether I am attracted to men, women, both, or neither is a totally separate thing from whether I am male or female. For example, if I am a trans woman who likes women, treat me no differently from other lesbians.
- When you use the word transsexual (or trans), it's better to use it as an adjective to describe a person, not as a noun by itself, e.g. transsexual people, not transsexuals.

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

MARLEA PINOR MUNEZ

I had a dream. I was in 'heaven'. I also had a nightmare. I was in 'hell'. My life moves with 'heavens' and 'hells'.

In February of this year, I was interviewed for an NGO work assignment. Looking at my CV, the principal interviewer asked why I am still single. I simply said, 'That's only a legal term sir, I am actually partnered'. 'Are you getting married within the near future?' he continued. I responded, 'No, sir, I am for civil union, and for lesbians like me, there is no room yet here in the Philippines'. He looked uneasy but readily talked about issues that are faced by lesbians and gays in the country. In a week's time, I started working with the organization.

Three months after, my older brother was asking for directions on how to reach my parents' place in Mindanao, a major island in the south of the Philippines. When my brother arrived in my parents' house, my mother sent me a text message to give her a call. She told me that my brother referred to my lifestyle as 'living in sin'. My brother, by the way, is a member of one of the popular Church lay groups in the Philippines. I immediately asked my mother whether she believes my brother. She said, 'No, you will always be my daughter'. Before ending our conversation, my mother remarked, 'How could you be living in sin, when you have done no wrong?'

This very inspiring moment I had with my mother was followed by another similar experience. I was tapped as one of the National Consultants to work with an International Team. Our task was to conduct an evaluation of a foreign-funded community forestry project in the Philippines. While we were on a long trip to the field, we had a chance to

chat and asked each other personal questions that are not usually found in CVs. The line of discussion was about families, number of children, ages during marriage, and the like. I was quiet because those matters were not relevant to me.

Then I was asked, 'Marlea, how old are you?' I replied, 'Thirty eight'. The next question was, 'How come you are not yet married?...might be too late to have children, are you planning to get married? How many children do you want?' Without hesitation, I told my colleagues that I have no intention of getting married at this time and I will not be having biological children because I am a lesbian. My colleagues treated my response like they did those of the others. Nothing was unusual, nothing special.

I still have dreams. Whether they are 'heavens' or 'hells', I am very sure, life would be no better than my being myself – a woman, a lesbian, a woman loving a woman, not wanting to be a man, and not hating men.

I will continue to dream my dreams.

Marlea Pinor Munez is the President of Women's Initiatives for Society, Culture, and Environment (WISE), Incorporated and is based in The Philippines.

AT THE RESOURCE CENTRE

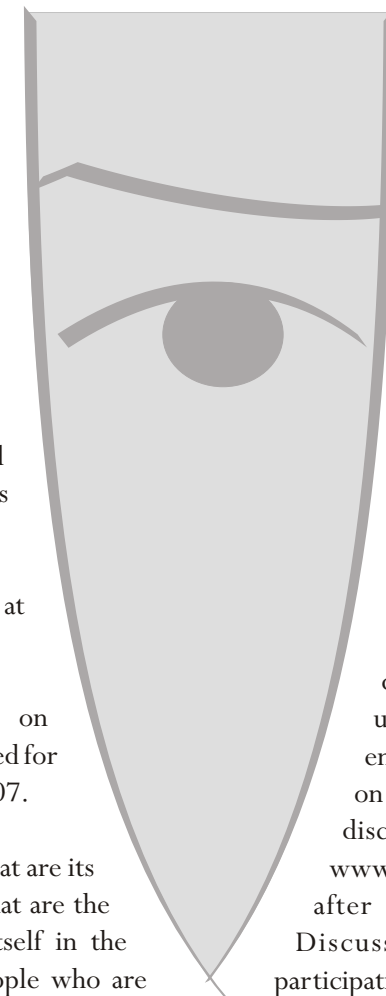
JOIN the 'Sexuality and Violence' E-Discussion Forum!

The Resource Centre conducts structured, time-bound, moderated e-discussion forums on various topics related to sexuality through-out the year. So far we have had discussions on Sexual Pleasure, Sexuality, and Rights; Sexuality and Censorship; Sexuality and Rights for Young People; Sexual Concerns — Approaches and Management; and, Diverse Genders and Sexualities.

Archives can be viewed on the website at www.asiasrc.org/forum.php.

The sixth E-Discussion forum is on 'Sexuality and Violence' and is scheduled for November 15, 2006 to January 15, 2007.

What do we mean by violence and what are its inter-connections with sexuality? What are the ways in which violence manifests itself in the realm of sexuality? Who are the people who are violated against because of their sexuality and gender? Are there people who are more violated or marginalized because of their sexuality? How is violence represented in popular media? What is the role of the State in dealing with matters of sexuality and violence? How do class, caste, gender, race, religion, sexual preference and other variables play a role in the matters of sexuality and violence?



The questions (and answers) are endless and we hope to use this space to begin trying to deconstruct some of the more nuanced aspects around these issues. The topics we will be covering include tracing the connections between sexuality and violence, exploring the various ways in which sexuality and violence affect different communities in diverse ways, media and representation and also how the State plays a role in dealing with certain kinds of sexual violence while excluding and sometimes even perpetrating and perpetuating others.

These are only some of the questions and debates we will be considering in the upcoming forum discussion. We hope to engage a diverse range of people and ideas on this issue. To join the forum and view the discussion, please visit our website at www.asiasrc.org and follow the instructions after clicking on the link to E-Forum Discussions. We look forward to your participation in an exciting and lively dialogue!

READ *In Plainspeak* Online

Every publication of *In Plainspeak* is available to download in PDF format on the South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality website www.asiasrc.org. To receive a hard copy of *In Plainspeak*, just send your mailing address to resourcecentre@tarshi.net.

BROWSE our website at www.asiasrc.org

The website contains information about Resource Centre programmes, a database of library materials, links to organizational and electronic resources throughout the region, links to journals, news articles, an online poll, and announcements.

CONTRIBUTE to *In Plainspeak*

Calling all Artists and Writers! We hope to showcase a diverse range of images throughout the magazine in each issue. *In Plainspeak* is calling for pictures, drawings, paintings, graphics, images, and paintings related to sexuality for inclusion in the magazine. Submissions should be sent to resourcecentre@tarshi.net.

We want to hear your stories! We are inviting submissions for *The 'I' Column* for the next issue of *In Plainspeak*. This column features a personal and specific account of how individuals see sexual rights as affecting them and highlight either affirmation or violation of those rights. If you want to share your experience, please send us a 500 word essay to resourcecentre@tarshi.net by January 10, 2007.

VISIT the Resource Centre Library

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.

The library page is hosted on the Resource Centre website (www.asiasrc.org). Users can access web links to many useful journals, browse the library catalogue for information on materials in the library, and send search queries to the librarian.

Library Hours: Monday to Thursday, 1:30 pm to 5:00 pm.
Telephone: 91-11- 55642625

GIVE us Your Feedback!

What did you think of this issue of *In Plainspeak*? We welcome any comments, suggestions, or ideas for how we can make improve our work. Please send your feedback to resourcecentre@tarshi.net. We look forward to hearing from you!

ABOUT THE RESOURCE CENTRE

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.

On the Advisory Committee of The Resource Centre are:

CHUNG TO, Chi Heng Foundation, Hong Kong

DEDE OETOMO, GAYa NUSANTARA Foundation, Indonesia

GEETANJALI MISRA, Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA), India

KHUAT THU HONG, Institute for Social Development Studies, Vietnam

NINUK WIDYANTORO, The Women's Health Foundation, Indonesia

PAN SUIMING, Institute for Sexuality and Gender, Renmin University, China

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 organization 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.

Contact Us

The South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality

11 Mathura Road, First Floor

Jangpura B, New Delhi, 110014, India.

Phone: 91-11-24379070, 24379071

Fax: 91-11-24374022

Email: resourcecentre@tarshi.net

Website: www.asiasrc.org

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Radhika Chandiramani

Arpita Das