

Torture of Sexual minorities, a global phenomenon

National meet in city on July 1 to launch campaign for rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Bangalore, June 22: Various organisations of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people (LGBT) from Bangalore, Pune and Delhi will get together in Bangalore on July 1 for a public meeting to speak for their rights and against crimes and torture on

Sexuality minorities speak out

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Stop harassment, demand gays

Stop harassment, change IPC, demand gays and lesbians



Issue 3

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February 2002

Sangha Mitra



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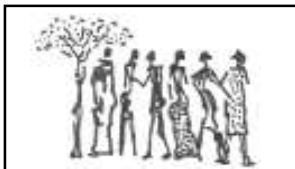
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Somewhere over the rainbow



This issue of Sangha Mitra presents articles from an entire spectrum of the sexuality minority community (the phrase *sexuality minority* has a cold scientific ring, but we use it in the interest of being inclusive) and comprises people from all faiths, economic classes, and professions -- truly the full spectrum. Yet, we are each different and unique and come together in our uniqueness. As lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, we have our own struggles, fears, joys, loves and hates.

When we started asking people for contributions to the magazine we noticed that there is a real need for sexuality minorities to express themselves. Being denied any mainstream forum to express their feelings, writing becomes an important act of affirmation. If we had focussed solely on questions of quality in this edition, we would have completely misunderstood what the process of writing itself means to LGBT people. Hence we choose to print the stories, articles and poems as submitted, without much editing or censorship.

The range of poetry, short stories and features aims to capture some part of our experience, as non-conformists to the heterosexual norm -- be it heterosexual marriage or monogamy. It is important to note that like all communities ours too has its diversities and no one experience can claim to capture the essence of what it is to be gay, lesbian, hijra or bisexual. It is here that fiction and poetry become important to constantly remind us of how experiences are both intensely individual and at the same time partake of a larger social reality.

Among many other contributions, one short story responds to the Catholic Church's views on homosexuality; another recalls a real part of many gay men's experience in cruising; a feature recalls the bisexual experience of extreme marginality in both gay and straight worlds and a poem affirms the solitary gay voice in a heterosexual world.

Apart from the features and short stories we also include a section called Bangalore LGBT Diary to indicate the enormous work, which has happened in Bangalore since the last Sangha Mitra was published!

With this, we are now bringing out the third issue of Sangha Mitra. We hope to publish Sangha Mitra as a quarterly, which would provide space for our community to express views on life and loves.

We would also like to recognise and congratulate all the groups in

Bangalore -- right now there are more than half a dozen groups working for and within our community! We've come a long way, but there still is much work to be done. So volunteer with an organisation, either with your space, time, money or other support!

A final point, which needs to be noted, is that section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (which criminalizes same-sex sexual relationships) is very much in the news. On the positive side, a petition has been filed in the Delhi High Court challenging the section's validity and on the negative side it is still being used to harass our community as in the Lucknow case where HIV awareness workers were arrested and charged under this section. These are serious issues affecting our community and will be covered in detail in a future issue.

So, enjoy this issue of Sangha Mitra and write to us with your comments or any suggestions.

Kurt & Arvind

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Definition: Sexuality minorities include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, hijra, kothi and any non-heterosexual person.

Disclaimer: The views expressed by the individuals are their own and do not necessarily express the views of Sangha Mitra or of any other organisation mentioned here.

Contact: goodasyoubangalore@yahoo.com or Sahaya Helpline (Tuesdays and Fridays between 7pm and 9pm) on 223 0959. www.geocities.com/goodasyoubangalore/

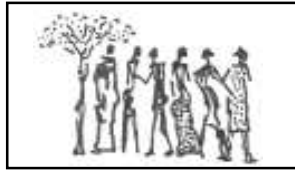
Good As You: A non-funded social support group that functions on voluntary efforts. Meets every Thursday between 7pm and 9pm.

Gratitude: Numerous individuals contributed to the creation of this newsletter. Thanks to all of them, including Manohar, Deepak, Chandra, and many others.

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Contributions: Suggested contribution is 20 rupees. Greater generosity will be more than welcome. We also welcome suggestions, reactions, news items, articles, researched features/information, cartoons, images from our readers for our future issues.

Come Out! Come Out! Wherever you are!



Sometimes, the most difficult stories are often the most personal. It's easy to write about the human rights of the gay and lesbian community, but it's difficult talking personally about yourself and your sexuality.

These are the stories of 2 regular "guys", who just happen to be gay. We were requested by members of Good As You to talk about our personal stories and how we had both come out to our families as being gay. We were asked to share with other members of our community our journey through a very difficult, but necessary phase.

Both of us are in our mid-twenties, and professional (one is a lawyer and the other is doing a Ph.D in the area of 'reproductive biology'). We come from middle class backgrounds, and from families, which by and large share in the dominant values of the middle class. We both came out to our parents several months ago and are in the process of renegotiating a familial relationship. This "traditional" relationship includes the comforting and familiar comforts of growing up as a good boy, marrying a woman of your parent's choice and settling down with your wife in a successful career was to be rudely disrupted. However, we are getting ahead of our story, so we should start at the very beginning.

Coming out to yourself

We were given the topic of coming out to parents. But we soon realized that coming out to parents is really just a part of a larger process. The first step in this entire process is really coming out to yourself, or just accepting your sexuality.

I always knew that I desired men. In fact, my earliest erotic imaginings concerned an uncle of mine. But as we grew up, I felt the pressure to be heterosexual in my desires, my conversations and in my actions. The world of the schoolboy slowly changes from ignoring the female of the species to slowly getting attracted and vocally expressing that attraction among your peers. In those boyhood conversations on how attractive Madhuri Dixit was, I was never able to empathize or participate. I went through a phase of psyching myself into finding women attractive and trying hard to participate in those conversations. When it did not work, I gave up and just pretended to like women in conversations while I secretly lusted after men. Then at one point feeling the sheer lack of authenticity in pretending, I stopped participating in such conversations. Let my friends talk about how attractive Jodie Foster or Julie Roberts were, I would feign a lofty silence, while thinking of how sexy Tom Cruise was.

This realization that I desired men both sexually and romantically finally led to me accepting myself and looking around for others like me. To arrive at this stage of comfort with myself and my desires, I went through periods of disgust at myself and my desires, hatred for myself and a desperate prayer to God to make me heterosexual. I think that what gave me comfort and hope was that I was not alone. I read any literature with a gay theme with hunger: Sartre's *St. Genet*, a biography of Foucault, the works of James Baldwin, and even looking for gay themes in literature. When there were no gay themes I invented gay themes. Brutus in my opinion was clearly gay and hence the Shakespearean line 'Poor Brutus with himself at war'. It was through these stratagems that I nurtured my gay self. To be sure of oneself and what one wants and accepting of that self is a great relief and was I glad that I was finally there.



Coming out to friends

We believe through our experiences, that coming out is never a question of individual courage alone as often courage is generated through the kind of support one gets. We have both been lucky in having friends who have not only been incredibly supportive but in fact proactively pushing us to do gay stuff.

The first person I came out to was this straight friend who was one of my best friends since school days. In the Law School where I

studied, writing articles for journals obsessed us, as that was a way of excelling. This friend, Sanjay, and I decided to write an article on gay rights -- each for different reasons. I did it because I really wanted to read more on what I saw as my issue, and Sanjay because he was game for exploring a different issue. One day when we were researching in the library, he suddenly said, "Fuck man, can you imagine sleeping with another man?" To which I replied without hesitation "Yes, I can."

His response was incredibly supportive and empathetic and before I knew it he said let's organize a seminar on gay rights. The seminar turned out to be the first seminar on gay rights in any academic institution in India and really brought me in contact with a number of gay people.

After that I came out to two lesbian friends in college and they were incredible people too. We used to go out for dinner and they used to flirt with the waiters and egg me on saying isn't he cute and what about him. I mention this, as it was important for someone to acknowledge my desires. All three of them constantly egged me on to go to Good As You, the gay group, but I would put it off saying I am busy or some other inane excuse. In spite of me knowing Good As You members like Manohar, Chandra and Mahesh, somehow when it came to the final step of going to the group I was unwilling. Secretly (out of my own internalized homophobia) I feared that the group would be full of screaming queens, and I could not yet see myself as that 'a queen among queens!' With great trepidation I finally took the step and the first emotion on going to a Gay Group was really relief. They were just ordinary chaps!!

After that it did not take much to visit cruising sites and when I was studying in England for a year, to join the lesbian, gay and bisexual society and visit all the gay bars, saunas and chat rooms as now I was totally comfortable in fact quite in love with the

company of gay boys.

Once this opened up, I came out in rapid succession to a whole host of my friends and amazingly I have not had a single negative reaction in close to the hundred straight people I have come out to since then. The worst reaction I really got was this good friend who said that he could not understand it, but if that was what I wanted it was fine by him.

Coming out to family

If you had asked me, a year ago whether I would come out to my family, the answer would have been a resounding no. There is no way I would even have contemplated it. However a year later, I was ready to tell my mother. The more people I came out to, the stranger it felt. Strangers, who I knew for a few hours, knew something so integral to myself as my sexuality and that was something someone I was close to, knew nothing about. If I kept going on the way I was going, wasn't it inevitable that sooner or later she would get to know from someone else? If that was so, was it not better that I told them than someone else did? In the endless conversations I had with friends on the same subject, they all told me; she definitely knows based on the kind of conversations they had had with her. I too had introduced the topic of gay rights with her and shown her pictures of gay pride in London. The responses though not enthusiastic had been encouraging.

I also saw the documentary by Nishit Saran when he came out to his mom on camera and was greatly encouraged by the mother's response that moved from shock to denial to acceptance in a matter of a few minutes. We also had a discussion post the public screening and my opinion at that time was that acceptance of being gay was easy, what was difficult was an acceptance of the gay subculture with its easy sexual mores.

Based on all these encouragements, one day I took my mother to a discussion at Sangama on prostitution and Manohar and James introduced themselves as working on sexuality issues. Post the discussion I decided that it

was now or never as the topic of sexuality had been opened out. I took her to a Chinese Restaurant and we ordered soup.



I then asked her if she knew why I was so interested in the issue of gay rights? She replied that well you have always been interested in human rights issues and its good that you work on this too. Emboldened by this response I said do you know why I don't want to get married? She said no, to which I said because I would identify as gay. She asked what does that mean? To which I said that I relate to men romantically the way other chaps would relate to women. She asked when did you realize this? I said when I was a child. Then she said, I always thought you were balanced; now I must change my mind. I responded by saying that I was the same person that I am before I told you this. Then she asked if I was abused and that we should go to a psychiatrist and get it cleared up. To which I replied that I was fine, and if she wanted to go to a psychiatrist we could definitely go to one. She finally asked about my friends who she knew and whether they were like that too and I said no they all prefer women. At which point she said lets go home I am tired.

We went home and the next three months were torture. There was no conversation at home on this topic, though the air was heavy with sadness. One could sense the difference, but somehow we never spoke about it again. The only difference was an extra solicitude from her side as she served the breakfast or asked me if I had taken the handkerchief and when I was

coming back home. She did speak to good friends of mine like Lawrence and Ramdas and she also spoke to Sanjay's mother. Finally one day she said, you said lets go to a psychiatrist, can we go visit one? To which I readily agreed.

The day we went was a tense day for me as my father, mother and myself trooped in to meet Dr. Shekar Seshadri. As we went in to his chamber and he welcomed us and started by saying that Arvind said that you wanted to meet me about something ... Before he could finish my mother interrupted him by saying that doctor yes I wanted to speak to you as he says he is not attracted to girls and that is unnatural. Dr. Shekar said that it was a medical opinion that was today discredited that homosexuality was unnatural. Medicine today was completely of the opinion that homosexuality was as natural as heterosexuality. She then said that I saw a movie with the boy living with his boyfriend and going to meet his parents, but who would have thought that my own son would turn out like this. It seems unnatural. Dr. Shekar assured her of the naturalness of the same yet again. Then she asked if there was any possibility of change. He answered by saying that asking such a question meant that she had not internalized what he had said. What she should instead be doing is supporting your son in his life and strengthening the bond. The conversation with Dr Shekar seemed to do a lot of good as she acknowledged herself. Things were better post the session as somehow I felt we had acknowledged my sexuality and in a sense there was acceptance.

Coming out and after

I guess I know now that coming out is a process and we are always on a journey in a quest for acceptance on our terms. Well my sexuality had been acknowledged, marriage was not an issue anymore, there were no questions as to where I was going and whom I was meeting, but I was not fully satisfied. What more did I want?

Full acceptance, with my mother saying get your gay friends home, I want to meet them or tell me more about your life, are you going out

with someone or ask your friend to sleep over at home or acknowledgement that I am doing important work when I work on issues of sexuality minorities....

I really don't know. I want something more, only I don't know if they can give it. But then as a friend said to me, if you took your own sweet time to accept yourself with all your access to resources, its only fair that you give them time to, to accept you completely on your terms. You owe them that much.

Well I have traveled quite a bit since those days of paranoia, but hopefully one day we will find a mutual balance based on mutual love and understanding.

Arvind

Many people, many sexualities: a personal journey

I was born in the year 1971 into a middle class farming family in a small village near Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh. Till the seventh standard I studied in and around my native place. After that I went to a boys' residential school about 100 kilometers from my village. By the time I finished SSLC, I was fairly clear about my attraction towards people of my own sex. I had a few sexual encounters in those three years, mostly with my classmates - always in the darkness, without any talk or discussion. The next morning we would pretend as if nothing had happened.

In 1986, at the age of 15, I went to Hyderabad to do a Special Diploma in Electronics. In 1988, I was watching a movie in a theatre when a middle-aged man made a pass at me. I was scared, excited, confused about how to react. After the movie it took at least 30 minutes before I could speak to him. This incident opened up a new world for me, a world where lovers meet only under the cover of

darkness. It also introduced me to cruising (men meeting other men for sex) - may be in a dark corner of a public park or playground, or a public toilet in a bus or railway station. You meet someone, talk and may be decide to go somewhere to have sex (though this happens very rarely). Sometimes, even after having met a person several times, you may not know his real name, leave alone address and occupation.

By the time I was 18, I used to frequent these areas quite regularly (at least two evenings/nights a week) in search of friendship and love. I must have met over 200 people in this way, without knowing the barest details about a single one of them (their work, residence/office address/phone number). Often, I never saw them again, though many promised further meetings at a particular place and time. I was very lonely and had no one I could talk to, or discuss and share my feelings with. I was seeking to understand my sexuality and visited the cruising areas in the hope of meeting people like me (gay/homosexual). But no one was interested in talking about these issues, particularly with a social activist (I was active in the Students Federation of India at the time). The experience only increased my loneliness. Being vulnerable to blackmail, the people who frequent these areas are usually too scared to reveal their identities. These are people who literally survive on the margins of society. I lost hope of meeting anyone with whom I could share my confusions and doubts.

Cruising areas are not safe either. Occasionally, someone would be caught by a policeman who would steal all his money and valuables (like a wristwatch). He would threaten to take him to the police station, inform his parents, relatives and so on. There is also the risk of being physically or even sexually abused. Many goondas and hustlers take advantage of this situation by posing as gays/homosexuals. Once you admit that you are also gay, they verbally abuse and beat you up, threatening to haul you off to the police station unless you hand over all your money and possessions to them. Whenever this happens, you feel like committing suicide and leaving this unfair and

violent world. You hate yourself for being homosexual and vulnerable to abuse and resolve never to venture into these cruising areas again. But you don't really have a choice. You go again and again and get abused again and again. You live under the constant threat of being blackmailed by the police, hustlers and others. You can't even shout when you get raped.

Helpless and ashamed

I began to dislike myself for being a homosexual and felt ashamed that I had to hide my sexuality all the time. Many questions haunted me: 'Why did I become a homosexual? Did someone convert me? Am I not a man (enough)? Why am I so sensitive? Is it because I am feminine?' My body would jolt with fear every time I thought... 'What if someone (classmate, friend, fellow social activist) discovers that I am gay? Would I be able to live the rest of my life with shame?' I felt awful whenever I had to pretend that I was heterosexual. I could own my sexuality only under the cover of darkness, in a world peopled by anonymous individuals; everywhere else, I had to suppress it. Leading a double life was tearing me apart. Suppressing my sexuality did not help either. Being vulnerable to blackmail, the people who frequent these cruising areas are usually too scared to reveal their identities

As a gay adolescent, you go through so many doubts and confusions about your sexuality, sexual identity, sexual desires/ attractions and so on. The turmoil that one goes through is further intensified because there is so little information and very few people whom one can confide in or talk with openly on these issues. Many people who appear to be liberal and progressive in other areas of life are very prejudiced when it comes to sexuality. They include communists, socialists, trade unionists, environmentalists, Gandhians, dalit activists and even few human rights activists and women's activists. I never dared to reveal my sexuality to any of my co-workers in my four years' active association with the left students' movement. Any discussion about sex and sexuality - leave alone homosexuality - was

taboo in these organisations.

In 1990 I joined a leading computer company in Baroda as a hardware engineer. I worked there for around 18 months. I used to frequently visit a cruising area and regularly meet a group of four to five people. Of these, I managed to discover the place of work of only two persons. They generally restricted their conversation to who they had sex with or who they wanted to have sex with, who was new to that cruising area, what precautions they could take in order to avoid being caught by a policeman or a hustler. Most of them were married. None dared to live/lead a gay life without the cover of marriage.

However, being able to meet a few people on a regular basis helped me feel a little comfortable with my homosexuality. I wanted to have a lover; I wanted to lead my life without having to marry a woman.

In 1992 I read an article about Bombay Dost, a gay magazine from Bombay, in Andhra Jyothi - a Telugu newspaper. The article, however, did not mention the magazine's address. I was thrilled to discover that there was a gay magazine. I took a job in Bombay in a month's time. Since contacting Bombay Dost was my one-point agenda for living in Mumbai, I asked every individual I met in the cruising areas about it. But it took at least three months of rigorous effort to get in touch with Bombay Dost.

Positive change

My life went through a major positive change in Mumbai. I made a few gay friends with whom I could discuss my sexuality. It was great to meet so many homosexual men who were very comfortable with their sexuality, who didn't want to live their lives under the cover of marriage. Some of them were living alone. It took me hardly any time at all to come to terms with my homosexuality. Within three months I was able to find a lover/ boyfriend. We started living together (and still live together) in February 1993.

I was thrilled when I found a box-file full of newspaper clippings on alternative sexuality at the Centre for Education and Documentation (CED), Mumbai. As I had worked with students/youth/left/environmental movements, it took very little effort to understand the oppression faced by gays/homosexuals. I was instrumental



in starting the Khush Club (1993, Mumbai) with my lover and five other gay men. We wanted to document information on homosexuality that would help gay people to come to terms with their sexuality, counsel people who were confused and uncomfortable with their sexuality and spread awareness about HIV/AIDS among the gay community. We organised several social gatherings, providing opportunities for gay people to meet in a safe space. During this process I got in touch with a few lesbian activists who were also active in the women's movement. Their group, however, only survived for around 18 months. Differences over what direction the group should take and whether it should become more political or remain social led to its break-up.

Lesbian women have very little space in this

society. Gay men had access to many cruising areas (over 50) in Bombay but lesbians had no place to meet other lesbians. Cruising areas facilitated gay men to meet and recognise other men like themselves, but lesbian women had no social space. At that time, there was no combined gay and lesbian groups in India. There were at least five or six groups for gay men in cities like Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai, Bangalore and Lucknow. One or two of them were open to lesbian women but they didn't feel comfortable in these groups. Like their heterosexual counterparts in our male-dominated society, many gay men - even activists - are sexist and make anti-women statements. While gay and bisexual men who are married can go out and have their sexual needs fulfilled - at least in towns and cities, married lesbians cannot refuse to have sex with their husbands. On the other hand, many gay men do not feel obliged to fulfil the sexual needs of their wives. These women suffer in silence and visit psychiatrists with problems like 'I am unable to arouse my husband.' Most gay groups in India still haven't taken a stand on the issue of gay men getting married to women. For these and other reasons, it was difficult for lesbian women to be part of gay groups. While gay men have access to many cruising areas, lesbians have hardly any space where they can meet other lesbians.

In 1994, a few lesbian women, gay men (gender-sensitive) and I tried to form a 'gay and lesbian' forum - Khush Manch - in Mumbai. Since we wanted to keep sexist and communal people out of it, we called it an anti-communal, anti-sexist, democratic, gay, lesbian forum. We wanted to have co-chairs (a man and a woman) so that the women would have an equal say in the forum. While the group died a natural death after a few months, its members decided to work openly as gay and lesbian people in other social activist and voluntary organisations. Some men stopped coming near me - perhaps they thought homosexuality is contagious

In Mumbai I was active in the Narmada Bachao Andolan (anti-Narmada Dam movement) and Nirbhay Bano Andolan (a forum formed to fight communalism and fundamentalism after

Mumbai's communal riots). I was OUT (open about my homosexuality) to many social activists. It was a conscious decision taken in Khush Manch to make homosexuality visible among social activists. Many women (mostly from women's groups) were supportive. Some people behaved as if they didn't know about my sexuality or hadn't heard about it. Some men stopped coming near me - perhaps they thought homosexuality is contagious. Some even stopped talking to me. Together with a few lesbian friends who were associated with Khush Manch, I tried to influence social action groups to support 'gay and lesbian' rights, to look at these people as oppressed people. This was very important for me, as some leading gay activists were communal and active proponents of Hindutva,



Accepting bisexuality

It was a shock for me when my best friend (a woman) and I realised that we were in love. I didn't believe that I could be bisexual. It was very difficult for me to accept the heterosexual aspect of my sexuality. For the first time, I realised that I had lots of negative feelings towards heterosexual people/heterosexuality - an inheritance from the gay community/culture/groups. I needed help from my friends in order to come to terms with my bisexuality. Most of

my gay friends (including activists) were cold, unsupportive and insensitive. I suddenly realised that as a bisexual, I did not have space in the existing gay groups. It was my feminist women friends from Forum Against Oppression of Women who gave me the support that proved crucial in coming to terms with my bisexuality.

In 1994, I moved into Bangalore where I started attending the meetings of a local gay group, 'Good As You', held once a week. I was the only man identified as bisexual in the group. A couple of women also attended the meetings, but very rarely. It was difficult to raise issues related to bisexuality because of the anti-bisexual feelings of a few group members. Many gay men (including those who were married) were very anti-bisexuality. I was asked to decide whether I wanted to be gay or straight. Bisexuals are regarded as people who are unstable and confused about their sexuality or people who don't have the guts or courage to accept that they are homosexual/gay and so use bisexuality as a mask in order to gain acceptance in society. They face discrimination not only from heterosexuals but also from gay men. I decided to be open about my bisexuality in the group and face the ensuing consequences.

I have attended most of the Good As You meetings in the last four years, but because of my bisexuality I often felt alienated from the rest of the group. It took around three years for some more men in the group to openly assert and identify themselves as bisexuals. Today we have around 10 men who openly identify themselves as bisexual - even though only a few of them attend meetings regularly. Bisexuals are unwelcome in a vast majority of gay groups in India. Other than Good As You, there are very few groups in India which allow them space. There are almost no bisexual men among the known gay activists in India. Bisexuality as an issue is rarely discussed, even among gay and lesbian groups/initiatives/rights discourse. Although Good As You is a safe social space for gay and bisexual men, there is no political or serious thinking even on issues affecting the LesBiGays (lesbians, bisexuals and gays). A majority of the members don't see this group

as an activist space.

Bisexuals are regarded as people who are unstable and confused about their sexuality or people who don't have the guts to accept that they are gay

A few students of National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore, organised a symposium on gay rights in their campus in September 1997. Sanjay Bavikatte, the main force behind this symposium, got in touch with me through Good As You. Many of the organisers were heterosexual people. They wanted to support gay rights because they felt that gay people are oppressed. The initiative, which was part of their study circle effort on gender, inspired me to start a group with both LesBiGays and others (who are sensitive towards LesBiGays) to support LesBiGay rights. I discussed this with a few of my friends (both LesBiGay and heterosexual) and called for a meeting. A few people from Good As You, a few heterosexual friends, and many organisers of the NLSIU symposium attended the meeting and all of us felt that there is a need for such a group, which was formed a few days before the symposium was held.

We began meeting once every two weeks. Many issues related to LesBiGays are discussed at these meetings. The group has realised that there is paucity of information not only about homosexuality but about heterosexuality as well and that there are several issues relating to heterosexuality which still need to be addressed. Since patriarchy oppresses both women and LesBiGays, we decided to call ourselves 'Sabrang' (all colours), indicating that our group has space for all sexualities - gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, transsexual and others. Sabrang believes in a plural, anti-sexist, anti-communal political ideology. Like other issues, we wanted to bring sexuality into public discourse and to fight myths and misinformation about sexuality in general and about LesBiGays in particular. We wanted to document, publish and disseminate information on issues relating to sexuality and to resist any form of discrimination based on one's sexuality. But Sabrang also sees itself as an activist group

which supports the rights of all people who face discrimination on the basis of their gender, caste, class, religion, ethnicity, language and so on. Physical attacks, sexual abuse, emotional and social alienation, psychological trauma become the everyday lived reality of many lesbians

With the agenda of making sexuality a developmental and human rights issue, Sabrang is working towards building a coalition of all oppressed groups. It believes that LesBiGay activism should support other social movements, for it cannot achieve success without the support of other groups. It also strives to reach out to people from non-English backgrounds and from the lower strata of society who are doubly disadvantaged.

I feel more safe, secure and comfortable in Sabrang than I did in any other group working on LesBiGay issues. This is one space where I feel bisexuals and lesbians are not oppressed by gay men, where people think not only about LesBiGays but also about the parents, spouses, children, friends and co-workers of LesBiGays.

Many people deny the existence of LesBiGays in India, dismissing their sexuality as Western and upper class phenomena. Others see sexuality as a concern that is too individualistic to warrant attention in a poor country like ours. Some label it as a disease to be cured, an abnormality to be set right or a crime to be punished. This denial, backed by an enforced invisibility, exposes LesBiGays to abuse and discrimination. Physical attacks, sexual abuse, emotional and social alienation, psychological trauma become the everyday lived reality of many LesBiGays, Self-acceptance in such a disabling environment is difficult, leading to low self-esteem, depression and sometimes even suicide.

Sexuality issues are considered irrelevant and elitist and hence routinely excluded from the human rights agenda in the Indian context. The social system and archaic laws (Section 377 of Indian Penal Code, which criminalises sodomy and is interpreted as anti-homosexual law, is frequently used by the police to extort money

from gay/bisexual men) stigmatise, discriminate against and oppress LesBiGay people. A culture of silence pervades the issue of sexuality and invisibility is the inevitable fallout of this enforced silence. LesBiGays and adolescents are the ones who are seriously affected in this process. By not accepting LesBiGays, society also places many other people in a troubling dilemma - their spouses, children and so on. Every effort to bring sexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality into public/ rights discourse will help LesBiGay people to get in touch with other people like themselves. It will help them to understand the oppression that they face due to their sexuality. It will give them courage to raise their voices and oppose these prejudices and intolerance. It will give many of them the courage to come out and to assert their sexuality publicly (as I am doing with this article for the first time in my life). It is easy for LesBiGays to face the world once they are comfortable and positive about their sexuality.

The moment LesBiGays become aware of their situation, a major change will come through in their situation. I would like to end this article with a quotation by a Black, gay, American writer:

The victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim; he or she has become a threat.

(This appeared originally in VOICES Journal, Vol. 3 No. 1 April 1999)

Manohar

My best friend is gay

My best friend is gay and I love it. I love him for being himself. We've known each other for nine months and he kept mum. Just like a woman bearing a child in her womb for nine months. The first time we went out to a pub, I delicately broached the topic and lamented on the fact that homosexuality is an offence in

this country. He just smiled and heard me out patiently. I've always known that he is gay and assumed that he knew that I knew. There was this unspoken bond of silence. I couldn't bring myself to ask him and little did I know that he was going through a "mini-revolution" within himself. When we went to see the movie "Fire" together, I wanted to discuss it in detail afterwards. I did so but he was unusually quiet. I couldn't in my wildest dreams have imagined that he was all bottled up inside. I guess he was dying to come out. Today, I realise how stressful life can be for a gay person. That is until they come out of the closet.



On the evening that he did, he revealed that he simply could not be open and frank about the movie. Actually, looking back, there was a slight strain in our relationship. In the beginning, he wouldn't shake hands when we met or give me a friendly peck. Then, there was this nagging thought in the back of my mind - maybe he swings both ways, what if he swings both ways? He is a well-built guy who works out at least thrice a week and takes care of himself. Luckily for me, I never did fall in love with him. Not in that way.

The day he came out to me is a milestone of sorts in my life. It was Valentine's Day and we both were a bit merry, having had a drink at

our favourite pub. Earlier that afternoon, he'd introduced me to the man he'd been dating. The friend vanished somewhere to make a call. I, in a flash of recklessness (?), told him something personal and that was the moment he must have decided to spill the beans. "There's something I've been wanting to tell you," he said quietly, his kind eyes peering into mine. "I'm gay." I just looked at him meaning fully, and said "I know" in my best nonchalant, blase tone. Actually, for a fraction of a second, what I had thought he would tell me is that he is attracted to both sexes. How was I supposed to react to that? Thank Goodness he is not that way.

"I've know from the first time I met you," I told him later that evening when his friend came back to join us. "Nah, that's not true," exclaimed the friend. Well, whether they believe me or not is their problem.

Now we are bosom buddies and I would want to do nothing to jeopardise our friendship. He means a lot to me and has finally introduced me to a few of his buddies. They are great as well. Kind, understanding and so non-judgmental. I don't have to keep things away like emergency trips to the beauty salon which I might do with straight guys I fancy. I can just be myself and express myself the way I want to. Folks used to tell me that gay men make the best of friends. I agree, I agree.

I have a schoolgirl crush on an adorable man who is gay, and both my best friend and his friend tell me not to fall for him. I haven't given up hope yet.

Sangeeta

Gay men and role models

Mainstream heterosexual role models typically fall into mainstream ideas of “good” and “moral.” What role models are provided for gay men, whose culture falls decidedly outside of this mainstream? What role models can we, as a community, embrace as positive role models and, importantly, need we embrace any role models at all?

The media, and the Western film industry in particular, have provided their idea of a gay role model: insecure, effeminate, promiscuous and indulging in unsafe sex, taking and abusing illegal substances. In contrast to this admittedly accurate portrait of the most socially visible and culturally established gay man is the innocent young man stumbling across his sexuality as if it were a rock in the street. As he learns more about his sexuality, there enters the always loud, always large female counterpart, known irreverently as the “fag hag.” (*Get Real* and *Beautiful Thing*, both British movies, come to mind).

After the usual mayhem and mild sex jokes, the young protagonist ponders coming out to his parents. In the final portion of the movie he announces to his parents “I’m gay,” provoking unrestrained melodrama. In the case of “*Get Real*,” the main character announces to a school assembly his sexuality. The entire process is, as a whole, a series of calculated, cliché conflicts and timely sex jokes. This formulaic account of the coming out process touches on some, though not all, of the realities of a young gay man’s experience.

Some of us have had or have our “fag hag” friends; many of us endured emotional melodrama in our own “coming out.” Yet, this formula leaves little room for other stories and other contexts, themselves vital for young closeted gay men to be exposed to. As our community is diverse in race, class, goals, religions, and sexual expression, might we explore this diversity and present these various

experiences in the media as legitimate, empowering experiences? Hardship, particularly in regards to coming out, manifests differently from case to case.

The coming out formula of Western film understands only one coming out situation, leaving little room for alternative experiences. In reality, some parents embrace their children and try as best they can to understand their child’s difference. Conversely, some young gay men are abandoned entirely by their family. In other cases, his sexuality may be entirely



ignored by his family, itself a very silent, very painful burden.

As most filmmakers behind coming out movies are themselves gay, why must they present coming out only as it is understood by mainstream straight culture? There are many unexplored possibilities in gay cinema. Why not provide young gay men with alternative role models? Why portray effeminate gay men as foolish, sex obsessed, insecure and gender confused individuals (effectively making them points of laughter)?

To truly recognize and empower the diversity of gay identity, in any context, be it India or the United States, filmmakers should provide more holistic, heterogeneous accounts of the

gay experience. As promiscuity is more accepted within gay circles, why not portray this sexual expression as something positive? Why not also provide the story of a healthy, monogamous relationship? Both experiences are valid representations of the gay experience. Both are also experiences largely ignored by gay film. Though this is certainly an issue for the Western media, it is also of relevance to the Indian context.

As Western Gay cinema continues to reach wider global audiences, its content should be thought about critically. Role models play a crucial role for young gay men, particularly closeted young men, because these role models provide a key space for expression and reflection on their sexuality, a comfort space unavailable in traditionally heterosexual home life. Though gay media reaches only a select Indian audience, it is an important gay audience because it is an audience that has itself been “coming out,” individually and communally. Watch these films, critique them, and take from them what is relevant to your experience. After watching a film at a film festival in New York last summer on ageism in the gay community, I realized how few or how lacking our gay role models are. Hearing the stories of older gay men in this documentary made me realize just how important their stories were to understand. There is much to learn about the gay experience, and I, as a gay viewer, would like to hear more of these stories.

Curt

Know your rights

If the police pick you up, you are entitled to legal protection:

1. You have a right to know why you are being arrested.
2. You have a right to be bail (if you are arrested for a *bailable* offence).
3. You have to be produced in a Magistrate’s court within 24 hours of your arrest.

4. You have a right to consult a lawyer of your choice.
5. You are entitled to free legal aid from the time you are produced in court if you can’t afford a lawyer.
6. If you ask, the police must inform a friend/relative/person you trust about where you are being detained.
7. The police officer must record in his case diary the name of the person informed about your arrest.
8. Any arrest made in violation of any of the points mentioned above is illegal and the police officer who arrested you is liable for prosecution.
Remember! Police don’t have the right to extort money from you, blackmail you, or physically or verbally abuse you.

(From a leaflet printed by Coalition for Sexuality Minority Rights)

Dear Darling...

Dear Darling, I am gay and I want to come out to my family and friends. How should I do this?

Want to be out

Dear Want:

Coming out can be as easy and natural as it can be difficult and dramatic. Instead of coming out all of a sudden, you could preferably prepare your family for it gradually. The following suggestions may help:

Talk to your siblings about differences in people, their aspirations and needs. Talk about how different people have different beliefs and attitudes, and how these have changed over the years with time. Examples of this include slavery and dowry. Healthy discussions about other issues, such as homosexuality and abortion, will help to open minds.

Leave around books, articles, and clippings of gay issues.

If possible, watch movies, with gay themes, with parents or siblings.

Remember that coming out does not necessarily mean that you have to verbally announce your sexuality. It can be also “understood” or “implied” or some such variation, such as “I haven’t told them directly, but I have given them enough hints about it. They don’t bother me about marriage anymore, so they most definitely know!”

Safer Sex Information

What is Safer Sex?

Safer Sex is a means of protecting yourself from catching infections from your sex partner. These infections could be STIs like gonorrhea, Hepatitis B, or HIV.

Safer Sex includes practices like kissing, hugging, massaging, fantasizing, mutual masturbation, body rubbing, or using a condom for penetrative sex. Additionally, always having protected sex (using condoms), if you have multiple partners, is safer.

Since penetrative sex (anal or vaginal sex) carries the highest risk for the transmission of HIV, using a condom will cut down the risk.

Why should I have safer sex?

Safer Sex means different things to different people. It could mean that you respect your own life as well as your partner’s. Since AIDS is an incurable condition, caused by HIV getting into your blood stream and killing your immune system, using condoms will help prevent you from catching the virus.

It can also prevent other sexually transmitted infections from getting into your body. This way you can still enjoy sex without raising the risk of catching an infection.

If you have multiple partners, safer sex can help you enjoy sex without worrying about catching an infection or passing it along. Safer sex is also about having protected sex with one

single partner

Are condoms the only way to have safer sex?

You can be inventive in your sex life. Include safer activities like kissing, hugging, body rubbing, hugging, massaging, fantasizing, cuddling, mutual and self-masturbation and others. But it is best to use condoms for safer penetrative sex.

What about oral sex?

The jury is still out on the risk factors of oral sex leading to HIV entering the body. Due to the large incidence of bleeding gums, it is considered safer to use condoms for oral sex.

One recent study suggested that around 8% of Male HIV cases (out of 102) were through oral contact. These patients reported oral problems including occasional bleeding gums which may have led to infection (*CDC - NCHSTP, Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention. Presentation at the 7th National Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections*). However there are disagreements.

The safest bet is to use condoms. Flavoured condoms (banana, strawberry and others) are available in the market. There is also a brand of whiskey flavoured condoms!

Buying a condom

1. Where do I get a condom?

One of the least discussed issues when it comes to safer sex is not using a condom, but buying one - considering the embarrassment that men connect to it. Most men go to chemist shops to get them or prefer getting them from condom dispensing machines anonymously. But if you have decided to have sex and would like to adopt safer sex methods buying a condom has to be the next step. Chemist shops, most departmental stores, or even NGOs working with sexual health are some of the best places to get condoms.

Choose a place with which you are comfortable. If it is easier, go to a shop in an

area that you don’t live in. But understand and explain to yourself that is better to be embarrassed about asking for a condom and using it, than not using one and ending up with STIs like HIV.

2. I can’t buy condoms, it is too



embarrassing.

You have to decide whether protecting yourself from HIV and other STIs is important to you or not. Buy condoms from shops in areas that you don’t live in. Or stock up and buy them when you are not in your city. Do something and get them. It’s safer to be embarrassed being seen buying condoms than to learn you have STI later because you didn’t use them.

Eroticising condoms

1. Condoms are too cumbersome to use

True, putting on a condom just when you’ve got yourself worked up over your partner can be irritating and trying on your nerves. But it is an important step to protect both of you. So

try and eroticise using condoms in your sexual relationships. Include wearing a condom as part of your foreplay.

2. I don’t know how to use a condom

Read up on all the available information on how to use a condom. Go through them very carefully understanding what you can and can’t do. Try masturbating wearing condoms, using water-based lubricants to increase sensitivity if you wish, to make yourself comfortable using them.

3. What if the condom tears when I’m having sex?

Don’t Panic. Gently bear down and ease the condom out. Try and figure out what went wrong so there is lesser chance of it happening again. Don’t use bleach or detergents to wash yourself, you could end up doing more damage. Be more careful the next time.

Tips for using a Condom

1. Choose a good brand of condoms

It is wisest to choose brands that are quality tested and state this clearly. Brands like Durex and KS are popular brands electronically tested. KS also comes in banana, strawberry and other flavours.

2. Keep the condoms handy

Carry your condoms with you all the time even if you think you don’t need them. Keep them in places you might have sex. You never know when you might need them.

3. Be careful with the condom

Condoms are made from latex / rubber, too much heat can damage them. So keep them in a safe and cool place. Don’t keep the condoms between your keys and small change. The sharp edges can tear the package and the condom.

4. Condoms don’t last forever

Always check the expiry date on a condom

before you buy them. If you've kept them for a long time and don't know how old they are, throw them away and get a new one. Old condoms are just as unsafe as sex without condoms. Condoms usually have an expiry date of two or three years.

5. Open the condom carefully

Don't open the package with your teeth. Carefully tear open one side, taking care not to tear the rubber, and ease the condom out onto your palm.

6. Using the condoms

Hold the condom by the closed end and squeeze out any air. Add the water-based lubricant inside the condom to increase sensitivity. Don't use too much inside because the condom might slip off. Roll the condom right down the erect penis. Get your partner to do it for you. Make sure you do this even before any pre-ejaculate comes out. Uncircumcised men may need to roll back their foreskin before putting it on. Smooth out any air bubbles inside the condom. Add water-based lubricant outside the condom.

7. Use Water Based Lubricants

Using lubricants is essential for penetrative sex because they cut down the risk of the condom tearing. Lubricants like KY Jelly (distributed by Johnson and Johnson) are available in the market. Whatever lubricant you buy, they have to be water based.

8. Don't use oil based lubricants

Vaseline, Vegetable Oil, Baby Oil, Skin Moisturisers, Margarine are not lubricants to be used with a condom. The latex reacts with the oil leading to rot and will make it tear.

9. Two condoms at once may not be a good idea

Putting a condom over another to double your protection may sound like a good idea. But it isn't. The condoms rubbing against each other will increase the chances of either or both tearing. So use only one condom and use water-based lubricant liberally.

10. Use each condom once

After sex, withdraw holding on to the base of the condom to make sure it doesn't slip off. Then dispose them. Latex condoms aren't made for reuse. If you've used a condom once, throw them away. Use a new one each time.

11. Dispose used condoms properly

The sewage system was not built to drain condoms. Don't throw used condoms down the toilet, they'll cause blockages in the drain. Tie a knot on the condom after use, put them into a small paper cover and dispose them in a garbage bin.

Lesbians and Bisexual women

1. Are Lesbians at risk for HIV?

If you use IV drugs and share your needles, if you have unprotected sex with men, or have oral sex with an infected woman without protection, you could be at risk for HIV.

2. What kind of safer sex is best for lesbians and bisexual women?

If you have oral sex, use dental dams (available in medical supply stores or dental stores - since they are commonly used in dental clinics) and prevent blood or vaginal fluid entering your mouth, especially if you have bleeding gums or cuts or ulcers in your mouth. Look at safer forms of having sex including mutual masturbation, body rubbing, hugging, kissing and others.

If you have sex with men then ensure protection by getting your male partner to use a condom.

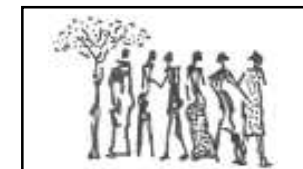
3. What about Female Condoms?

Female Condoms or Femidoms made their appearance in India some time back. But they are not yet as popular as male condoms are. However, they are very effective in protecting a woman from STIs or pregnancy.

(from www.swabhava.org, 2002)

Stories

Happy and gay till that evening...



"Gejje has had an accident. He's at the Victoria Hospital" informed the shrill, lisp voice of my queer friend, Nikhil (K being silent) over the phone.

"He was driving down the crammed Kempe Gowda Road traffic, when he was distracted by a pair of swinging buttocks in skin-tight jeans" Nikhil continued speaking expressly.

"And then what happened"? I asked, curiosity brimming over.

"He craned his neck backwards to see the face of the buttocks' owner, lost sight of the road in front of him, and banged his Bajaj into a cow right in the middle of the road"! Nikhil exclaimed.

"Is it serious"? I asked fearing the worst.

"No, Just a few bruises and a hairline fracture on his left leg. He doesn't want anybody to visit him in the hospital. Too embarrassed, I guess" Nikhil guffawed.

I suppressed a spontaneous giggle picturing podgy Gejje sprawled helplessly on the poor fat cow. His glasses broken into tiny diamonds, his bright floral shirt ripped open to reveal his hirsute beer-belly with the sacred, chiku-coloured brahminical thread around it.

Done in by a pair of seducing buttocks in his greed to stud-watch even while driving. Ha.

Gejje is his gay nick. His actual name is Manick. One of the richest gays in Bangalore, he does not have a single caring bone in his body. His obscene, but scrupulously hidden wealth accounts for his haughty approach towards lesser equals like me.

"Listen, I have heard that a busload of Malayalees are staying at The Chancery next to Cubbon Park. The queens' are meeting this evening at 7:30 in the park. Let's try our luck" Nikhil lisped eagerly expecting me to reply in the affirmative.

"Er...I have a cousin's wedding to attend. I can't make it." I lied.

Gays are not hyenas to hunt for guys in packs. Hunting in packs, has, with the monotonous regularity of a baby peeing in his sleep, led to disastrous consequences for gays - Starvation for each one of us. I enjoy the company of my camp friends only if I am in a mood for camping. That day, I was incredibly horny and I didn't want a gaggle of gays to spoil my weekend.

It was 5:30 pm on that Friday evening when I hurriedly excused myself and put down the receiver, disappointing Nikhil, a shy and effeminate

fashion-designer who is terrified of hitting the streets alone.

Knikhil does not have any scruples whatsoever in having surreptitious sex without the knowledge of his lover; M. Or that's what Knikhil thinks. M, according to gossip, knows too well about Knikhil's sexual waywardness and to spite him, he goes on a fucking and sucking spree at all the public toilets in Bangalore.

I drove home, showered, changed into smart-casuals and stepped outside. All ready for a night of steamy sex, I started my gearless Kinetic Honda which doesn't exactly require tons of testosterone to drive.

"Why do you ride a lady's bike"? Anushree, my pretty but pesky teenage neighbour and ex-girlfriend of several boys - some of whom were heartbroken and most relieved - had once asked me. To which I had rudely retorted in a polite tone "Why don't you make up your mind Anushree, and settle for one boy instead of junking boys like your mom discards your monthly stack of newspapers to the paperwallah." Stung, she has stopped speaking to me since then.

I began to drive at a leisurely pace. The sky was pregnant with heavy burnt-charcoal clouds which suffocated the 6 pm sun. Monsoon hung heavily in the mid-July air of Bangalore. An emaciated street dog with droopy eyes was pissing on the low compound wall of a government school on which a message from SPCA was painted in thick black letters - STOP KILLING STREET DOGS. SAVE THEM. The butterscotch piss of the dog fell in a disciplined line on the I in KILLING, extending the I to the ground.

Two thick drops of rain fell on my eyes which caused my eyes to flutter and close for an instant. The drops turned into a drizzle. The fresh smell of the earth when it is first ploughed by rain, intoxicated my olfactory senses. This aroma was soon overpowered by the stench of urine from a public toilet. The drizzle turned into a downpour and hammered my helmetless head.

Drenched, I quickly parked my scooter at the KSRTC parking lot. The downpour reverted to a drizzle which formed beautiful concentric circles on the puddle across which I jumped with my dainty feet. Two boys - who, in the course of the evening were about to create history in my ten years of happy homosexual life - were standing close to a theatre screening a Kannada film starring Ananth Nag. They were huddled together under a tarpaulin shelter of an adjacent chai shop. The chai-shop owner, a double-chinned man with tea-bags in his hand and bigger bags under his eyes, appeared crabby either at the incessant rain for ruining his peak business hour or at the boys for obstructing his customers wanting to have hot cups of watery teas.



I stopped at a safe, unsuspecting but hearing distance from the boys, both in their early 20's. I was planning my opening line to them. At a closer, more extended inspection the taller of the two guys was earth-shakingly good-looking. Goosebumps erupted on my skin. He had an earthy, raw-sex appeal about him.

Very, very eatable.

His guava-green eyes were highlighted by thin kohl lines. A papad-thin mustache bordered his upper, strawberry lip. His cheese like cheeks were bridged by a beautiful aquiline nose which seemed to be crafted by nature after years of backbreaking work. His black-grape hair was

parted on one side - a tuft of which repeatedly fell to his forehead. He used his hairless, cornflake brown hand in a stylish way to brush it back. He was dressed in a garrish Kurta pyjama which concealed his lean, taut body. A body and face for which I could kill.

The shorter boy would have been a dwarf if he was a couple of inches shorter. To understand the true meaning of 'opposite' in the phrase 'opposites attract' one should see these two guys. The shorter boy was spectacularly ugly. Dressed in a white T-shirt and imitation Lee jeans, he had a face that could easily replace a mask in a horror movie in which scantily clad, voluptuous women scream their lungs out and run with their tits jiggling, on seeing them.

Whenever a breeze blew, strong enough to carry snatches of their conversation to my ears, I understood that they were butchers and were on their way to the slaughter house when rain had intervened.

The drizzle by now had reverted to being slow, tiny drops. The sky was shaking off its last few drops after a contended pee.

For some unfathomable reason I saw something criminal about the good-looking boy. It must have been some English suspense movie I had seen eons ago, in which the hero similar to this boy I was drooling over, turned out to be the surprise maniac killer in the end.

I tried hard to read the inscrutable, impenetrable minds of the two boys; HorrorFace and CriminalFace. I had no idea the depths - like Bangalore's potholes, my potential sex-mates would sink to. My brain exhorted me to flee. My raging hormones suggested otherwise.

In retrospect, I feel the boys had no problems in reading my lust-filled eyes and my campish -body language. HorrorFace and CriminalFace were too willing when I suggested that we go to a lodge. It was their immediate willingness to come with me that should have alerted me. But when your mind and body is swamped with the quicksand of lust - there is nothing that can be done except sink into it. Still, somewhere, a tiny part of my cautious

brain wondered; whether, after a hopefully satisfying copulation I could buy them over them with fifty bucks each, in case they turned nasty.

We began to walk to a nearby lodge where Gejje had once taken one of my hand-me-downs. While walking silently, I kept giving sidelong glances at the boys. We checked into the slatternly, sleazy lodge close to the bus stand. The gaunt, and bored looking receptionist did not bother to ask for our baggage. A wiry, cute and therefore arrogant roomboy with a flamboyant gait and a distinct Dharwad-Kannada accent, ushered us into our rooms on the way to which I couldn't help seeing different vermilion-shades of paan-spit generously sprayed from the unthinking mouths of countless former guests. Paint was peeling off the cheap wooden doors and windows. The smell of fried fish swaddled the dim-interiors of the lodge.

I had already started planning devious ways to seduce the arrogant room boy. Arrogance in my boys, has always been a big turn on for me. It could be because of the sheer delight of seeing their arrogance crumble once I start using my tongue, nails and arse with the consummate ease of a thoroughbred whore.

Once inside the pinched and airless room, for a few awkward moments we did not know what to do or say to each other. A rusted iron cot lay disinterested and overused in a sad corner. A once-upon-a-time pristine white bedspread hid an anorexic mattress. An ancient fan hung desolately from the ceiling with fluffs of dust clinging precariously to the corner of its blades.

Cigarette-butts, half-smoken beedis and match-sticks lay scattered on the unswept, red-oxide floor. A termite-eaten window opened out to the inside of the lodge, from where I could see the scruffy doors and windows of the other rooms. Light from a 40-watt bulb light stole itself out of a crack in the door directly opposite our window and spilled onto my peeping face.

The faded blue walls had graffiti scrawled all over it. Various heterosexual acts of the

human species were artistically drawn by pens and pencils of previous straight occupants of the room. 'A cock is the lightest thing in the world. It can be lifted by mere thoughts' read one particularly naughty graffiti bringing an instant smile onto my lips.

The boys had comfortably plonked themselves on the grimy, coffee-stained, beer-stained, piss-stained, vomit-stained, semen-stained bed. They were completely nonchalant and oblivious to the riot of stains under their nubile butts. I was enveloped in total joy which arose from my anticipated romp with CriminalFace.

"Abbey Gaandu! Kya chahiye tumhe? Hamara Louda?" bellowed HorrorFace. CriminalFace had loosened the drawstrings of his pyjama and it fell into a crumpled heap on a bewildered cockroach eating its supper of a stale banana chip. His knee-high, shocking-pink kurta hid his desirable love-muscle.

HorrorFace clutched my hair at the back of my head and viciously pushed me to the ground towards CriminalFace who had by now, raised his flowing kurta to reveal his underwearless crotch. His circumcised prick was lean and long. Easily the superstar of pricks, it was the longest I had seen in my entire life. Below this angry young prick clung two smooth, deep-fried jamoons waiting to be licked and devoured. Not yet erect, his prick was swinging like Anaconda ready to spit on my face.

"Mooh me leh lo, chakka" a baritone voice commanded me. For one hallucinatory moment I thought that the superstar of pricks was speaking to me. Quickly, I realised that the voice belonged to CriminalFace. I hesitated - even though I was overcome by excitement, because HorrorFace had gripped my hands and turned it backwards in such a way that I could not wriggle out of the situation.

CriminalFace's tantalisingly long dick with its two jamoons was close to my mouth.

HorrorFace gave a stinging whack on my head "Kissko bol rahe hai hum? Leh loh!"

HorrorFace was turning out to be more criminal than CriminalFace. I began to wish I was the spit on the staircase walls or the rust on the iron cot - the very filth I wanted to flee from just a few minutes ago. They would have ignored me completely if I was a part of the inanimate surroundings.

"Death is better than being a homo. At least it is natural". HorrorFace continued speaking in Russel Market Urdu, by which time I had begun to plead in servile tones. He whipped out a gleaming, wicked looking pocket knife from his Kurta and put it exactly where I feared - at my throat- The Knife felt sharp and clammy. I was petrified. My heartbeat stopped abruptly. Was I going to be butchered? Killing was their roti. Being butchers, they were used to seeing life wither away if front of their eyes. Death was an everyday ritual for them.

So what difference would another killing mean to them? I would get my 15 minutes of fame in the following day's newspaper, an item tucked away in the left bottom corner of the 3rd page, headlined in 10 points "Gay found murdered and naked in city lodge".

The knife brought out unpleasant memories from inside me. In a similar situation, in another room, in another city in another country - UAE, homophobic ruffians had thrashed an Arab queen who was a friend of mine and robbed him of his 500 dirhams and all his dignity.

"Kuch nahin Karna. Jo bhi chahiye le loh please" I uttered, surprised at the calmness in my voice. Inside I was a wobbling wreck, and I was secretly pleased that I did not sound terrified. My Titan watch worth Rs.1500/ gifted by my Mom on my 21st birthday, was unceremoniously unstrapped. I let HorrorFace fish into my trouser pocket and remove my wallet containing Rs. 750/- and some loose change. He took the money, rummaged through my other pockets, disappointed after finding nothing, threw the wallet on my lap.

Still half naked, CriminalFace kicked me on my trembling butt. I fell on the ground with a streetdogish whimper. He tied his drawstrings with the urgency of a reckless motorist jumping

the red signal.

"Kissi ko math bathana..Varna..." he left the sentence incomplete, menacingly showing the itching-to-get-at-my-throat knife. Before I could even flutter my eyelids, they were gone. My gay throat was safe.

The volcano of sexual energy waiting to erupt from within me, on seeing CriminalFace was smothered by a shower of deceit, evil and hate. A gamut of emotions see-sawed through my heart. From fright to anger to humiliation and self-hate. I was too drained and relieved to raise myself from the ground, let alone raise a ruckus. Besides, what story would I tell the lodge owners and the police?

Feeling cheated and humbled, I slowly got up and sat on the bed. The stains did not matter any longer. I sat there quietly, trying to steady my jangled nerves, listening to my own breathing for 15 agonising minutes before I got up, locked the door and handed over the keys to the receptionist.



Moneyless, I gingerly stepped outside, still shaking and half-expecting HorrorFace and CriminalFace to pounce on me. The rain had stopped completely. The air was crisp and as fresh as a new-born baby. A thorough loser that evening, I ambled along with slow, heavy steps. A strong breeze blew from across the bus stand. A nearby puddle trembled and quivered.

As if it was mocking me.

Vishwas

A Night to Remember

I shall never forget the first time I saw him. I never thought he would make a big difference in my life. I was not prepared for it.

It was mid-March, and I was in this strange place for the first time, filled with people like me. Surrounded by hunks, gorgeous and cute guys (man was I in heaven!) I was dancing away to the rhythm played by the DJ in this most happening club in the Capital. I was there with my new friends and my date for the night. Then I saw him, dressed in a blue see-through shirt with blue eyes and glittering all over. Dancing on the podium, he was grabbing all the attention of the guys present. I stopped dancing and began watching him. He was simply great. It was as though the music was made just for him. Like me, all the other dancers were admiring him. I was drawn by the simplicity in his face, his body's rise and fall matching to the music.

I felt a nudge on my elbow. My date was getting impatient, and he took me out of the trance I was in. (Actually, he was feeling jealous that I was not paying any attention to him). As time slowly crept by, the crowd started dispersing, some finding new partners for the night, some already with their respective partners embracing each other. I was drawn to him much more than before, but I didn't have the courage to talk to him. I wanted him to know me. I wanted an image of myself to enter

his mind and stay there forever.

But, how was I to approach him? He was surrounded by admirers and friends. It was closing time, and my friends wanted to leave as well. As I was leaving, I felt disappointed and disturbed by the fact that I may never see him again. At the door, we were stopped by one of his friends and seeing that we were all visitors to the city, he introduced himself to us, and to his other friends. He offered to buy us a drink.

Suddenly, I realised that he was staring at me. Now he was smiling, or was I dreaming? He beckoned me to his table and my heart began pounding like an empty drum. I went to him.

"Hi, what's your name?", he asked. "Ashley," I said, "And you?" "Manu," he stated.

Hey! We were going to be friends ...

Deepak

A Time to Mourn

"He was a pillar of the Church ...," the priest droned on. Pillar, hah! He was more like the Shivalingam of the Church with the milky Ganges spouting from its tip. Whatever was that sister of his drying her eyes for. Bitch! Angel always lamented she wouldn't discuss his woes with him. She'd just pretend the whole thing didn't exist. When Riaz ditched him and he went crying to her room, she started telling him how upset she was her tomato sauce tasted like pudding. Whore! Her angel was a sweetheart, her angel never looked at girls, her angel certainly didn't letch at guys, her angel was a born actor, a born comedian, those tears weren't real, it was just that her angel could act so convincingly he didn't need glycerin, her angel, her poor angel died of cancer – not AIDS – bitch, she killed him, if she had listened, he wouldn't have gone crazy painting the town pink, tempting the furies and the Bug.

Funny they named him Angel – considering the things he liked to do with men, he would

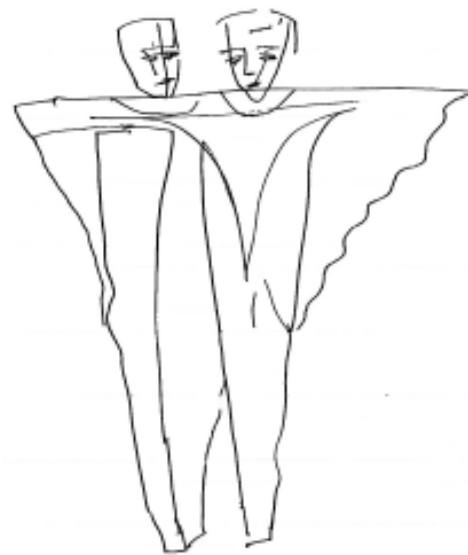
have had a miserable time getting the wings out of the way. Talking of angels, there is Lucifer himself, looking somber and perfectly ridiculous in his black sherwani. Funny how murderers make a religion out of attending their victim's funeral. I wonder how many Catholics he's sent to glory everlasting. He knows the responses by heart. He didn't see me though. How could I ever have fallen for his looks, his transparent serpentine guile – serpentine as in the serpent of Eden – that's nice, I'm thinking erudite, maybe I'm getting scholarly, even religious! I mean that Eden bit sounds like I got a doctorate in comparative religion.

"Lift up your hearts ..."

My heart, yes, but not my butt, I'm not standing, forget kneeling for this mumbo-jumbo. That hypocrite Riaz is kneeling now. I'm sure he gets kicks thinking how he's done in one more Catholic. He never forgave that Jesuit who molested him in school – and I thought he was praying when he started coming for Mass to take me for a ride! I almost went Angel's way. Coming to think of it, that's what made me fall for Riaz. His acting, his mannerisms, the way he pulled faces, the way he'd pout when I said I had night-duty and just couldn't bunk it. That, and the fact he's Muslim. Muslim, ha! Lucifer is a kafir if ever one existed, but still he was circumcised and I have a fixation for circumcised cocks – Muslim, not Jewish – I'm not anti-Semitic, it's just that the Jews I know are so cocky and self-assured (as if they were Einstein's kids and had siblings in Mossad), and have such ghastly olive complexions that I ... well, they turn me off; for chrissake, I shouldn't be thinking like this, after all, it is Angel's funeral. Poor thing, he wasn't an actor, Angel was actually a seminarian, if he hadn't left the seminary when he did, he would have gone crazy. He wasn't philosophical, he was just a kid and too sentimental at that; when he cheated on his God, he left the seminary, and when Riaz cheated on him, he promptly went on a death spree and they say he hated rubber. Well, that was asking for it. I wonder whether we've slept with the same guys. There's Riaz of course, but Riaz doesn't have it so I probably don't have it. Besides I use rubber for the real

thing and I'd better start using it for the other thing. I heard Saul doesn't use them either. There he is, Holy Virgin, a Jew in Church, but what the heck, I'm not anti-Semitic, I'm not even a Catholic, a lapsed Catholic perhaps. Hey! I'm really getting erudite, well, say fluent and articulate – articulate, bullshit, I still stammer when Riaz looks at me like that.

*"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away.
Change and decay in all around I see
O Thou Who changest not, abide with me!"*



There goes Mother Church, crooning lullabies to put the sons of Sodom and Gomorrah to sleep. We aren't your kids mama Rome. We got exchanged in hospital. Save your stupid songs for your real offspring – the kind who go forth and multiply, and not in their Catholic homes either, I've seen them queue up in Lalbagh for quickies. Lalbagh of all places! At least our Cubbon Park's got class. And they call us perverts! Well, damn them and their Catholic souls! Saul's weeping. Sop! His namesake killed Christians, became one and then fought with the first Pope so that Christians could keep their foreskins. Damn him and his namesake! Well, at

least he cared for Angel. I think he had a crush on him. Riaz tried to hook Saul as well, but Saul's not dumb, after all, he is Jewish and Malayalee at that. Riaz likes Jews. I think he's got a complex about being Muslim. I mean, he hates Palestinians and loves Jews. And he loves being called Lucifer. Luci for short, Luci sounds like Lucy – very queeny and camp, very pansy – the perfect stereotype. But Riaz isn't pansy, he's Adonis. He's got Lucifer's looks except they say Lucifer is straight. Mama Rome thinks Lucifer is straight, or else she would have burnt wizards and not witches on the stakes. How could I fall for his looks? He's got problems in life and not just about being Muslim. He's got problems with being gay, about being handsome, about everything; which is probably why he likes playing with other guys, it gives his neurotic self kicks to see guys go crazy about him. I'm not on that list. I haven't gone crazy. I never believed in "falling in love" to start with. The phrase itself sounds funny, like Lucifer's falling from grace – whatever that means. I just used Riaz to confirm what I already believed. I didn't go crying to big sister. I didn't get drunk. I didn't get suicidal painting Cubbon Park pink, well at least not the way Angel did.

The Bug's really eaten this guy. I mean his coffin is so light. Three of his four pallbearers are gay. There's Saul and he's looking at me queerly – that's what they call us – queers. Lucifer in his sherwani and David – that's Angel's kid brother – are hoisting Angel's feet. Can't those guys coordinate? They're running and making Saul and me stumble in the slush. The clouds are gathering again. Does it never stop raining in this accursed place? At least now padre will stop acting solemn and get over with this instead of dragging it on like he loves to.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth in me though he were dead yet shall he live and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Mother of God! They're putting Angel away. My poor Angel; I sang with him in the choir. No, I'm not a sop like Saul. He's looking at me again. We are all going to die. Last Sunday at Cubbon Park, they were saying he'd got cancer.

He had Kaposi's all over his face for chrissake, and they say he's got cancer! Cancer's fine, but no one's talking about the Bug, and half of them actually saw him doing it! Maybe, that's why they're blind. They know we are all dying and it's just like Indians to pretend we're not. Fools! I'm patriotic enough but I'm not a fool. Ken's from the States and he says rubber is religion there. But Indians, we'll attain common sense when we attain salvation, or damnation ... whatever. Maybe the existential jokers have a point. We'll all die and therefore life's one big joke.



"Let's get out of here. Why don't you drop in at my place?"

Just like a Jew to make a pass at a funeral. But I do need to get away. Besides, it's going to rain and Saul's got a bike. The road's slippery and the joker is speeding. At this rate, we won't need the Bug to kill us.

"Take it easy, honey!"

"Relax, Paddy! I know what I'm doing and it's going to pour. We'll just about make it. And sit closer, I won't rape you. I'll lose my balance if you keep perching at the end."

Well, that does it. He's slim, my type and quite attractive, never mind the olive complexion. And it makes me feel kinky that he's taking me home – he's never invited Riaz.

Besides, right now, we need each other. I'm sure Luci's cruising in the Park, hunting for fresh prey. But Saul doesn't like rubber. Frankly, neither do I. Either way, Indian rubbers are sub-standard; the WHO says so. Those jokers in Delhi have family planning in their thick skulls when they make rubbers. The Bug, however, is smaller than the male seed and gets through Indian rubbers like nobody's business and will help the stupid Government cut the world's largest democracy to size in more ways than originally planned. And whoever thought up flavoured condoms! I mean, if I wanted strawberry, I'd go to Snow White's Ice Cream Parlour. Besides, even doctors aren't sure about the actual risk involved in oral intercourse. At any rate, I'm sick of sex – and men. Maybe, I'll become a priest.

"Why don't you stay over?"

"Why not?" I'm going to relish celibacy. But I'll stay back. His skin is smooth like an olive. Oh, oh! No kidding – this will be the last time.

Pratap

Jeeves and the postmodern tie that binds

After a night out with the boys, where 'revelry' and 'gay abandon' were the watchwords, I had crept into bed in the wee hours, just as the flocks of birds (dashed idiots!) were beginning their vocal exercises without. One does not lightly forget such a night. One cannot, even if one wished to. I had only dim recollections.

Pongo and Bingo and the rest of the lads were there, I recall. But, for now, a solid eight hours of the beauty rest was what old Bertram needed to restore that schoolgirl complexion to the cheek and remove the furrow of the brow.

I was having these rather odd dreams involving some new chap I was introduced to last night. He was coughing. EXACTLY LIKE JEEVES would, when he wishes to draw the

master's attention to something of a delicate nature. I cursed this bloke for imitating Jeeves. I mean to say, he (Jeeves) is such a frightfully brilliant chap, eats a lot of fish to keep his brain well-oiled and all that, and here is this very odd-looking chap imitating Jeeves! It was quite thick, I don't mind telling you. And just as I thought it was getting even thicker, I heard the gentle cough again, and this time a gentle intonation.

"Good morning, sir. I am sorry to disturb you, sir, but there is a gentleman to see you." And Jeeves, normally a very polite bird, had this air about him as if to say that he was not responsible.

This WAS thick! I groaned. In body and spirit. I mumbled something to the effect, "Oh, how could you, Jeeves, at this unearthly hour? ..."

"I am sorry, sir, but the gentleman is insistent on having a brief word with you. He says he is visiting from the United States of Northern America, where he is employed as a purveyor of geographical learning. If you would care to, sir, perhaps this restorative might assist you in coping with the situation."

What a life-saver, he, this Jeeves! His pick-me-up was just what I needed. The man had rallied round to the master like a champ. I gulped it down. After what seemed like a violent war within, peace returned and I was ready to take on a dozen, if not scores of, irritating visitors. "Shoo the excrescence in, Jeeves, shoo him in," I cried with aplomb (I think that's the word I have heard Jeeves use once).

Shortly, the visitor was among us. Of all the people on this earth, it had to be this odd duck I had been introduced to last night. I could not, for the life of me, remember his name. Jeeves, always the rallier-rounder, announced him, with not a touch of the austere air of a butler who thought he had seen everything, but now was thrown another googly, "The Professor Chain-draw, sir."

I know you think it is impossible to reel while lying in bed. I reeled.

What an odd name, that! Chap looked like he might be from India. I made a mental note to myself to have a well-chosen word with the management of the Drones about their admission standards.

"HULLO, BURRTEE!! HOW YOU ARE? DID I WAKE YOU UP?? SO, SO, SORRY, NA?"

"Oh, ah, rather. Hullo, hullo, hullo, what?"



Good to see you and all that jazz."

"I had a grreat time lasht night, didnt YOU? Those boys vere all very very nice, as you would say, 'blokes'! heh heh heh..."

"Splendid, splendid, splendid... I say, would you like a snort or something?"

"I beg yuvar pahrdunn...?"

"You know, a gargle, a splash, a drink, a little something to wet the old tonsils ...?"

"Oh, how nice you are! Yes, please, I would like some appul joos. Thank you, Jeevus."

I reeled some more. "Apple juice", did he say?? Ghastly! How is this man able to LIVE? I nodded at Jeeves and added, "And a whiskey and soda for me, Jeeves."

Jeeves looked at me wistfully.

"Very good, sir."

In due course we were with libation, I with the fruit of the gods, he with his muck.

The chappie was squirming rather like he had sat on a giant squid or something. He seemed about to say something difficult.

"Burrtee, I vant to ahsk you sumthhing. ..."

"Ask away, Drawchainbridge, old chap."

He looked puzzled for a moment, shook his head, and went on.

"I couldnt help noticing lasht night that your vertical expression of horizontal intentions, vis-a-vis the larger milieu chez Drones vith specific body-texts possessing clearly articulated, unique, often even whimsical, labels expressing your desires in very novel constructions, and often creating a proximity of texts, your own, and the others', with the interstices among the said texts asymptotically approaching zero, and a resultant tension along/across the boundaries of the individual body-texts in brownianly-constructed motion on the arena of the free-flowing texts ..."

My head was swimming. I looked at Jeeves. His eyebrow flickered. He coughed that cough of his.

"Pardon me for interrupting, sir. I believe the gentleman is complimenting you on your very close dancing style last night with your other gentleman friends. Apparently, he found the dance-floor rather chaotic."

I groaned silently and reached for my glass again. I needed it, you know.

This cove was not one to be stopped so easily.

"... I vas left interrogating the possibility/probability that your male body and the other male bodies vere really texts of constructed desires transcending the boolean categorical texts, moving freely among the boundaries in different modalities — e.g., in verbal discourse, talking about persons such as Madeleine Bassett and the like; in enactments, expressing the mutuality of your own intertextual desires based upon originary intratextual imaginings which you seemed to be somehow reifying — and speculating on the narrative that was unfolding there, on the dance floor, based on the locus you were describing, vether you and the other "lads" vere engaged in reading each other erotically..."

Jeeves' eyebrows were raised a full sixteenth of an inch. He was clearly disturbed. But, anyone who belongs to the Ganymede, cannot be an ordinary butler. Jeeves, I'll have you know, was anything but ordinary. But, there was no mistaking that he was quite, quite disturbed.

"Sir, the gentleman, I believe, is wondering if you are romantically involved with your other gentleman friends and stating that you talk about your lady friends and also are close to your gentleman friends."

"Eh?"

Then, it hit me! This strange-looking professorial bird, Chaindrawbridge or whatever the dickens his name was, is not quite as daffy as he looks. He had, as he had a habit of saying, "read" me! I just wish he would have spoken more like a human than like one of those, those, the word slips my mind at the moment, but I am thinking of these bespectacled, oddly-dressed fellows who wear jewelry and speak with funny gestures and wear a demeanor of general Disapproval. What had evaded so many of my acquaintances — and I have many of these, owing to my having to undertake frequent travel, often at a moment's notice trying to avoid my aunt Agatha (she being the one that is known to chew on broken bottles and eat babies on new moon nights — a most frightful bird!) — he had 'read' so quickly.

I spoke up. It was time for me to say this.

"I say, old bird, you couldn't speak properly, could you? I mean to say, what's with all these poly-syllabic twisty turny applesauce talk? Yes, my dear chap, when I referred to my friends as a "gaggle of gay lads", I did mean "gay" lads. How very ... what's the word, Jeeves?..."

"Astute, sir?", he said with a flicker of a smile.

"How very astute of you. They train you well in professor's schools don't they? No, i am not in love with any of the coves I shook my shapely leg with last night ... Yes, Jeeves?"

"Sir?"

"You wish to have speech?" I had seen a tiny twitch from his vicinity. Bertram is very very observant.

"Thank you, sir. I was about to observe that in these postmodern times, the announcement of one's gayness is considered, to borrow a vulgarity, 'kewl', sir. Though violence often is visited upon those who announce it in inappropriate places and times, it does a person great credit. Michel Foucault in his ..."

I waved peremptorily. This had to stop.

"Jeeves!"

"Sir?"

"Another time, what? Perhaps during one of those long winter evenings as we sit by the fire, ..."

"Yes, sir."

"... a glass of champagne, shared between us, I, cozily nestled in your capable ironing, pressing, pick-me-up-concocting arms, my head upon your breast ..."

"Precisely, sir."

"Jeeves! You are a marvel!"

"Thank you, sir. And, if I may be permitted, sir, ..."

"Carry on, Jeeves."

"It gives me great pleasure to be with you, sir. I have taken a great liking to you and would

like nothing more than that arrangement you outlined just a moment ago, for those lengthy winter evenings. The poet Burns says, sir, ..."

"Jeeves!!!"

"I am sorry, sir."

"No, no. Shut up and kiss me."

I mean to say, what?

(with sincere apologies to P.G. "Plum" Wodehouse)

(this piece was published in TriKone magazine)

Chandra

Prerana - a support group for lesbians and bisexual women

A support group for Lesbians and Bisexual women has been long in coming. Bangalore's Sahaya helpline received numerous calls from women who identified as lesbian or bisexual, the need for such a support group was strong.

After much deliberation, a support group was started on 18 December 2000. The group named itself "Prerana" and has been going strong since. The group meets every first and third Sundays of the month.

The support provided by the group to lesbian and bisexual women is immense and several discussions on various issues like family, marriage pressures, employment challenges, social discrimination have taken place. They have also had a screening of the documentary by Nishit Saran: "A Summer in My Veins".

See resources for contact information



Poets Corner



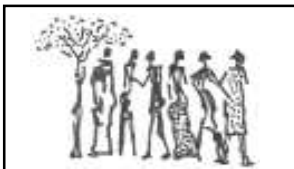
Of time and triangles

There is that time, when I do not wish to live.
Days when I wake up and suddenly realise
that my bed is cold; that no one is waiting
for a new day with me.
That you too are alone in your bed,
and perhaps thinking the same thoughts.
But of someone else.
That is when I wish that time wouldn't exist.
Or at least, triangles wouldn't.

Anonymous

Me, my hopes and my dreams

Life has changed a lot for me
I am not the same person.
I am aware of my sexuality,
Accepted it, without any problems
Always knew that I was different from others
but now I know, what was the difference.
I started as a child discovering about myself and people like me
I hesitated to meet them, now I meet them often.
I talk to them, chat with them, I feel good about it.
I had my share of crushes, got disappointed, cried,
Got depressed but now I am happy with my life.
I am glad that I discovered my sexuality a bit late
But never hurried myself to get laid.
I am taking small steps.
It is not that I do not crave for sex or I do not masturbate
Or I don't feel lonely.
I do, really I do but
Sex has a different definition for me.
It's not satisfying your body but also your soul
I could have get laid with many guys
Whom I met on the net or on the road. But didn't
I am waiting, still waiting for that man,
He is not hot n sexy guy from a porno magazine.
He is intelligent, loving, caring, understanding, romantic,
Lively, smart n sexy in my eyes. Most importantly
He loves me, I love him,
We should be best of friends,
We should live together for the rest of our lives.
Might sound childish for some, outdated for others.



Some may say it's a dream which will never
come true,
Some may say I will die alone and frustrated
But I have faith in myself .
My friend asked me one day,
"Aren't u afraid that u are minority in a
minority?"
I said, " yes I am. I know that I am minority in
my community,
However, I am happy with what I am.
Patience and hope will pay off one day".

Pratik

Silence

Ever wanted to scream and shout?
When u thought,
U had to speak out?
'No, u shall speak not.
U can see,
But not be seen.
Hear u may,
But not be heard.
U can exist,
But u cannot be!!!
Ur speech disturbs,
Ur voice threatens.
That rainbow flag,
Do keep it back,
Let things be,
Plain white and black!!'
No, Speak I must!
For I have always spoken.
Voices, not victims,
Bring revolutions.
I was the Black
Who challenged your paleness.
That woman I was
Who questioned your maleness.
The Dalit I have been,
Who refused your wisdom.
I was the poor
Who fought 'gainst your kingdom!
Now I am
The GAY incarnate.
I shall love on-
Despite your hate!!

Tarun

Book-marks

I read so many storybooks
they are my private world
I read in chairs, in cozy nooks
hunched over, prone or curled
I need to keep reminders
of pages, since long gone
to serve as good pathfinders
to pages yet unborne



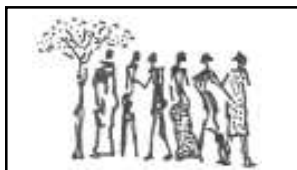
So I make do with bookmarks
as good as I cn get
bus tickets, slips or tree-barks
or postcards from Tibet
But best bookmarks, o wise one
are those that last always
indelible, fragrant, much-fun
each time they meet your gaze
They are the sprays of semen
that shoot across a page
when nerds, just-dudes or he-men
extract a joyous wage
From penises, hot and arched-up
by paragraphs erotic fine
leaving page sixty starched-up
and stuck to page fifty-nine
And as the book ages and yellows
and the pages have wisdom's warm smell
there comes a new gang of fellows
who read those very lines as well!
They pen-knife open the glue-veil
with knowing delighted grin-smile
run trembling fingers over cum-braille
and arch-up to ponder awhile
The Early Anonymous Cummers
that blessed this very page, long past
and left sweet aromas of summers
to last and to last and to last!

(from khush-list@yahooogroups.com)

Sachin

Bangalore's LGBT Diary

1999 - 2002



The last few years witnessed the beginning of a number of new forums for sexuality minorities. Bangalore saw the opening of Sahaya -- a help line for LGBT people, Swabhava -- an NGO working with LGBT issues, Sangama -- a resource centre for sexuality minorities and Prerana -- a lesbian and bisexual women's support group. (For further information please look at the resources page).

Coalition for Sexuality Minority Rights (CSMR), a coalition of Bangalore based groups working with sexuality minority issues, took up the issue of police harassment in public parks was formed in the year 2000. The members of this coalition include Alternative Law Forum, Good As You, Manasa, PUCL (Karnataka), Sabrang, Sangama, Snehashraya, Swabhava and many other supporting groups and individuals. The coalition printed and distributed a leaflet in Kannada and English among men in cruising areas informing them about their legal rights and exhorting them to organize themselves to fight for their rights. The leafleting was launched on the evening of 23rd April. More than 1500 leaflets were distributed in different cruising areas of Bangalore till now. The coalition met the Bangalore City Police Commissioner on 29th April, requesting him to ensure that the police harassment was stopped. He responded positively to the request.

The visit of Peter Lane, a member of the ex-gay organization *Exodus International*, in July 2000 announced the arrival of Bangalore on the international fundamentalist circuit. He visited Bangalore, which he believed was the gay capital of India at the invitation of a Christian fundamentalist and anti-abortion organization 'Respect for Life', Bangalore. *Exodus International* is a worldwide Christian organization that believes homosexuality is learnt behavior and people can get rid of their homosexuality through prayer (to Jesus) and repentance. They call it 'reparative therapy'. There is enough evidence to show that this reparative therapy not only fails in changing people's sexual orientation but also pushes gay / lesbian people into deep depression, guilt and at times suicide. He spoke in public meetings in churches as well as in St Martha's hospital, St. John's Medical College and the National Law School of India. Bangalore's LGBT activists followed Mr. Lane and ensured that he was comprehensively questioned and his homophobia vigorously opposed in all public forums.

PUCL-K came out with a Report on '**Human rights violations against sexuality minorities in India: A fact-finding Report in Bangalore**' during February 2000. The report for the first time documents the violation of the rights of sexuality minorities in various spheres like state (including the police and the law), and by civil society institutions like the family,

medical establishment media, workplace and household space. The Report also documents the further marginalization experienced by bisexuals, hijras and people from a lower class background.

A public meeting titled '**Sexuality minorities speak out**' where gays, lesbians, hijras and bisexuals spoke out about the issues confronting sexuality minorities was held on 1 July 2001. The meeting itself was preceded by a poster campaign in which Bangalore city was plastered by pink posters proudly proclaiming '**Breaking the silence: Sexuality minorities speak out**'. All prominent areas including Jayanagar Complex, Shivajinagar, Brigade Road and Double Road were plastered pink in the days preceding the meeting. The meeting was well attended with over hundred people attending the same and was also well covered by the media the next day.

A public protest was organized at Mysore Bank Circle against the arrests of HIV/AIDS workers under Sec 377 of the IPC in Lucknow. The protest was well attended and had colourful posters titled *gay and proud, love is a basic human right, Indian and lesbian -- so what?* etc. It was the first time that Bangalore's sexuality minorities were occupying public space so openly.

The openly gay judge, Hon. Justice Michael Kirby of the High Court of Australia (equivalent of the Supreme Court of India) visited Bangalore three times in the course of the last three years. He gave lectures at the National Law School of India University and come out as a gay person in the course of the talk. A discussion with members of Bangalore's queer community was also organized. Hon. Justice Edwin Cameron another openly gay judge from South Africa also visited Bangalore during these three years and spoke about being gay as well as living with HIV to judges of the Karnataka High Court and others.

The Institute of Law and Ethics in Medicine of National Law School of India University (NLSIU) organised a two-day consultation on 'Examination of ways and means of building

social capital for the purpose of promoting social change with regard to HIV/AIDS related legal and ethical issues' in the NLSIU campus. There were presentations on queer issues made by members of Bangalore's queer community.

Sangama organized a number of film screenings including *Summer in my veins* directed by Nishit Saran, *Ma Vie En Rose* or 'My Life in Pink', 'The Paper Flowers' by Deepa Krishnan., 'Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun', 'The Wedding Banquet'. There were also a number of public talks in which queer issues were spoken about. The list of speakers included Kieth Godard (a gay activist from Zimbabwe), Ashwini Sukthanker, Swati Shah (lesbian activist), Grace Poore (lesbian feminist), Thomas Waugh (gay film critic), Shivananda Khan (Naz Foundation International) Eva Fels (transsexual from Austria) and many others. This kept the Bangalore queer calendar quite busy!

The Kannada queer group *Snehashraya* also started and they organized a one-day event '*Namma Nimma Milana*' for Kannada-speaking queers to discuss in detail matters of mutual interest, including issues of sexual health, queer sexualities and the law, and remove each other's misconceptions about these matters.

Manohar and Famila from Sangama addressed sexuality minorities' issues at an evening prayer service attended by over 200 people United Theological College (UTC)

Students of the National Law School organized a gay and lesbian film festival for the entire college showing films such as *Go fish*, *Bound*, *Wedding Banquet* and *My Life in Pink*. The student body enthusiastically received the films.



Resources

BANGALORE

Alternative Law Forum: Provides legal assistance to LGBT people. 122/4, Infantry Road, Bangalore – 5600001. Ph: 286 5757. alforum@vsnl.net

Coalition for Sexuality Minority Rights: A coalition of Bangalore based Human Rights groups, Sexuality Minority groups and others working for the rights of sexuality minorities. csmr@yahoo.com

Good As You: A support group for LGBT people. Meets every Thursday between 7pm and 9.00pm. Call Sahaya helpline. goodasyoubangalore@yahoo.com. www.geocities.com/goodasyoubangalore/

Indian Institute of Geographical Studies: An Institute looking at academic studies on various issues including sexuality minorities through their Sexualities and Spaces Division. thedharanitrustindia@yahoo.com

Jagruthi: Working on prevention of HIV transmission and sexual health issues of MSM and Transsexuals. Supported by Karnataka State AIDS Prevention Society. Address: C-3, 2nd Floor, Jyothi Complex, 134/1, Infantry Road, Bangalore - 560001. Ph: 2860346. jagru@vsnl.net

Prerana: Support group for lesbian and bisexual women. To contact this group and be part of it, please call Sahaya Help Line on Ph: 223 0959. Or, write to sahayabangalore@hotmail.com (Attn: Prerana Support Group).

Sabrang: A collective of individuals working for the rights of people of all sexualities. Contact Sangama for information. sabrang@mailcity.com.

Sahaya: A telephone helpline for LGBT people in Bangalore. Operates on Tuesdays and Fridays between 7.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. Ph: 223 0959. sahayabangalore@hotmail.com

Sangama: A resource centre on sexuality issues focussing on LGBT issues. *Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 5pm.* Address: Flat 13, III Floor, 'Royal Park' Apartments, (Adjacent to back entrance of Hotel Harsha, Shivajinagar) 34 Park Road, Tasker Town, Bangalore- 560 051. Ph: 2868680 / 2868121. sangama@sangamaonline.org / sangama@vsnl.net.

Swabhava: A non-governmental, non-profit organisation running several projects for LGBT people. Address: P.O. Box 27069, Wilson Garden, Bangalore – 560 027. Ph: 080-2124441. swabhava_trust@hotmail.com. www.swabhava.org

MUMBAI

Aanchal: Help Line for lesbian and bisexual women. Ph: 3704709. Saturday 3 to 7pm. aanchal69@hotmail.com.

Bombay Dost: A magazine printed from Mumbai for LGBT people. www.bombay-dost.com

India Centre for Human Rights and Law (ICHL): Human Rights Group which has a separate division on LGBT rights. Address: 4th Floor, CVOJ Jain High School, Hazrat Abbas Street, (84 Samuel Street), Dongri, Mumbai - 400009. Ph: 371 6690 / 3759657. shuright@giabm01.vsnl.net.in. www.indiarights.com.

Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit: 7/10, Botawalla Building, 2nd Floor, Horniman Circle, Fort Mumbai - 400023. Ph: 022-2676213 / 9 Fax: 022-2702563 aidslaw@vsnl.com. www.hri.ca/partners/lc

Samabhavana: A group for sexuality minorities. samabhavana@vsnl.com. www.samabhavana.org.

Stree Sangam: A collective of lesbian and bisexual women. Post Box 16613, Matunga, Mumbai - 400 019. streesangam@yahoo.com.

The Humsafar Trust: An NGO working with LGBT issues, counselling, sexual health and others. Drop-In Centre for gay men and lesbians. Meets on Friday 6 to 9 pm. Voice Mail: 9726913. Address: PO Box 6913, Santacruz (West), Mumbai Metro - 400054. humsafar@vsnl.com. www.humsafar.org

HYDERABAD

Mithrudu: Sexual Health Agency for Men who have sex with Men. Address: 5-8-595/B/16 Mubarak Bazar lane, Abids Road, Hyderabad - 500001. mithrudu@yahoo.com.

Saathi: Support group for gay men. Address: 2nd Floor, Sana Apartments, Red Hills, Lakdi Ka Pool, Hyderabad - 500004. Ph: 6571225 / 3375401. saathi99@yahoo.com.

Sampark: Support space for gay, bisexual men. Help Line. Address: 2nd Floor, Sana Apartments, Red Hills, Lakdi Ka Pool, Hyderabad - 500004. Ph: 6571225 / 3375401 (Telugu). Office: 3395398

VIJAYAWADA

Saathi: Support group for gay men. Address: 11-1-231/2, B R P Road, One Town, Vijaywada - 520001. Ph: 635241.

VISHAKAPATNAM

Unnamed group: Address: Dominick, P.O.Box 203, Vishakapatnam, Andhra Pradesh 530001.

PONDICHERRY

Thozhan: Sexual Health Agency for Men who have sex with Men. Address: 106/2, Rue Francois Martin, Kourousoukuppam, Pondicerry - 605012. thozhen_2000@yahoo.com.

DELHI

AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA): Activist Collective doing community work in issues of queers, blood donors, drug users, women, HIV positive people, law, health and education. Address: Post Box 5308, New Delhi - 100053.

Campaign for Lesbian Rights (CALERI): An activist collective working for lesbian and bisexual women's rights. Address: P.O. Box 3526, Lajpat Nagar Post Office, New Delhi 110024. caleri@hotmail.com.

Humrahi: Support group. Lesbian/Bisexual women meet on Saturday 6 to 8 pm. Help line for Gay/ Bisexual men on Mondays and Thursdays. Address: D45, Gulmohar Park, New Delhi 110049. Ph: 6851993. humrahitrust@hotmail.com. www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/7258.

Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit: 63/2, Masjid Road, 1st Floor, Jangpura, New Delhi - 110 014 Tel: 4321102 Fax: 4321101. aidslaw1@ndb.vsnl.net.in. www.hri.ca/partners/lc

Naz India Trust: Sexual Health Agency for Men who have sex with Men. Also works on HIV and AIDS, sexual health and sexuality issues. Address: D45, Gulmohar Park, New Delhi 110049. Ph: 6567049 / 3929. Fax: 6859113. nazindia@bol.net.in.

Sangini: Group for Lesbian and Bisexual women. Meets every Saturday from 3 to 5.30pm. Runs a help line on Tuesdays and Fridays 6 to 8 pm for lesbian and bisexual women. Address: C/o Naz PO Box 3910, Andres Gunj, New Delhi - 110049. Ph: 6851970 / 851971. sangini97@hotmail.com.

Talk About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues (TARSHI): Help Line for information, counselling and referrals on sexuality issues. Monday to Friday. Ph: 4622221 / 4624441. <http://arrive.at/tarshi>.

CACLUTTA

Counsel Club: Group for LGBT people. Address: C/o Ranjan, Post Bag 794, Calcutta - 700017. wrongzone@hotmail.com.

Integration: Sexual Health Agency for youth and sexuality minorities. Address: C/o Pawan, Post Bag 10237, Calcutta - 700019. pawan30@yahoo.com.

Praajak Development Society: development organisation working around issues of masculinities with a primary focus on boys and male youth. Also works with gender variant males including hijras, kotis and duplis/doparathas. Address: 468A, Block K, New Alipore, Calcutta - 700053. Ph: 4000455. Fax: 4000592. praajak@yahoo.co.in.

Pratyay: Support group for Kothis and other MSMs. Address: 468A, Block K, New Alipore, Calcutta - 700053. Ph: 4000455. Fax: 4000592. pratyay@hotmail.com.

Sappho: Support group for Lesbians and bisexual women. Address: C/o A.N, Post Box 13003, Calcutta - 700010. malvi99@hotmail.com

Sarani: Experimental performing arts troupe focussing on development issues like sexual minority rights and sexual health. Address: 84 Jhowtalla road, Suite No.2, Calcutta - 700017. wrongzone@hotmail.com

CHENNAI

Sahodaran: Sexual Health agency for men who have sex with men. Address: 1st Floor, 127 Steling Road, Chennai - 600034. Ph: 8252869 Fax: 8252859. sahodara@md3.vsnl.net.in. www.sahodaran.faithweb.com.

Social Welfare Association for Men (SWAM): Support group and drop-in centre for MSM, gay, bisexual, and HIV positive men. Address: No.5, Natarajan Street, Jafferkanpet, Balakrishnanagar, Chennai - 600083.

South India AIDS Action Program (SIAAP): Sexual Health Agency for Sex Workers and Men who have sex with Men. Address: 65, 1st Street, Kamraj Avenue, Adyar, Chennai - 600020. siaap@satyam.net.in.

PUNE

Organised Lesbian Alliance for Visibility and Acceptance (OLAVA): A space for Women who love Women. Address: P.O. Box No. 2108, Model Colony Post Office. Pune 411016. olava_2000@yahoo.com.

LUCKNOW

Bharosa: Sexual Health Agency for Men who have sex with Men. Address: 216/6/5, Peerpur House, 8 Tilak Marg, Lucknow - 226001. Ph: 208689. bharosatrust@usa.net.

Friends India: A group for men who love men. Post Box No. 366, G.P.O., Lucknow - 1.

PATNA

AASRA: Group for gay and bisexual men. Address: GPO Box 68, Patna, Bihar 800001. aasra@dte.vsnl.net.in