



MADE IN INDIA

DECOLONIZATIONS, QUEER SEXUALITIES,
TRANS/NATIONAL PROJECTS

SUPARNA BHASKARAN



Made in India

COMPARATIVE FEMINIST STUDIES SERIES

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Series Editor

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*Decolonizations, Queer Sexualities,
Trans/national Projects*

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Chapter One

Introduction

“Aren’t you in graduate school to escape compulsory heterosexuality in India?”

“Aren’t you going to do field-work in India?”

“Will you ever go back to India?”

A colleague and friend in graduate school, a feminist philosopher, once jokingly pointed out the reason why she thought I ended up in graduate school, in a Cultural Anthropology program, in the United States. Her diagnosis: “to basically escape compulsory heterosexuality in India,” appeared to be too neat, narrow, inadequate, and somewhat arrogant, but also fairly close. As a foreign student (both as an undergraduate and a graduate student) from the geographic Third World I had clearly benefited materially, politically, and culturally from having the opportunity to separate myself from my “home” communities in India and travel half way across the world to the geographic North with scholarships to ostensibly earn a *practical* and *technologically superior* education. My chosen detour into Cultural Anthropology and Feminist Studies, at a nonelite university in graduate school, was taking me toward somewhat of a different trajectory. As a feminist, queer, nonimmigrant (who began to long for U.S. immigrant status), with socioeconomic privilege, and a recently marked woman of color in the United States, I began to contend with an increasingly tenuous economic future, the political economy of U.S. academia, an uncertain “home” in the United States, and a growing interest in studying a questionable project as a cultural critic. The topic involved the examination of the experience, management, and regulation of “compulsory heterosexuality” (including my own lived experience) within the structural, cultural, ideological, material arrangements of everyday life in postcolonial India. I ended up tucking away my friend’s comment as a quick and easy analysis of a white American middle-class lesbian-feminist-separatist take on the story of my life (and for that matter about how hetero-patriarchy was the sole cause of my intellectual interest, geopolitical location, and situation).

Classic Indian middle-class guilt at having the privilege to go to school in the United States, even with academic funding, may have also facilitated my avoidance in probing the issue any deeper. After all, perverse sexuality was about privilege (first world, class, American, and white) and lazy self-absorbed myopia. Even some of my khush¹ friends (in India and the United States) told me: “Try living in India as a desi² dyke with a living wage especially with the kind of work you do.” In a reactionary manner I began to think more about finding the right issue or community to objectively “observe,” “experience,” and “describe” as non-solipistically and as experientially distant as is possible for a feminist in the social sciences. The kind of topic that one could do *real* fieldwork for. I then had to contend with the second question I was asked when I decided to go ahead with my project: “Aren’t you going to do field-work in India?”

My original very conscious intention of not working on anything that had to do with India in graduate school changed due to a series of personal and political events. My initial response at anthropology’s assumption that I would automatically “study” India or all things Indian got revisited. Knowing full well that many Indian graduate students in U.S. anthropology departments were herded into studying India within topically marked boundaries and that this was often viewed by some of us as the source of our legitimacy—I decided to “do field-work” in the place where I was avoiding for many real and imagined reasons. This was so because increasingly I was being placed within and torn between an in-between space amid the academic study of South Asia, a relatively more public intellectual space of South Asian America, between nonacademics and cultural workers in India, and most importantly influenced by the work of feminist/queer women of color in the United States (both outside and within the U.S. academy). Furthermore, becoming a woman of color in the United States and a foreign queer now shamefully desiring legal papers and residency, and experiencing new kinds of institutional and cultural resistance politicized me in profound ways. I was drawn back into examining the amorphous entity of “compulsory heterosexuality” within an Indian context but viewed through in this in-between space.

“Coming out,” especially with my topic, was often attempted at unsuccessfully. Responses from the “field” (read: family and friends at “home” in India) and “academy” (read: academic “home” in the United States where I also lived as a foreign student) were strikingly similar. Parallel responses from the “field” and the “home” included: “you’ve become too American” (or “sounds like a topic for American Studies”), “these things only happen in America” (or “are there

homosexuals in India?”), “you know this will be the cause of our death” (or “you know this will be academic suicide”), “you should just come back to India” (or “you should study a village in India”), “we should have never let you go, what a blunder” (or “what does this have to do with anthropology?”). Or silence. Or facial expressions filled with polite revulsion. My interest in the topic grew as the pressure from the wedding-industrial complex (the Indian one) pushed forth. This included proposals from India via the United States with pictures of “suitable” Indian boys posing in front of computers in their North American apartments. I wondered if American graduate students/ethnographers were contending with these travel and topical issues. Being caught between refusing to arrogantly travel to a world (to ethnographically document Indian sexuality) on the one hand and insisting on traveling to India so that I would not have to choose between being Indian and queer, on the other, pulled me even closer to my project. Furthermore, my inability to clearly articulate to myself and thus to others the ideological and material dimensions of normative heterosexuality in postcolonial India passionately generated the chapters of this book.

I decided to revisit my feminist philosopher friend’s comment. As a diasporic cultural critic in disguise in an anthropology department I thought I should do “fieldwork” in India—to tackle my so-called “escaping compulsory heterosexuality.” I say in disguise because most anthropology graduate students I knew were vigorously socialized into particular forms of hegemonic distancing-maneuvers of the social sciences. Represent their worlds and words. Represent your critique through their lives and edited tongues. Be the careful neutral ventriloquist. This can be for many academics the more “grass-roots” “down-to-earth” “down-with-the people” kind of social science. This is in no way an all out rejection of this particular genre of ethnographic work or writing. I am simply questioning this hegemonic practice, the circumstances that inflect certain forms of representations, and their implications for democratic forms of social criticism. Nor am I claiming some sort of unquestioned innocence to my project or mode of writing. I explore this much further in the following chapter.

Women’s Studies classes, especially the work of radical women of color, on the other hand taught me to view personal experience as a source and cornerstone of special knowledge/insight and also insisted on the flaws of unexamined homogenous experience. Interestingly enough, experience (sometimes touted as “visceral” experience) also has high currency in cultural anthropology departments.

“Experiencing” *other* people’s realities, communities, and practices within the cultural logics of ethnography, still garners a high premium. But as an Indian graduate student I was allowed some leeway. This leeway assumed a double bind. Since I had been a native of India it was assumed I would want to study India. The nativeness in turn did not give me “special knowledge” or “epistemic privilege,” a much more familiar debate in Women’s Studies, only the specter of essentialism to deal with. Thus I had to work extra hard at viscerally “experiencing” Indian reality. Part of working hard at “experiencing” India and to examine the political economy of compulsory normative heterosexuality was to figure out: where was my community? Could I find them in the archives? What was my field-site? Could I find the city or town to nail down the study of sexual identity formation or the institutions that congeal in them the logics of post/neocolonial heteronormativity? What part of my experience (especially my life in India) should count for the visceral experience of fieldwork? What would “participant-observation” of obligatory heterosexuality be like to experience and how should I document it? Was “neutral” ventriloquism my only way to engage in social criticism and be a cultural worker?

The Art of the Essay

To consider these questions I was drawn to what many feminists and historically unauthorized writers have sought as a favored genre, namely, the essay. Some feminists have described the “essay” as a device that is a playful medium and an open-ended form that is difficult to define. With an explicitly present narrative “I” the essayist can deploy various modes such as carefully crafted arguments, thick description, critical reflection, nonfiction, and fiction, which are polemical in nature. Contemporary feminist ethnographic work experimenting with the genre of the essay by Kamala Visweswaran (1994), Kath Weston (1998), Mary John (1996), and Ruth Behar (1996) contribute to the organization, intellectual impulse, my location as a cultural critic/ethnographer, and epistemologies of this book.³ For instance, Mary John, who writes as “an anthropologist in reverse,” a potential immigrant, “an impossible mix of author and native informant” and a participant-observer of the worlds of U.S. feminism and theory, uses the genre of the essay to travel between India and the United States and the fields of trans/national feminism (109). In problematizing the disciplinary boundaries of traditional

ethnography, cultural criticism, and autobiography, Kamala Visweswaran as a “hyphenated-ethnographer,” experiments with ethnographic essays and first person narratives to move between cultural and national spaces as a historical subject. She says, “If one virtue of the ethnographic essay is that it resists closure, I intend each of the essays below to open out upon adjoining essays as a means of exploring the conjectures between some arguments and disjunctures among others” (12). The possibilities inherent in essay, “[A]n amorphous, open-ended, even rebellious genre that desegregates the boundaries between self and other,” and first-person narratives especially by the traditionally “ethnographized,” writes Ruth Behar, actively distinguishes between the tabooed practices of self-revelation of the “ethnographized” verses the usual all-powerful unmarked ethnographic “I.” As “virtual ethnographer” and one who is not “anti-empiricist” either Kath Weston seeks to undermine what she refers to as the theory/data split and weaves in theory and ethnography as a queer ethnographer “reposition[ing] sexuality at the heart of the social sciences.”

As a collection of essays *Made In India: Decolonizations, Queer Sexualities, Transnational Projects* weaves in themes from different levels and points of reference to argue for the fundamental and intermeshing relationship between the formation of queer sexual subjectivities, forms of consciousness, and trans/national governmentality in post/neo-colonial India. I demonstrate this by examining three concurrent phenomena in India since the early 1990s within three intersecting moments. The three interrelated moments involve the accelerated privatization of the Indian economy, the growing khush cultural work particularly between India and the diaspora (of the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada), and the marked effect of trans/national governmentality in postcolonial India. The three concurrent phenomena are described ahead in my chapter descriptions.

Privatization

The July 1991 response to the fiscal and balance of payment crisis by Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh government involved Brettonwood lead measures of structural reforms and macrostabilization. The 1991 governmental response to international agencies was decisive, deeper, and wider and a considerable turning point in Indian economic reforms (or privatization). Many economists have pointed

out that since 1977 and more specifically since the 1980s and 1990s economic liberalization occurred in three episodes. During the Indira Gandhi (1980–1984), Rajiv Gandhi (1985–1989), and Narasimha Rao (1991–1996) governments. For instance it has been suggested that in the 1980s “policy entrepreneurs” or “the Change team” in the Congress government (particularly under Rajiv Gandhi) with a more managerial and technocratic orientation toward the global private markets influenced the direction of India’s new economic policy. The push to upgrade, modernize, and integrate more efficiently and successfully into twenty-first-century global markets sharply contrasted with prior policy (which was developmentalist in orientation, with a definitive state monopoly and patronage toward indigenous capitalists, and with much more of a socialist rhetoric toward “social justice” and wealth redistribution). These economic reforms in the 1980s were met with criticism, faced slow downs, and thus more sporadic measures were taken. India’s severe foreign debt, low credit rating, balance of payment crisis, and political instability in 1990 forced the economic reforms⁴ in 1991. Furthermore, the loan that India took from both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank came with additional conditions.⁵

Privatization or economic liberalization into global markets has also meant increased exchange of ideas and images through the institution of the media (both domestically and internationally). My chapters demonstrate that global exchange, albeit uneven, has occurred from above and below through complex processes ranging from providing tutorials of the self (perhaps “globalization from above” via the Femina Miss India contest winners discussed in chapter three) and diasporic queer activism (possibly “globalization from below” regarding sexual minority rights and the Indian State discussed in chapters four and five). And, finally, I argue that the conditions of this exchange have produced new forms of domination as well as unique avenues for resistance, self-transformation, and community mobilization.

Queer Desh Pardesh

My exposure to and connection with queer South Asian and diasporic cultural workers have been vital to this book. This relationship has been both virtual and non-virtual and in many ways speaks to the growing role of virtual communities and trans/national social movements.⁶ In the early 1990s, I met several khush cultural workers who

were involved with *Trikone*, *Anamika*, the South Asia Feminist Network, and *Desh Pardesh*.⁷ In addition to connecting with khush women doing important political work locally (meaning in the cities they/we lived in and in the United States) and trans/nationally the South Asia Feminist Network was interested in organizing gatherings where we/they could share our/their political work together. It was a place where conversations (both face to face and on email) about sexual exile, immigration, isolation, organizing, and knowledge exchange about other khush activists, and solidarity actively took place. It was here that I learned about the work of Anu who wrote about her anger and sadness of being forced to choose being Indian and a desi dyke. She wrote: "I start dreaming about my return. About the lesbian community that denies the 'Indianness' that is so essential to who I am, but affirms the equally essential 'lesbian' in me" (*Anamika*, 8). Many of these women spoke about being lesbians from the geographic third world, South Asian, of various diasporas (not just between India and the United States), and how they were all situated in the United States at that moment as nonimmigrants and immigrants (Aruna and Poore). All of them were actively trying to figure out how to make a community between the United States and South Asia, how to deal with the Immigration Naturalization Service (and U.S. queer and feminist groups who seemed to be oblivious to khush non/immigrants), how to survive economically, whether to go underground, how to deal with a situation (especially in South Asia) if they were to "come out," how to survive outside the usual blood and marriage networks, and ultimately how to be in solidarity with desi dykes. For Yasmin Tambiah, it was also about dealing with life after the civil wars in Sri Lanka. She writes, in an essay on Sexuality and Human Rights, about how the eclipsing of the sexual rights of girl children, lesbians, and women in traditional human rights discourses disconnects economic rights from sexuality. Tambiah's work points to the regulation and management of the female child through normative heterosexual behavior and coercive practices (such as compulsory marriage, motherhood, and heterosexuality) perpetuates and inscribes the honor, respectability, and responsibility burden upon her. *Made in India* seeks to describe the matrices within which the management and production of intimate life are at once hard to decipher economic and political formations usually regarded as neither.

The South Asian Feminist Network also took me to khush cultural workers beginning to articulate themselves (specially in English language at urban centers) in India. For instance, the 1993 Seminar on Alternate Sexualities (organized by Sakhi and Naz) was attended by

activists and scholars from all over South Asia and the diaspora (primarily the United Kingdom and the United States). Despite publicity (in local papers) that trivialized and sensationalized the get together with headlines such as “Gays meet at the capital” the gathering was a transformative moment for many of us. Many attendees at this conference since have made important contributions to newsletters (such as *Trikone*, *Bombay Dost*, *Naz Ki Pukaar*, and *Shakti Kabar*), created newsletters, published books and anthologies (dealing with historical legal, literary, colonial, religious, and sexual health issues), and added to the growing literature on LGBT India.⁸ In chapter four I specifically address some of their work (from *Naz Ki Pukaar*, *Bombay Dost*, and *Trikone* in particular) with regard to the ongoing discussion about indigenous categories of the self, fluid practices versus fixed identities, and the place of identity politics in sexual minority politics in India. Since 1993 several conferences later and with much more organizing the late 1990s has also seen academic publications such as Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai’s *Same Sex Love in India* (2001) and Ruth Vanita’s *Queering India* (2002) and some analysis of “alternate sexualities” in Mary John and Janaki Nair’s *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India* (1998).⁹

The members of the South Asian Feminist Network as well as feminists of color in the United States have pointed out the radical potential of myth making. In other words, to make worlds out of words and the meanings you ascribe to them instead of being paralyzed by authenticity politics. I take their insight in their/my usage of terms such as queer, desi dyke, dyke, khush, sakhi, shamakami, or gay. For instance, I use queer in both a broad and narrow sense and recognize that giving it too much umbrella power (like some American queer theorists have like “that which is not normative”) or too much specificity (when explicit differences are overtly recognized) can be useful and limiting. Categories like queer have the potential for coalition politics but many sexual subalterns who are also marginalized by socioeconomic class, sex, race, nationality have rightly questioned the monolithic and universal use of this concept. I use it to make sense of worlds constituted by multiple histories, about subjects who resist and are outside the folds of heteronormativity, and who seek similar gender/sex erotics. I use it in a strategic, embodied, very much marked, and invented manner. I recognize that queer can often flatten out difference, such as between desi dykes and desi gay men, and therefore employ relatively more specific terms like dyke. Similarly, queer can be deployed in ways that flattens out and disregards the normalizing practices of national, socioeconomic, racial, and/or sexual difference.

I therefore use queer in a dual dialectic sense of fluid and specific because I believe it is important to recognize differences amongst us and simultaneously seek categories that speak to our lived experience and coalitions. I also draw from the work of Cathy Cohen, who eventually rejects the term queer for a politically grounded and concrete gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans, and who then advises on making a distinction between “heterosexual,” as simply a sexual identity, versus “heteronormative” which “mean both localized practices and those centralized institutions which legitimize and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and ‘natural’ within society” (542). So while much of my book speaks to the growing lesbian, gay, *genderqueer*, same gender erotics, and newly classed heterosexuality I do not specifically focus on other sexual others such as poor single women or sex-workers.

I use khush in a very similar manner as queer. As another umbrella term that was invented by South Asian activists to make worlds out of words. I am more cautious using queer or khush to refer to the constellation “men who have sex with men” or “women who have sex with women” not because of concerns about whether “queer” counts as indigenous but more because many “msms” or “wsws” may not politically identify with “queer” although some of their practices do locate them as sexual outsiders.¹⁰

Trans/national Governmentalities

Growing NGO-ization (nongovernmental organizations) in the arena of sexual health, and in the private lives of sexual minorities (particularly with a focus on non-heteronormative practices within the context HIV/AIDS) is an aspect of what I refer to as trans/national governmentality. I borrow this concept from Gupta and Ferguson who suggest it as a new way to understand the increasingly privatizing neoliberal nation/states, “the grassroots” (or the local such as NGOs), shifting centralization and decentralization within states, and institutions of “global” governance and funding (such as the World Bank or the Ford Foundation) (Gupta and Ferguson, 981:2002). Ferguson and Gupta use the idea of governmentality from Foucault to point to the processes by which institutional power (such as that which is deployed by the State) regulate, manage, and govern the private lives of individuals and populations. These practices connect the intimate life of individuals, such as identity formation, forms of consciousness, and private conduct, to spheres of the state. Thus, trans/national governmentality, refers to

forms of power exercised over populations that also intimately involve institutions of global governance such as the World Health Organization, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organization, private funding agencies, NGOs, and the United Nations.

I employ trans/national governmentality as a phenomenon that links various layers of local, national, and inter/national governing authorities (e.g., community members in a town, the local NGO, the local and national government, and the Ford Foundation). Furthermore, these linkages are unevenly distributed with the national population and accelerated and decelerated in history through different periods of formal and informal colonial and nationalist forces. For example, the state of West Bengal had a much slower influx of NGOs working on sexual minority health in the early 1990s than Maharashtra. Through this concept I also argue that individual actors from stigmatized and marginalized groups (such as homosexuals) are placed in unforeseen webs of power, privilege, conflict, and empowerment with the local State and national governments and international institutions. More of this unexpected negotiation of power can be seen when global institutions like the IMF and World Bank undermine and shrink existing social services (in arenas such as health, education, and social welfare networks) in India as a result of liberalization. Subsequently the growing numbers of NGOs are internationally funded (and often legitimately recognized by the WHO, UN, and World Bank) to fill huge gaps of a weak infrastructure of education and health. As politically heterogeneous entities, NGOs, in turn contend and broker with various levels of governmental authority, degrees of state decentralization, and re-centralization of national bodies (like how external funding gets allotted to an NGO). The chapters in the book point to how newly formed identities such as “men who have sex with men,” “the new millennial woman,” “girl-child,” “gay,” and “lesbian” are fundamentally structured by neoliberal globalization in which trans/national projects (such as NGOs) are integral part of the landscape.

And finally, I use trans/national to suggest two key things. First, I use the word to mean the instability between the national and the global as well between the local, national, and global. And, second, to also recognize national and community borders and difference. The slash thus speaks to both the porousness and fixity of ideas, capital, people within, between and across borders, and the fundamental structural inequality of nations, communities, and people. I also use trans/national to point to Chandra Mohanty’s insight that “our most

expansive and inclusive visions of feminism need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them.”¹¹

Trans/national Political Economies of Sexuality

The intermeshing relationship between identity formation, political subjectivity, and geopolitical forces/institutions, with a particular focus on modern gay and lesbian subjects in the West (and in particular in the United States), has been described by writers such as John D’Emilio, M. Jacqui Alexander, Rosemary Hennessey, and Denise Altman. For instance, in the now classic essay, D’Emilio has pointed out that the market economy in the United States fragmented and drew out sexuality from the newly formed “private” sphere into new forms of non-procreative intimacy, kinship, and notions of community. For the new homosexual (and the modern heterosexual subject) sexual object choice constituted sexual identity and women (in particular heterosexual ones) also became desiring and respectably feminine subjects. Alexander pushes D’Emilio’s point of gay identity formation to include the rise and contributions of what she calls (white) “gay capital” in late trans/national capital’s tourist narratives of the consuming-gay-white-American-classed-subject with all the trappings of consumer-rights (minus radical political agency or coalition politics with marginalized queers). In a similar vein Hennessey calls for a “materialist approach to (queer) sexual identity” (73) that refuses the fragmentation of desire and forms of consciousness versus material relations. In particular she points to the contradictory effects of late capitalism, queer visibility, and the subsequent formation of docile white queer consumer-subjects.

Paradoxical effects of trans/national capital’s material, governmental, and cultural forces have simultaneously created parallel (and in many ways vastly different) seesaw effects of a “dialectic of freedom and oppression” for differentially placed marginal-privileged subjects such as African American women (Davis), the modern (white) flapper women of the 1920s United States, or Latino/as in the United States (Davilla). Within the postcolonial Indian context several challenges are present. The formation of particular identities and ideologies of gender may have some comparable influences of modernity but do not have the same roots or influences. I demonstrate in the book that the discourses of development, privatization, increased trans/national integration (both colonial and postcolonial), virtual and local communities, and nativism have created parallel unique and accidental effects.

I suggest that unevenly produced forms of consciousness and identities concurrently co-constitute one another especially after the 1991 economic reforms in postcolonial India. They are the millennial woman (or the New Indian Woman of trans/national India) and the girl-child (the birth child of development and corporate volunteerism) within the ideological framework of a new heterosexual consciousness of Indian-individuality and self-help; the increasingly visible global/local sexual minorities and subjectivities such as gay, MSM (or men who have sex with men), and variously *localized* categories such as kothi and panthi within the framework of sexual rights and health; and finally, the lesbian (activist, suicidal, hard to find, urban, and rural), sakhis, and “women who have sex with women,” also within the framework of rights, visibility, and death. These co-constitutive discourses and identities demonstrate how particular forms of consciousness are negotiated and envisioned within trans/national India. These discourses pull together modernization theory and development policies, nativism, economic liberalization, trans/national activism, and NGO-ization around the categories of non-normative sexuality and gender. They often connect the intimate lives and conducts of “lesbian” policewomen, unmarried same-sex couples, cruising gay men and MSMs, beauty queens, girl-children across states, socioeconomic class, caste, religious faiths, and language. In the following chapters, these themes are examined at different levels.

In chapter two, “The Evidence of Arrogant Experience: Boomerang Anthropology and Curdled Otherness,” I argue that the radical potential of experience and thus social criticism can often get lost amongst minoritarian feminist ethnographers when poststructuralist skepticism regarding essentialism and epistemic privilege, and a lack of understanding embodied subjectivity dominate academic intellectual production. I further argue that despite useful critiques of the limitation of identity politics and anthropological liberal humanism, social criticism cannot afford disembodied dispassionate subjects. I propose another possible way to consider experience and subjectivity through the concept of “playful world traveling.” I take as a starting point the work of anthropologists/ethnographers who have called themselves “halfie,” hyphenated, virtual, native, and hybrid to revision epistemic privilege with political solidarity.

In chapter three, “Taxonomic Desires, The Sutram of Kama and the World Bank: ‘Sexual Minorities’ and Section 377 of The Indian Penal Code,” I look at the intersections of local, national, and trans/national efforts at the management of intimate conduct through prison reforms, condom production, NGO-ization, pressure from international development agencies (such as the World Health

Organization), and the growing discourse of rights stemming from various human rights organizations. Subsequently, this has led to contentious debates about sexual minorities such as the Indian Gay and “men who have sex with men” and organizing around the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Section 377 is an anti-sodomy statute established during British empire in 1886. This chapter goes on to demonstrate the following: first, the nexus of imperial militarization, prostitution, and imperial concerns about homosexual vice in the colonies; second, a reading of judgments and citations from the 1830s to the present that point to the continuities of imperial and postcolonial sexology and racial science; third, the politics of the post/neo-colonial Indian State and human rights agencies (NGOs) in either preserving Indian tradition versus the civil rights of gay and lesbian Indians; and fourth, the special location of the post/neo-colonial condom industry to pursue development and modernity via population control, AIDS/HIV control, modern (read heterosexual) desire, and the phallic nature of the discourse of civil rights by human rights activists (and queer Indian activists).

In chapter four, “Compulsory Individuality and the Transnational Family of Nations: The Girl-Child, Bollywood Barbie, and Miss Worldly Universe,” I point to the emergent *new* heterosexual consciousness at the nexus of India’s economic liberalization policies, the mushrooming beauty contest service industry, and the ornamental ideology of global multiculturalism and volunteer work. The burdens of structural adjustment, economic restructuring, and other failed promises of development wizardry lead to decisive economic reforms, in the 1990s that integrated the Indian economy deeper into the global capitalist system. Trade liberalization and other modalities of privatization were claimed, by mainstream media and many state officials, to jump-start the outdated Indian economy as well as being offered as the reason for liberated cosmopolitan beauty queens/women. In 1994, for the first time in Indian history two women from India captured the titles of Miss Universe and Miss World. Liberalized India and the liberated new Indian Woman in turn produced a new (hetero)sexually assertive woman as the consumer citizen. One with a new localized sense of individuality, service oriented for herself and her nation, and through her bodily capital the self-proclaimed agent of volunteerism. In this chapter I argue that for particular segments of the population (primarily middle- to upper-middle-class women) individuality is realized through service (as in working in the entertainment business and volunteer projects) and consumption (as in being consumed as the new Indian woman, and through consuming the ideology of the self-made career woman and the beauty–entertainment–industrial

complex). The fifth and final chapter, discusses the post liberalization New Indian Woman hypermodern Other, namely the Indian “lesbian.”

In chapter five, “Inverting Economic Man: Pleasure, Violence and ‘Lesbian Pacts’ in Postcolonial India,” I argue that the figure of the Indian lesbian becomes symbolic of the violence of dichotomous thought that constructs and imagines “the Indian lesbian” as the unproductive Other of third world underdevelopment and perverse overdevelopment. She is unproductive, un(re)productive, and un-sustaining of developmentalist modernity. It is however necessary for the lesbian subject to materially sustain other sexual subjectivities. Furthermore, as a result of death, “uneducated” practices and rights discourse she too has gained some notoriety through several media accounts of “lesbian suicides” and “lesbian marriages.” Also, the debates generated by Deepa Mehta’s film *Fire* and the formation of lesbian organizations (including NGOs) brought to the forefront yet another emergent form of consciousness.

My book then presents the concurrent emergence of sexual subjects, and forms of consciousness as detours working with and against intermeshing local, national, and global governmentalities. I view many of these detours as embodying resistant subjectivity and possessing the radical potential for solidarity. The actors constituted through these maneuvers are products of the discourse of development and the abnormal. My chapters also demonstrate how some of these projects of decolonization are aborted and muted. None of these actors can be viewed as solely as victims or uniformly hybrid which means a simultaneous recognition of embodied experience, geopolitical power, and hybrid subjectivity. These subjects represent variations of dominance and subordination.

To the third question I was asked when it was assumed that I was done with my “fieldwork”: “Will you ever go back to India?” I still don’t have firm answers for that question. If anything it has bolstered the tremendous respect I have for the many cultural workers both in India, South Asia, and in the diaspora who have through hardships and privilege made meaningful lives for themselves and others. In solidarity with them I have hoped to demonstrate in *Made in India* that queer and non-heteronormative sexuality are fundamental issues of economics and material life especially in the geographic third world. To dismiss khush lives as not about “the masses” is violence done to understanding the linkages between the management of individual lives, intimate conduct, state power, and global politics. And, finally, I hope to have consistently and variously pointed out that sexuality, and in particular khush sexuality, is not a luxury.

Chapter Two

The Evidence of Arrogant Experience: Boomerang Anthropology and Curdled Otherness

Experience is, in this approach, not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain.

(Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience")¹

A discipline in which "experience" is so central has been surprisingly unfriendly to the notion that "experience" is constantly refigured by memory. If an anthropologist can "write up" an ethnography based on data collected during doctoral fieldwork twenty or thirty years ago, why should it not be possible for "natives" to "write up" an ethnography based on their lives?

(Gupta and Ferguson)²

I write this chapter with *primarily* Third World/people of color in U.S. anthropology in mind: foreign-born, diasporic, and U.S. born. I will refer to them as anthropology's Curdled Others who have consciously and variously marked their practices, realities, and identities as *hyphenated*, *virtual*, *native*, *halfie*, or *hybrid*.³ They are atypical Others in that they are academics within the U.S. anthropological and educational establishments. Most identify as persons of color and many exist at multiple intersections of marginalized racial, sexual, gendered, classed, and national citizenship. This conscious marking of oneself as hyphenated, hybrid, halfie, and virtual has been the most evident by those racialized Curdled Others who have confronted the realities of themselves working with or studying traditionally ethnographically witnessed communities—often increasingly seen as one's "own." Additionally, many of these Curdled Others are variously placed along the privileged spectrums of research and teaching schools and tenured-status, degree granting institutions, and citizenship. I use the term Curdled Otherness to highlight a dialectic. First, taking my queue from feminist ethnographers I recognize the potential limitations of using insider versus outsider in any pure

organic sense. And, second, I believe it is concurrently necessary to recognize insider-ness or close-ness and outsider-ness or far-away-ness in terms of our differences. We are located differentially across histories, communities, and privilege, and do identify and connect closer to some communities/groups over others. It is within this dialectic that I use and explore Curdled Otherness. I am interested first in identifying some key concerns raised in a select group of writings. Their concerns register discontent towards new and historical forms of ongoing institutional and historical monopoly over “native discourse,” the lack of sophistication in claiming “native” authority, and the disciplining practices of a field that has historically *trafficked in difference*.⁴

I am most concerned with how these Curdled Others have raised political and epistemological questions regarding practices of identification, a “split-subjectivity,” travel between worlds, the use of first and third person voices, and the negotiation of intimacy and distance. Their work to me offers an important transfer point to examine an under theorized and slippery issue within American anthropology—that of the connection between *experience* and *epistemic advantage*. I argue for a re-grounding and reconnecting of experience and epistemic advantage and subsequently suggest new ways to imagine relationships between Curdled Others (as mixed nationals, cultural, or racial) and complexly configured communities. In re-visioning experience and epistemic advantage, I argue that the poststructural incursions and impacts within anthropology have made some useful contributions by calling into question the ethnographer’s (particularly the Lone Ranger) modes of Self-making and Other-making via ethnographic humanism, but continue to be limiting for Curdled Others. It leaves many Curdled Others with a limited form of identity politics (where we still follow the same model of ethnographic humanism and insist on the problematic bifurcation of Self and Other) or poststructuralist thinking that rejects any form of Self-making and collectivist politics as essentialist. I demonstrate my point by elaborating on a distinction between arrogant experience and loving embodied lived experience. The former, I argue is the premier model of subject-making in anthropology. A subject that is readily flexible for poststructural scrutiny and disempowerment. The latter, is also a form of subject-making but one which I argue has been unfortunately re-marginalized and drained of its radical potential.

In a discipline that valorizes *particular* forms of experience and experiential knowledge, experience, in the hegemonic disciplinary sense or what I call arrogant experience, is constituted by two key maneuvers. First, arrogant experience produces a model of Self-hood

in which liberal humanism prevails and subsequently domesticates and inflames the limitations of identity politics. By this I mean that the ethnographer always assumes a core Self of the original Lone Ranger (the Western, atomic-individual, white-male subject, who willfully chooses to travel to new worlds to gather data from Others, and who objectively reports back to the metropole). At a time when the Lone Ranger includes more women, people of color, nationalities or sexualities, ethnographic humanism is reproduced in brown/black face or feminine drag. In essence the core self and logic remains unchanged. Ornamentally, the ethnographer can still be loyal to same objective neutral reportage and process that will still privilege the Self. Identity politics then following this logic produces the hyphenated “insider-outsider,” “participant-observer,” and “native-anthropologist.” Further, this then gives rise to split and fragmented subjects such as the Insider-Outsider, Native-Foreign, Data Giver-Data Analyst, the Halfie, or Participant-Observer. Therefore as Curdled Others we are left with a limited way to understand lived and embodied experience. And, second, experience (and thus subjectivity) in the dominant sense is informed by particular modes of travel, what Laurent Dubois has called “a love-hate ballet of rebellion and racism,” that produces its specific forms of fragmented intimacy, identification and distancing. Here the kinds of intimate relations that the ethnographer makes is generically presented as a rich detailed immersion styled subjectively experienced knowledge only to be replicating the original objective reportage schema of the Lone Ranger. In concluding, I ask: what might it take for hybrid ethnographers to attempt critical “travel” between communities and worlds, willfully practice illegitimate acts against the dominant forms of travel, knowledge-production and accumulation, and practice resistant subjectivity?

Equal Opportunity Through the Logic of the Wild West Self

Kamala Visweswaran has pointed out that early-twentieth-century women (in particular, white and middle to upper middle-classed) ethnographers in the United States easily adopted a “wild west anthropology” approach from their male counterparts, whereby these Progressive Era women could take on an almost gender neutral “unruly frontier masculinity” to brave foreign places and peoples. These foreign spaces became hotbeds for the discussion of domestic

social reform issues (such as issues on the reservations or the “Negro problem”), which were taken on by scientific empiricist vigor to prove lack of civilization, promote salvage anthropology and projects/narratives of save and rescue. This form of “wild west anthropology” similarly applied to the wild east or the *Orient*, as many scholars have demonstrated, implemented the logic of roguish adventurous masculinity into remote and rural regions. As a foreign-born graduate student I was often disciplined into this “unruly frontier masculinity” to make sure that I wasn’t just another lazy native banking on her pre-existing native *experience* when I decided to work on a topic connected to India. This understanding of experience also placed me in an unfortunate double bind, one pointed out by many “halfie” anthropologists, as the practice in graduate anthropology departments of assuming that students who are Indian born (and in many cases of the Indian diaspora) naturally must want to (or ought to) “research” India provided they reproved their identity-credentials through dominant ethnographic logics of imperial nomadism. In this case the aspiring ethnographer could truly experience her identity through fieldwork in a village, which might undo some of her wimpish urbanity or assimilated middle-classness, and allow her to renativize herself. Such disciplining of graduate students also simultaneously rejects any kind of lived non-arrogant experiential knowledge that s/he may have of political and material life in India. Experience is hijacked as too subjective or essentialist. A pre-emptive anti-essentialism, if you will. This is an intellectual position that has had a long and enduring legacy within U.S. anthropology.

Experience has been an extremely well guarded, highly valued, and flexible commodity in the discipline of anthropology. Experience is wielded in strategic ways to simultaneously discount resistant and/or marginalized subjectivity (as only essentialist) and valorizes an arrogant subjectivity of competence and mastery (conversely, as anti-essentialist). Would it be lazy on my part to simply state that my book is an experiment in resisting mastery and competence? My book builds upon memories and ongoing experiences between India and the United States. And I deeply hope that this experience has made me a knowing subject that isn’t interested in the race for arrogant experience. I believe that many of anthropology’s Curdled Others in the academic establishment understand the value of this and follow the logic of arrogant experience. In examining some of the ways it has been used can provide useful lessons for Curdled Others—especially for those interested in trans/national political solidarity and resistant subjectivity from their variously privileged locations (in the United States/academy).

The Arrogance of Experience

You know when I was doing my fieldwork in India, for two years of course, I took detailed and meticulous notes at the end of everyday. I had 55 pages of single spaced notes per person I had interviewed everyday. How many pages of notes do you have? How many people did you interview? You know if you really want to know the real India or especially Indian women's issues you should spend at least two years in an Indian village. That is the way you can produce a rich, intimate, subjective, empirical, and authentic ethnography. (South Asianist faculty to an Indian graduate student in the States)

Many in the discipline of anthropology in the United States are by now quite familiar with poststructuralist anthropology that began examining the production of ethnographic authority through the deployment of epistemological assumptions (such as the bounded/homogeneous field, the ethnographer as objective liberal humanist subject and the coherent split between the representer and represented) and disciplinary practices (such as the immersion experience, visceral experience-distanced data reportage, voluntary/university/careerist travel and dislocation, and fieldwork) that privileged the experiential authority and objective voice of the imperial Ethnographic-Self. This mode of distancing has historically set up the Self (the metropole, white, academically trained expert, observing, interpreting, agentic Self) and non-Self (natives of the colonies *out there*, or "exotics at home"—such as "negros" and "Indians," the studied, interpreted, represented Other). This bifurcation of Self and Other presupposed an existing asymmetrical geopolitical ordering and constitution of Empire/Colony, and subsequently Academy/Field.

Nineteenth-century formalization of the discipline, many have pointed out, posited the ethnographer as the "best interpreter of native life" against *amateurish* accounts (travelogues or confessional accounts), *biased* accounts (of missionaries and colonial administrators) and the *arm-chair* anthropologist-philosophers (who read secondary reports of hired natives or government officials, and didn't leave their offices and libraries and get their feet wet in "the field"). The science of man through the "ascertaining of presence" ("I was there") and imbued with power inequities gave the Fieldworker-Theorist "unquestioned claims to appear as the purveyor of *truth*" (Clifford, 1988:32). At the core of *going out there* was the paradoxical method of participant-observation. This method established the scientific validity of objectively "I-Witnessing," collecting, recording,

describing, and interpreting native customs or beliefs (“the native’s point of view”), and the immersion experience of empathy which involved participation—but whose goal was not to lose objectivity by “going native.” This “first-hand” research was the premier form of experience.

Ethnographic authority at once allowed for an objectification and appropriate “intense personal experience.” Just so long as one didn’t *go native* or *was not native*. This kind of experiential authority is constituted by what feminist philosopher Maria Lugones has referred to as the politics of purity. For the Ethnographic Self in this model is a unified subject that equates the Western-White Self with full citizenship and the Ethnographic Other with body, emotion and as the embodiment of ethnographic data. When the Ethnographic Other attempts citizenship (and wants to be an anthropologist) s/he is viewed as fragmented and ornamental. Namely s/he is automatically Native-Anthropologist, Insider-Outsider, Virtual, or Halfie. This “intense personal experience” distinguished (and thus gave more authority to) the anthropologist from those who may have been *too abstract* (the armchair anthropologist, philosophers, etc.) or *too concrete* (as in native informants who apparently couldn’t make the critical connections the anthropologist made and this distinction gave him more authority).

Reflexive poststructuralist anthropology of the 1980s, that explored and presented a variety of textual strategies and limitations for a new more enlightened anthropology of late capitalism, also facilitated the “halfie” discourse literature. Anthropologist Kirin Narayan is often associated with coining the term “halfie” anthropology to refer to those anthropologists who are persons of color, mixed raced, and mixed nationals/culturals who began to experience the conflicts inherent in talking about “my people” to the academy; of taking notes about one’s everyday life primarily intended for export and consumption through legitimized gatekeeping concepts/logics; and of personal experience and diasporic longings. I would however argue that Narayan’s notion of the “halfie” places the hybrid ethnographer as a fragmented ornamental subject within what Maria Lugones refers to as the logic of purity. The halfie exists as “fragments, pieces, parts that do not fit well together, parts taken for wholes, composite, composed of imagined parts produced by subordinates enacting their dominators’ fantasies” (Lugones, 463). In the next section I elaborate upon Narayan’s essay. Although she raises some important points her work is limited by the poststructuralist concern of confronting *essentialism*. This I believe once again opens the door for the privileging of arrogant

experience, one that can ignore discursively and materially formed embodied and structurally differentiated subjects (such as the Curdled Other). The Lone Ranger of early twentieth century is now the disembodied dispassionate flexible ethnographer of late capitalism. In this logic every ethnographer is hybrid, trans/national and postcolonial in the same way and any explicit marking of difference determined at the nexus of material, national, racial, sexual, and gender is futile and retro identity politics.

Third World Native and Anthropologists of Color

Kirin Narayan's essay "How Native is a Native Anthropologist?" (Narayan, 1993:671–686) provides me with an entry point into the issue of essentialism and epistemic privilege in anthropology. Narayan asks "How 'foreign' is an anthropologist from abroad?" Narayan questions the binary logic of the *regular* versus the *native* anthropologist; the *native* versus the *non-native* anthropologist; and the *outsider/insider* and *observer/observed* schisms in cultural anthropology. She finds problematic the automatic assumption by *regular* anthropologists in the metropole that native anthropologists would have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of their culture, an insider native's point of view. She suggests that the native anthropologist, who enters the space of fieldwork "from a position of intimate affinity," is essentialist. She identifies "as someone who bears the label of 'native' anthropologist and yet squirms uncomfortably under this essentializing tag" (Narayan, 1993:672). It is this uncomfortable squirming and "this essentializing tag" that I would like to most explore. And, finally, Narayan concludes by calling for the "enactment of hybridity." In arguing against the fixed dichotomy, of *regular* and *native*, she would like to view anthropologists as researchers with "shifting identifications amid a field of inter-penetrating communities and power relations." Further, Narayan suggests that "the enactment of hybridity" will also be reflected within ethnographic writing where the authors can belong to many worlds—such as being "minimally bicultural in terms of belonging simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday life" (Narayan, 1993:672).

Narayan notes that the opposition between the *native* and *regular* anthropologist can be historically placed within the heydays of empire when Western Anthropologists went off to distant lands (usually the colonies) and studied the Native-Other. She points out that this

opposition, which was initially clearer cut eventually became complicated when natives and informants began getting professionalized or trained by universities in the metropole. Almost always these native anthropologists were sent back to their cultures to study their own. Narayan quotes Franz Boas, who describes a trained native as having “the immeasurable advantage of trustworthiness, authentically revealing precisely the elusive thoughts and sentiments of the native” (Narayan, 1993:672).

Narayan finds it objectionable that native anthropologists are seen primarily by their native-ness rather than their contributions to the field. She makes a specific reference to M.N. Srinivas, an Indian anthropologist trained under Radcliffe-Brown in Oxford during the 1930s and 1940s, whose classic monograph was on the Coorgs of India. Narayan points out that “despite the path breaking professional contributions,” his “origins remained a perpetual qualifier” (Narayan, 1993:672). She quotes Radcliffe-Brown, who had written a forward to M.N. Srinivas’s monograph as saying that his official training and Indian origins contributed toward “an understanding of Indian ways of thought which is difficult for a European to attain over many years” (Narayan, 1993:672). Narayan rightly points out that the native’s insiderness, based on his race and colonial subjecthood, was used to further the interests of good data collection by the White Metropole *regular* anthropologist. This native was allowed into the “charmed circle” of Oxbridge Anthropologists. This, Narayan felt, was a form of romanticizing the native or romancing the noble savage. She writes that it is this native, “the adequately westernized native” who received full professional initiation into a “disciplinary fellowship of discourse, who became the bearer of the title ‘native’ anthropologist” (Narayan, 1993:672).

However, Narayan’s point is limited in that: first, native anthropologists, an identity externally imposed due to the subordinate location of the Other-Native Self, were allowed access into these charmed circles precisely due to their stigmatized race and colonial locations or Savage-Otherness within the metropole and second, they had some basis for political alliances with the White Metropole Anthropologist based on sex/gender, class, educational privilege, and professional politics. Both Radcliffe-Brown and Srinivas followed similar criteria for reporting data (objectively, scientifically, and holistically) and performed the Science of Man for a similar academic audience. M.N. Srinivas’s ethnographic logics were not too different from his mentor, which in turn made his Indian-ness and understanding of *all* Indian realities more authentic and representative. The native-ethnographer is disembodied

in Narayan's critique. The possibility of his pre-ethnographic lived experience is completely discounted. Such poststructural skepticism mainly recognizes Srinivas through one axis of identity: Indian.

The theme of identification versus distance is repeatedly invoked by Narayan. Throughout the essay she points out moments of identification and distance that the Ethnographic-Self encounters. In particular this Ethnographic-Self is one who experiences shifting identities like her own. She provides some biographical information, such as being "minimally" bicultural and biracial (Indian and White German American parents and she grew up primarily in the United States), educated in an elite U.S. university, and being based in the United States. Narayan did fieldwork in Nasik and Kangra (small towns in Northern India, one of which [Nasik] is her father's hometown). On the one hand Narayan felt like she "often share[d] an unspoken emotional understanding with the people with whom I work." On the other she states: "All too aware of traditional expectations for proper behavior by an unmarried daughter, in both places I repressed aspects of my cosmopolitan Bombay persona and my American self to behave with appropriate decorum and deference" (Narayan, 1993:674). She says she felt "uncomfortable, even ashamed, of the ways in which my class had allowed me opportunities that were out of reach" for the subjects of her ethnographic work. The man being Swamiji, a Hindu holy man, whose stories were collected for Narayan's book—*Saints, Scoundrels and Storytellers*.⁵ Narayan felt that her identity was "unstable" due to the fact that she was at times accepted as a granddaughter and at other times distanced as someone doing business with a camera, tape recorder, and notebook. At times she felt bonded by "an unspoken emotional understanding" (due to historical familiarity with the locale, people, language, and culture) at others, she was ridiculed by Swamiji and his followers when he (Swamiji) mockingly questioned why or what educated people do what they do—directly referring to Narayan's fieldwork.

Narayan's moments of identification that seemed to have produced her *stable identity* included the following: common language, familiar people, an established history of visitations, a pre-discursive sense of familiar culture, ancestral bonds, and inclusion into kinship as a daughter, granddaughter, or sister. Narayan's moments of distancing (which she often associated with "unstable or shifting identities") included: being marked as an academic outsider entering a space (familiar for the most part) with a camera, notebook, and recorder; polite exclusions from day to day activities or personal information; ridicule or questioning of her project; experiences of differences marked by gender,

class, education, and geographical locations (the cosmopolitan Bombayite in semiurban Nasik or semirural Kangra or the nonresident Indian in India); and the longing for a time of independent living in California. So Narayan was at times included as an outsider to the village (Kangra where she “had no deep local roots”) by village women, as someone from the outside that is, from Bombay and/or America who had come all that way to record their lives and activities. And at times she got excluded as an insider, in Nasik, by Swamiji, who knew her as his friend’s granddaughter and treated her as kin, but also knew that she was visiting, recording, and collecting his stories for a dissertation in the United States and sometimes challenged the motives of educated people. Part of her inclusion into Swamiji’s world also required following the rituals of local patriarchy by not touching a holy man’s feet while menstruating.

Narayan’s unease in uncritically adopting “a position of intimate affinity” with rural Indian women as an urban Indian/German American woman is quite different from the position Faye Harrison takes. Faye Harrison, an African American anthropologist, travels to Jamaica to research the “Jamaican underclass.” In *Decolonizing Anthropology* (Harrison, 1991:88–126 and 1991:1–14), Faye Harrison (along with the other contributors) call for “an activist anthropology” from “politically responsible Third World Intellectuals,” a critique of Anthropology as colonial discourse, a “meaningful dialogue and reconciliation” across multiple locations (nation, race, class, culture) and ultimately an “anthropology of liberation” (Harrison, 1991:104). In her research of the Jamaican underclass and U.S.–Jamaican relations, Harrison, like Narayan, feels an affinity with her “informants”—specifically Black Jamaicans. Harrison states:

Although I was a foreigner, in many ways I felt at home in Jamaica. Intellectually, I knew that I shared with Afro-Americans an African diaspora, that my enslaved African ancestors had probably passed through the Caribbean archipelago, and that it was an historic accident that my pivotal fore parents had settled in the Virginia colony rather than in Jamaica, Barbados, or Cuba. Beyond this intellectualized notion of kinship and affinity, there were many times when intuitively I felt familiar with things Jamaican. (Harrison, 1991:102)

Harrison’s sense of this strong identification is coupled with an “organic responsibility” toward “oppressed peoples, especially to peoples of Africa and of African descent.” She says after dealing with the community’s initial bouts of suspicion and tension directed against her (as a foreigner, an outsider, and as an American), especially at a

time when the local population actively questioned American empire, she was eventually given honorary Jamaican citizenship by Ras John a local artist and community member. According to Harrison, Ras John accepted her as a sister “from the same ancestral mother-Africa” and believed despite the fact that the African diaspora had separated them, Ras tells Harrison that “blood is thicker than the waters of the sea.” Edmund Gordon, another contributor to Harrison’s anthology, is an African American anthropologist, who researches the lives of Afro-Caribbean people in Nicaragua and also explicitly indicates his connection and identification with the Third World as an anthropologist and as a Black American. Gordon like Harrison is primarily interested in sameness and identification as third-worlders, African and of the diaspora. Connection and identification are necessary elements of any solidarity politics, however, many feminists have rightly asked to carefully consider how we connect to others. Power and organic responsibility as researchers must apply to all and it is in the interest of all if minoritarian subjects too look at themselves as heterogeneous agents. Therefore, it may help to have both Gordon and Harrison also consider categories such as “third world,” “Africa,” and “peoples of color” as heterogeneous.

Narayan’s familial connection with the community and her subsequent sense of outsidership while researching the community provides an interesting juxtaposition with Harrison, who as an American and complete stranger enters new terrain in the geographic third world which felt like home. It is interesting that Narayan’s style of anthropology is not necessarily about solidarity or a sense of “organic responsibility” but she questions some of her outsider and privileged locations and Harrison makes demands for “an activist anthropology” but does not seem to address how her fieldwork and “organic responsibility” to the Jamaicans or Jamaican underclass are connected.

Narayan’s essay opens the door toward questioning limited categories and an uncritical politics regarding authentic or inauthentic ethnographers and geographical space. However, I found Narayan’s call for the “enactment of hybridity” (where identities and locations are “multiplex” and constantly in flux and where native origins should not be an important factor in determining respectable ethnographies) and charge of “essentialism” potentially useful but quite limiting and disempowering. It is disempowering to those hybrids who may have a deeper political connection and identification with a community (such as sharing similarities in economic class and/or visions coupled with an interest in political justice). The possibility

of identifying with another without arrogance brings with it the possibility of going against dominant anthropological distancing and authority making maneuvers.

The ease with which particular acts of identification, connection, or similarity are dismissed as “essentialist” can ignore political subjectivity and solidarity that can be forged and constituted within systematic, historical, and structural dimensions of inequality, domination, and exclusion. It is often assumed that a sense of connection and/or identification ignores difference between, within, and across communities/identities. Many feminists have pointed to such forms of liberal humanism (e.g., Mohanty, 1989). Narayan doesn’t consider the possibility of people connecting due to their differences or plurality of shared experiences or across differences. The enthusiasm to denaturalize or reject biological determinism often forgets the materiality and physicality of structural domination and the different forms of identification.

A move toward a more embodied Curdled Other, one who is concerned about examining the modes and voices by which scholarship is produced and “split-subjectivity” have come up is later essays by feminist ethnographers of color and queer anthropologists in the 1990s. For instance Kamala Visweswaran encourages hyphenated ethnographers (and others) to attempt at giving up the game by experimenting with first person narratives and self-writing from places of intimate habitation. Mary John writes about unlearning and desisting “ventriloquist fantasies” from speaking from a place she is not. And, Lila Abu-Lughod speaks about suffering from “split-subjectivity” experienced by the “halfie.” And, finally, Ruth Behar, mentions the taboo associated with and the much needed practice of non-voyeuristic self-revelation in an anthropologists’ intimate words. These feminist ethnographers point to issues that have been long debated by feminists in the United States such as the distinctions between the “problem of speaking for others,” “speaking for oneself,” and speaking to issues or with others on issues further away from one’s immediate experiences. Furthermore, although Behar does not problematize self-writing or self-revelation enough in her work, she too is working on terrain mulled over by many feminists about a contested genre considered *both* as important for minoritarian subjects and solipsistic navel gazing diary disease in a culture riveted by public confessions. The claim to speak for oneself based on the single-experience model, and in this case “the gay/lesbian ethnographer,” also comes to the forefront in the 1990s.

On discovering, in the preliminary program of the 1992 American Anthropological Association meetings, that there was a by invitation

only panel on “AIDS and the Social Imaginary” organized by Paul Rabinow and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, some members of SOLGA (Society for Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists) “became concerned.” In reaction to this exclusion SOLGA produced a T-Shirt stating “These Natives Can Speak For Themselves.” According to the SOLGA co-chairs, Ralph Bolton and Mildred Dickerman, their initial concern stemmed from the exclusion of participants who had done work on AIDs or who had been affected by AIDS. In other words, they (Bolton and Dickerman) asked: “Where were the voices of the ‘natives’ in this session?” A brief conversation with Scheper-Hughes and Dickerman occurred where Scheper-Hughes maintained that this session was an informal discussion/dialogue between “outsiders” and “non-specialists.” After this initial conversation, Scheper-Hughes sent Dickerman a copy of a syllabus of a course on AIDS, her talk and a letter responding to SOLGA’s concerns cowritten with Rabinow. Subsequently, Dickerman requested that they include Bolton as a commentator with “long [term] involvement in AIDS research, and with knowledge of homophobia . . .” Bolton “reluctantly agreed, concerned that he would be seen only as a token gay AIDS researcher.” Scheper-Hughes and the other organizers agreed to “recognize him [Bolton] as the first audience from the floor.”⁶

What began as a critique of the star system in the academic establishment, the commodification of “hot topics,” and establishment “stars,” the disconnection with communities impacted most seriously by HIV/AIDS, and a critique of anthropology’s usual narratives of discovery, soon boiled down into a T-Shirt with a caption that read: “These Natives Can Speak For Themselves.”⁷ As a graduate student who only saw these T-Shirts in the middle to late 1990s it simply represented to me the self-righteous privileged indignation of a few white queer anthropologists. It represented to me white queer anthropologists who really did not stop and push their critique to anthropology at large and simply approached this issue as imperial-activists who preferred a single-issue identity politics, one that primarily saw the problem as the homophobic silencing of the usual privileged interpreting ethnographers. It appeared as the tug of war over the “my community” between the straight Lone Ranger and the activist-homo Lone Ranger.

The exchange between some of the members of SOLGA and the “all star” panel in many ways parallels and intersects with the concerns of feminist anthropology (in the 1970s). Lesbian and gay ethnographers have to deal with societal and institutional (including the discipline of anthropology) forms of exclusion, invisibility, and pathologizing⁸ as an “Ethnographic-Self” and in their research projects

(Weston, 1993:340). Feminist anthropologist Marilyn Strathern has referred to this as the “awkward relationship” for feminist ethnographers. Lesbian/gay studies in anthropology began confronting the blurred boundaries of Self and Other especially where the borders between “field” and “home” or “field” and “academy” also bled against each other. These can be seen in Kath Weston’s ethnography, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (Weston, 1991).

In many ways Kath Weston’s very descriptive ethnography with numerous interviews and life stories stylistically resembles the traditional ethnographic genre. However, her project of looking at the contemporary American discourse of what constitutes a family and who gets to be part of “legitimate” kinship, challenges many practices and ideologies in anthropology. Weston’s endeavor of sketching a much-contested terrain of what “family” means to gays and lesbians (specifically in the San Francisco Bay Area) and the invented schisms between “families of choice” versus “biological families” (based on heterosexual institutions: marriage and procreation, and therefore of “blood”) provides a powerful cultural commentary on heterosexism in and outside of the academy and American culture.⁹

Weston’s ethnography creates a space fraught with ambivalence for the researcher, who is a positioned subject, where the lines between her academic writing and work, professional and personal lives, and audience often dissolve. She says:

Everything around me seemed fair game for notes: one day I was living a social reality, the next day I was supposed to document it. Unlike anthropologists who have returned from the field to write ethnographies that contain accounts of reaching “their” island or village, I saw no possibility of framing an arrival scene to represent the inauguration of my fieldwork, except perhaps by drawing on the novelty of the first friend who asked (with a sidelong glance), “Are you taking notes on this?” (Weston, 1991:14)

and

For me, doing fieldwork among gay and lesbian San Franciscans did not entail uncovering some “exotic” corner of my native culture but rather discovering the stuff of everyday life. (Weston, 1991:14)

In a later essay, Weston introduces the “virtual anthropologist” and critically pushes the notion of “halfie-ness.” The hyphenated Native-Ethnographer (or Halfie) still continues to assume a fragmented-split subjecthood. The fragmented subject is viewed in parts, still proving

itself to the anthropological industry, gaining points for authenticity via anti-essentialism or fragmented hybridity, and primal love for ethnographic experience. The halfie continues to be “the savage in ethnographer’s clothing” (169, Weston) needing to prove her anti-essentialism or nativity. Weston rightly points out that the hybrid ethnographer “pays a price when she bows to pressures to disembodiment herself in order to disavow nativity” (Weston, 171). By reinvoking ethnographerness she then needs to establish authority via the “omniscient” gaze and distancing tropes. They said it, not I. They seemed to believe this, not I. The choices then become Nativized Ventriloquism, Ethnographer Drag, or Native Drag.

Along with Weston, Bustos-Aguilar warns about reverse romantic self-righteous activist (including native) anthropology. Where excessive personal connecting and rhetorical locating serve to maintain and mask the usual inequalities. Where the “my people” of the Lone-Ranger becomes the “my people” of the activist’s quest for privileged interpreter. The virtual anthropologist to Weston is not the same as marginal but someone who is unfixed and threatens to expose disciplinary exclusionary practices. “If anybody can help anthropology retool, she’s the one” (179).

The Savage Slot and Post/Neo-Coloniality

I believe it is a mistake to view social anthropology in the colonial era as primarily an aid to colonial administration, or as the simple reflection of colonial ideology. I say this not because I subscribe to the anthropological establishment’s comfortable view of itself, but because bourgeois consciousness, of which social anthropology is merely one fragment, has always contained within itself profound contradictions and ambiguities—and therefore the potentialities for transcending itself.

(Asad, 1973:18)

In 1973, Talal Asad importantly pointed to the geopolitics of intimacy. This intimacy is foundational to the discipline’s legitimacy (via the cultural capital of the long-term immersion experience of the “outsider” and experiential knowledge) as well as in the constitution of the unified authoritative distance-experienced Self. This geopolitical intimacy automatically stigmatizes all other forms of experience as solipsistically essentialist. Although it is important to interrogate and distinguish various kinds of experience it is just as imperative to recognize the particularly shrewd move of a discipline that simultaneously

monopolizes “objectivity” and “subjectivity.” Asad maintains that the close relationship between anthropology and colonialism, and its historical and structural power imbalance between observer and observed (manifested in the practices of fieldwork) is often “trivialized or dismissed” or “not consider[ed] seriously.”¹⁰ Asad points out that this power imbalance and domination facilitates relatively easy access to the cultural and historical worlds of the colonized (anthropology’s *original* “other”) through a one-way outsider imposed intimate physical proximity—“participant-observation.”

Asad notes that:

The colonial power structure made the object of anthropological study accessible and safe—because of its sustained physical proximity between the observing European and the living non-European became a practical possibility. It made possible the kind of human intimacy on which anthropological fieldwork is based, but ensured that intimacy should be one-sided and provisional. (Asad, 1973:17)

Asad provided a powerful critique of romanticized notions of the ethnographer’s quest for experience of other people’s lives and reality, and his (the ethnographers’) claims to political neutrality. The claim to political neutrality is fundamentally tied to what and whose theories are used and what topics are considered worthwhile studying. These romanticized notions of fieldwork also valorize subjective experiences (of the anthropologist in the “field” and his/her rendition of the experiences of the community observed) and can trace their genealogies to anti-armchair anthropology—most explicitly and systematically propounded by “the father of fieldwork methods” in the 1920s, Malinowski. Yet Asad’s critique of this “bourgeois consciousness” in anthropology, whereby the anthropologist is at once (with “contradictions and ambiguities”) complicit with colonial structural and individual privilege, and sometimes an uncritical caretaker/protector of alien cultures (or an underdog) also provides the space of “potentialities for transcending itself.” Although Asad does not elaborate any further upon this I see his connection between this transcendence and the bourgeois consciousness of benign care taking something for all ethnographers and social critics to think about. As members of the U.S. academic establishment our intellectual productions must continually engage in practices that always question our connections and disconnections, identifications and disidentifications, and care and lack of care for forging solidarity.

In a parallel essay, almost twenty years later, Michel Rolph-Trouillot addresses the possibility of the “potentialities of transcendence” for

anthropology in the 1990s (Rolph-Trouillot, 1991). Trouillot is interested in excavating and examining the tropes of the discipline that goes historically beyond and deeper than European colonial expansion. In other words, Trouillot maintains, that poststructuralism has come close to identifying these implicit assumptions but “its potential for self-indulgence” leaves the savage slot intact.

Anthropology did not create the savage. Rather, the savage was the *raison d'être* of anthropology. Anthropology came to fill the savage slot in the trilogy order-utopia-savagery, a trilogy which preceded anthropology's institutionalization and gave it continuing coherence in spite of intradisciplinary shifts. This trilogy is now in jeopardy. (Rolph-Trouillot, 1991:40)

A point of entry into challenging the savage slot, Trouillot suggests, is “an epistemological reassessment of the historical subject” (Trouillot, 1991:40). This would possibly entail giving up the “monopoly on native discourse,” becoming and recognizing oneself as a situated intellectual and creating a space for stigmatized voices speaking in “the first person” (Trouillot, 1991:40).

Reportage (via the various schools of thought in the discipline) still tends to split an Ethnographic-Self (the one who goes somewhere, usually outside of their day to day life, who always writes about some other community's day to day life) and a Personal-Self (the day to day life issues, joys or struggles inside or outside of their profession). The Ethnographic-Self as problematized by Narayan has increasingly begun to be recognized as a mixed Self but inadequately termed as a plural or hybrid Self. This mixed Self/Other occupies and is aware of her/his multiple locations: sometimes between and across race and citizenship; across different writing genres (doing analytical essays or telling personal narratives); across lives “touched by life-experiences and swayed by professional concerns.” This is an important shift or recognition in anthropological practice and theory building. The mixed (or halfie) Ethnographic-Self might appear to be an improvement of the earlier Ethnographer-Self, the dominant, authoritative, unified Self of the Lone Ranger. The Lone Ranger Self is atomic, individualistic, nonrelational and founded upon hierarchical oppositions. It is remarkable that the Lone Ethnographer contradictorily claims both universality and particularity; universality with the Metropole-Self as the standard, and claims of neutrality and authority and particularity through examples of the personal day to day lives of their “objects of study.” Claims of neutrality and authority

(by the Lone Ethnographer and his loyalists) were and are based on politics and projects that dislocate and distance. For instance, the Ethnographer's personal and political lives are sometimes completely separate. Take for example, a reflexive classic monograph, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, where Paul Rabinow's self-making in the ethnography is marked by the tropes of western man's alienation (Rabinow, 1977). Rabinow's confessions/reflections give some body (and visibility) to him as a beneficiary of U.S. post/neo-colonial hegemony. However, this body is alienated/disembodied from an engagement with ongoing U.S. progressive anticolonial and antiracist activism/politics at the time he was completing his research and writing. The fragmentation that occurs here happens to the halfie as well. The halfie's core Self remains separated out from its ornamental aspects. The ornamental parts are mixed and matched depending on the identity group. So feminists get gender, queers get sexuality, third worlders get nationality, the members of the working class get socioeconomic class, and people of color get race. The separation into pure hierarchical parts perpetuates the same dilemmas about experience, epistemic advantage, distance/intimacy, and ultimately solidarity.

Boomerang Anthropology

Many undergraduates in the United States are courted into "diversity awareness" or ornamental multiculturalism through anthropology courses. They are often asked to understand themselves (or the Self) through the detour of the Other, and to "make the strange familiar." I believe there are some merits to this particularly if it involves cultivating a sociocentric comparative worldview as citizens of the United States. However, the discipline then also actively promotes boomerang perception or what I call *boomerang anthropology*. Where acts of curiosity, discovery, and understanding ultimately privilege and boomerang back to the liberal-humanist Ethnographic-Self. The Other exists only for the maintenance for this Self (in its dominant fantasies of self-discovery, cross-cultural understanding, or ornamental self-aggrandizing "social justice").

It is then easier to see and feel Narayan's discomfort at being labeled Native when she "studies" people who she generally doesn't keep company with. A point that Narayan doesn't consider is that the totalizing authority to represent all of a particular culture, community or peoples, that was once presumed by the regular anthropologist, was uncritically passed on to the native anthropologist. This authority

was often presumed since anthropologists were describing “simple” societies. In *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Kamala Visweswaran points out “Self writing about like selves has thus far not been on the agenda of experimental ethnography. To accept ‘native’ authority is to give up the game” (Visweswaran, 1994:32). Although James Clifford’s essay has cast some doubt on the ethnographic authority of the academic fieldworker-theorist and his/her “intense personal experience and scientific analysis” of participant-observation—an uncritical “anti-essentialist” stance would suspect all authority of experience. An uncritical and unspecific “anti-essentialist” position ignores the fact that political identities have physical dimensions and consequences.

The dominant model of experience privileged in anthropology at once valorizes and rejects the concrete, visceral, everyday life, immediate and bodily. This is a move that embodies an arrogant subject—the participant-observer. This form of experience is also self-conscious and thereby adopts the authoritative truth-telling role. The absolute presence of this experience simultaneously avoids accusations of essentialism that certain forms of feminist work have faced. Like some feminists the ethnographer temporarily shares experience to thereby constitute his identity as truth-teller. But unlike certain feminists the ethnographer is not simply a truth-teller via victimization but truth-teller by risk taking Wild West style. This is not to say that all “participant-observation” is arrogant. But its history and deployment is such that it tends to constitute ethnographic selves within the logic of mastery. I use the term arrogant to describe this form of traveling worlds because its ultimate goal is supreme competency of subjects and mastery of the material.

As a discipline quintessentially known for its world-traveling I propose a new form of “world-traveling” by drawing once again from the work of Lugones. Maria Lugones, a feminist of color, recommends that white women adopt the willful exercise to “world” travel. She suggests that white women travel to the worlds of women of color in a “playful” manner and practice a form of identification that is constituted by loving perception and not one of arrogance. It is a “playful” form of entering and negotiating worlds because it is not done in an “agonistic sense” as a contest or about winning and losing. Lugones points out that “an agonistic sense of playfulness is one in which competence is supreme. You’d better know the rules of the game. In agonistic play there is risk, there is uncertainty, but the uncertainty is about who is going to win and who is going to lose. There are rules that inspire hostility. The attitude of playfulness is conceived as secondary to or derivative from play” (430). The participant

in the agonistic sense of play seeks to conquer the other worlds and has a “fixed conception of himself.” Lugones’s sense of playfulness is intentional activity, filled with uncertainty, open to surprise, constant self-construction and reconstruction, where rules aren’t sacred and competence is abandoned.

“Love” and “identification” can be slippery terrain for feminist anthropology or trans/national feminist work. Many feminist social scientists in the 1980s have warned about the dangers of privileging intimacy and identification over objective distance. Their concerns have rightly pointed to the twin pitfalls of intimacy and distance, but Lugones offers insights into new ways of relating to one’s work and the politics of solidarity. Through intimacy one can still fail to love and arrogantly “graft the substance of another to oneself,” abuse them, demand their services, and take them for granted. Lugones’s notion of identification allows for recognizing a self-conscious mode of shared and unshared experience. Lugones also suggests that women of color and white women practice a politics of identification where one can see oneself in the other. But this isn’t a call for liberal humanism, or “seeing ourselves undressed” where we are all the same inside but look different, or that we are all homogeneously marginalized Others or Women. It’s a call for loving ways to combat arrogant racist material and cultural conditions and ways of relating. It is a way of seeing each other in the same historical and time spaces, as cohorts, and not as saviors. Traditionally undergraduate anthropologists are taught to understand oneself, the liberal humanist process, through the “detour of the other.” This detouring produces what both Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spellman have said about boomerang perception: “I look at you and come right back to myself. White children in the United States got early training in boomerang perception when they were told by well meaning white adults that Black people were just like us—never, however, that we were just like Blacks” (quoted in Lugones, 41). Thus a form of liberal identification with the marginal or Other with the primary goal of understanding one’s (ethnographic) Self. A form of boomerang anthropology constitutes a fragmented bifurcated Self for halfies, thus the inadequate term halfie or insider-outsider. But Lugones’ form of identification attempts an undermining of romantic intimacy or a fragmenting narrative of distance, and explores a curdled ambiguous space where self-conscious experience, the forging of solidarity/love, and some recognition of epistemological advantage (of those familiar with and who continuously live within and across multiple margins and centers). This space rejects the authenticity politics of some forms of identity politics and seeks the

forging of political subjectivity within preexisting unequal geopolitical context. It is thus a resistant subjectivity, a form of curdled Otherness that is illegitimate, impure, playful, and disloyal to competence and mastery over the Other. It is never innocent or automatic. But this lived experience has radical possibilities that must not be devalued in contrast to the carefully crafted willful participant-observation of Anthropology.

Part of my title invokes Joan Scott's now classic essay "The Evidence of Experience." Although her essay primarily speaks to historians (including feminist ones) Scott maintains that historians who attach too much value to unquestioned experience (especially when discussing minoritarian histories) produce essentialist foundationalist accounts of identity and history. In a refusal to be foundationalist Scott goes on to reject "the special political status" garnered to "women," "the black," "the worker," or "the gay."¹¹ Scott's essay, like Narayan's, may have contributed in interrogating the fetishizing of arrogant experience by Anthropology's Lone Ranger, but has dangerous implications for Curdled Others. Arrogant experience is voluntary and privileges mastery and for the most part remains unquestioned at a time of U.S. empire. Scott seems to consider the discursive foundational and refuses to acknowledge that experiences are not only discursively constituted but lived within and through subjects. Material conditions mark and inscribe subjects, which can serve as foundational points as bodily subjects and sources of special conscious knowledge or epistemic privilege.

The following chapters refuse (and very well may be excluded from) competence and mastery. Drawing upon memories, conversations, archives, multiple media, flesh and blood and imaginary persons, it attempts the work of a cultural critic, who is in between India and the United States. From this position I examine the trans/national political economy of queer postcolonial sexualities.

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Chapter Three

Compulsory Individuality and the Trans/national Family of Nations: The Girl-Child, Bollywood Barbie, and Ms. Worldly Universe

The worlds that I grew up in were trans/national and hybrid. Like many middle-class and upper-middle-class peers in India, I grew up in multiple languages: Malayalam, Hindi, Bengali, and English—in many accents. I grew up in urban India where many of us got contradictory messages about *swadeshi* and *videshi*.¹ Our economics textbooks told us that if only we would reproduce less and control our population, our *amazing* culture would crawl out of poverty and underdevelopment. At my Catholic English medium school, learning Hindi, Bengali, and English was unevenly coordinated with Malayalam, the language of home. Hindi was the language, second only to English, that promised national and trans/national mobility. The worlds of Hindi presented many inconsistencies to me. It was the postcolonial State's language of national identity that marked the songs of Independence and Republic Days,² the tongue of politicians, and *Doordarshan*.³ It was at once revered for its purity (*shudh* Hindi or pure Hindi) and its national authenticity by our school instructors and politicians, and ridiculed by some of us from English medium schools because Hindi instructors and speakers had funny accents when they spoke in English. But most of all Hindi, especially the competent *shudh* speakers, represented to many of us the xenophobic postcolonial Hindi–Hindu culture that hegemonically saturated much of our lives.

For many non-Hindi speakers, Bollywood⁴ offered us exciting tutorials. Here the Hindi appeared to be impure, racy, and streetwise. This adulterated Hindi took some of us to worlds where we learned what it meant to be true to India, assimilated or successful moderns via stories of *desis* (natives) and *firangis* (foreigners). It simultaneously ridiculed the *morbidly obese* women of the so-called “fat” corrupt capitalist classes—*Tun Tun*, *Manorama*, and *Preeti Ganguli*; the

mems (or Westernized women) like *Zeenat Aman* and *Parveen Babi*; and the vampish sexually free girlfriends of the villains—*Bindu*, *Helen*, and *Aruna Irani*, to underscore it's moral commitments to “the masses” and *sanskriti* (culture and tradition), which was ultimately about—duty and servitude to one's family (*Raj Kapoor*, anyone?).⁵ Some of these *filmi*⁶ depictions of women and men reflected and refracted our realities. In a nutshell: women/girls were ornamental to reality, they can be pretty to be around specially if your family could afford a girl-child, and they were childlike and constantly needed to be saved by the hero so that she could maintain the male-lineage. However, my Malayali home community told me in conflicting ways that we were far more advanced in terms of the treatment of “our” women than “those North Indians.”⁷ Kerala was, after all the miracle baby of the developmentalist project. In fact, like North Indians, Western women too needed feminism, because Malayali women did not take their husbands or fathers names, we came from matrilineal families, and we preferred girl children. So even though the Bollywood movies and the North Indians around me said that girls are *paraya dhan*⁸ and an expensive burden my grandmother and parents were emphatically overjoyed and proud when I (and my girl cousins) showed up. However, within this kind of *Nair*-centric narrative, I realized slowly that the highly educated revered girl-child too was intended first and foremost to her ornamental maternal destiny.⁹

English, the first language at school, was intimidating to many thanks to the pedagogical practices of our English teacher, a Catholic nun from Ireland, Sister Aluigi. Sister Aluigi had us “learn by heart” numerous Shakespeare plays, Dickens, and poetry by Indian nationalists, and would have us publicly recite them. Rote memorization of Dickens's *Hard Times* and calculus equations, and “Socially Useful and Productive Work” (SUPW),¹⁰ many would argue, made Indian education tough and superior. During our final years of high school we began to get a taste of America. America, specifically the United States, seemed mysterious, untouchable, dangerously exciting and powerful—much more so than Britain, France, or Germany. When the opportunity arose, my friends and I would carefully study hard-to-find pieces of recycled American cultural artifacts. They included Levi's jeans, *Archie* comics, bootlegged music, *Time* magazine, *Seventeen*, and hard to see reruns of “Three's Company” via satellite TV from Bangladesh and Singapore. This was before Rupert Murdoch finally gave us Star TV, sitcom reruns that were of “good print,” and bootlegged DVDs. It is within some of these worlds that my peers and I learned about becoming Third World moderns. It is within some of

these complex webs that we learnt about the duties and possibilities of becoming the “new Indian women” of the 1990s and the next millennium.

In this chapter, I provide a context for the formation of a *new* late-twentieth-century consciousness of (hetero)sexual subjectivity. I argue that this form of consciousness is ideologically produced within the specific post-1990s economic privatization programs, media liberalization, and a history of social reform/welfare work for particular classes of urban Indian women. I suggest that this new classed heterosexuality and thus ornamental-essential femininity is an explicit and assertive (hetero)sexuality, one that is defined by an ethic of active self-help, upward mobility, ambassadorship, and public service. This ethic in turn is bolstered by a growing media-saturated high-end service work that is a significant development of the increasingly privatized Indian economy. In particular, I focus on the production of beauty contestants or Bollywood Barbies by Femina Miss India (a media conglomerate that produces the high-end magazine *Femina* and *Femina Girl* for middle- to upper-middle-class women and girls in India). The self-making of the contestants and the audience sought out by *Femina* consistently asserts showcasing. In particular the women announce modernity, development, and economic privatization, through the active production of dominant femininity. The women’s body discipline, aspirations, desires, hopes, activities, work, simultaneously make this dominant femininity and new consciousness. Ambassadorship work assumes a self-motivated independent entrepreneurial spirit combined with social work for the “underprivileged” that must be heteronormative.

Ruling Through Looking or “No More Fat Adivasis”

Do you feel you have it in you to be the ambassador of Indian culture & beauty in the world? If You have the lethal combination of enigmatic Indian beauty with immense talent & intellect to complement it, get set to win the crown of The Femina Miss India 2003.¹¹

The problem is that they are currently being told how ugly they are and how difficult it is to find a husband for them. They’ll come out one day in droves—from the wheat fields of Punjab and the backwaters of Kerala, from the hills of Coorg to the salt lakes of Calcutta. And some day, these beauties will rule the world.¹²

In 1994, Sushmita Sen, the winner of Miss Femina India, became the first Indian woman to win the Miss Universe title. The same year the first runner up for Miss Femina India, Aishwarya Rai, won the Miss World title. It was as if a simmering volcano had finally erupted to transform and drench the existing landscape. Many in the commercial media have suggested that Indian women beauty contestants were winning, especially since the early 1990s, due to India's aggressive economic liberalization policies under P.V. Narasimha Rao, prime minister since 1991. They have pointed out that India was advertising itself anew, shedding its mixed economy and extra heavy public-sector orientation, in an attempt to seriously and forcefully integrate itself into a global economy. Vimla Patil, once the organizer of the Femina Miss India contests, editor of *Femina* magazine, and who sent women to Miss Universe, Miss World, and Miss Asia Pacific contests, says that economic liberalization has helped India's image and, in turn, Indian winners will further aid in India's enhancing image and economic prosperity. Patil says, "The Indian girls are winning not only because they are better prepared, but because India has been in the eyes of the world thanks to its economic reforms. The picture of India as a poverty-ridden, snake-infested country has changed drastically because of the marketing of the country as one that has many facets."¹³ In other words, economic reforms have produced role models and good will ambassadors that are independent, smart, liberated women who are 100 percent Indian. The lethal combination is clinched by our ambassador's private and very public heterosexuality. Her essential uncompromised Indian-ness is intact precisely due to how her dominant femininity resolves and bridges the private and public sphere created by liberal masculinist nationalist thought. Says Patil, "Earlier, only girls from Anglo-Indian, Christian or Parsi families felt comfortable entering such contests. Now, values have changed and even girls from conservative Hindu and Muslim families don't feel that there is anything wrong in taking part."¹⁴

Sunita Pancholi, a college student in Kolkata, remarked:

Sushmita Sen and Aishwarya Rai have become role models for many of the college girls. Even any smart girl from a good family. These girls are good in studies and can easily become doctors, computer scientists or businesswomen. But now they are choosing this career. There is a lot of money in it and it is respectable. Now there are modeling schools cropping up everywhere, especially in Bombay, Delhi and Bangalore. Calcutta there aren't that many—but you know how Calcutta is. Totally backward-moving. People are leaving this place if they can.

Did you know Jyoti Basu's¹⁵ niece entered a beauty contest here?! I think she was runner up or something. The Communists will shout "objectification of women" when it's other people's women—but their own daughters it's a different story. But, basically, your family has to at least put in a big investment for a modeling course, say 7,000–10,000 rupees. Then you must keep up with your facials and make-up, keep thin, so regularly exercise at home or in a gym, have a good tailor—but if you are really rich you can buy directly from these designers—all this is easily another 2,000/month. Easily 1 or 2 lakhs per year. It's a gamble—if it pays off you've got it made—or else you could go empty handed.

What was initially backed by indigenous corporate patronage (Femina, Lakme, and Bollywood) has boomed into a full-fledged multinational enterprise.¹⁶ State, corporate, and transnational sponsorship has significantly increased, alongside aggressive media coverage (especially with the entry of Murdoch's Star TV Network in 1993 and competitors for *Femina* such as Indian versions of *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle*), and diasporic-global-ethnic designer industry. So for instance, local designers such as Ritu Kumar (referred to by the media as the "couturier to the stars" and "the grand lady of revivalist ethnic fashions"), design the outfits for the women who go to the Miss Universe and World contests, advertise consistently in *Femina*, have a growing and lucrative client base at urban centers in India, Bollywood, and for wealthy NRIs (Non Resident Indians) and locals (in New York, London, Hong Kong, and Dubai). Regional contest winners then make it to the national round—Femina Miss India, which is held in Mumbai. Femina Miss India is the stepping-stone to the international circuit (such as for international titles like Miss Universe and Miss World, and international modeling agencies in the United Kingdom and the United States); domestic modeling and designing careers; and most of all Bollywood.

At the Femina Miss India contest, there are three kinds of winners. First, there is Miss Femina India-I. She comes in first and is automatically selected as the Indian representative for the Miss Universe contest. The Miss Universe contest is a U.S.-based company, considered the most prestigious of all contests. Miss Universe, was founded by Catalina Swimsuits president, E.B. Stewart, in 1952, a year after the formation of U.K.-based Miss World. Interestingly enough, Stewart initially called the contest *Miss United Nations* but changed names when he collaborated ownership with Universal International. In the 1960s Proctor and Gamble also had part ownership, followed by CBS Television in 1972, and, in the 1980s, it was co-owned by Madison

Square Gardens, Inc. In 1997 a majority of its ownership went to Donald Trump. It is currently co-owned by CBS and Trump.

Then there is Miss Femina India-II. She comes in second and is the candidate who represents India for the Miss World contest. Miss World Corporation, a U.K.-based corporation, was founded in 1951 by Eric Morley, a publicity salesman for Mecca Dancing (a British leisure company), when asked to liven up the Festival of Britain. Ten years later, with the help of his wife Julia, he turned it into a fund-raising activity for various charities. First covered by BBC in 1959, it reached its highest audience numbers in 1968 (27.5 million viewers). It was hosted in London until 1989, but was dropped by BBC in 1988 when its audience sank to 12 million viewers. Miss World went into offshore production in 1990, and began to be hosted in Hong Kong, Atlanta, and Sun City. Its slogan is, “beauty with a purpose,” it seeks “. . . beautiful role models and good will ambassadors.” For example, an article in a news magazine claimed, “Today Miss Universe contests are no longer mere beauty contests. They are more of a personality test, and a beauty queen from a country goes to the contest not just as a beautiful face of a country but as an ambassador of the country.”¹⁷ Miss World was brought to Bangalore, India by ABCL (The Amitabh Bachchan Corporation, Ltd.) in 1996.¹⁸ Amitabh Bachchan is also a veteran megastar of Bollywood based in the same city that hosts Femina Miss India contests.

And, finally there is, Miss Femina India-III. She comes in third and is the candidate who represents India in the Miss Asia-Pacific contest. This category is relatively less “prestigious” and lucrative.¹⁹ The winner in this category wins almost the same prizes, but the cash amount is halved.²⁰ As of 2001, India has been sending the third ranked winner to a brand new contest based in the Philippines—Miss Earth, a Manila-based organization formed by Ramon Monzon and former beauty queen wife. As CEO of Carousel Products, he also has tied up Miss Earth with Philippine’s largest tourism project inaugurated by the Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Environmental and Natural Resource, Manila Development Authority, and American Global Release. This pageant states that it’s for “Beauties With A Cause” and seeks to “overcome their being stereotyped as events for just promoting peace and good will,” like others. It seeks action-oriented environmentalists as contestants whose winners will engage in “tree planting activities, proper waste disposal, tours to schools and colleges, environmental awareness, mental problems and youth problems.” Most importantly, the United Nations appoints the winner as an ambassador for environmental concerns.

The official reception ceremony held for Sushmita Sen and Aishwarya Rai, in 1994, was attended by the Indian president, prime minister, and Sonia Gandhi (wife of the assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi). The triad seemed to be a remarkable combination of explicit state sponsorship and aggressive Indian capital. A powerful nexus of image-producers of the new India and new Indians (specifically Indian women as India's latest "ambassadors"), big business and MNCs seem to dominate the ideological, economic, and political imaginary of middle- to upper-class urban India. This nexus has allowed for the unusual transformation of a once-small-time (although lucrative) primarily local business to a major national passion and trans/national enterprise.

Making it to the top three of the Miss Femina India finalists also opens the door to specific transnational communities via diasporic commodification. For example, Miss Universe, Sushmita Sen, was a "hot commodity" for the New York Independence Day Parade. With a breathless voice and tears streaming down her face, Sushmita Sen proclaimed, "I love you!" to the New York crowd full of her "foreign brothers and sisters" whose hearts she knew are always with India. Sushmita Sen was also accompanied by the Indian Ambassador to the United States. Additionally, Sen was excited that, "America is one place which does not have Asian faces as models and they are just crazy about dusky skin and slim bodies."²¹

The increasingly corporatized cricket industry plays a complementary role with the contests. For example, Sushmita Sen was the special guest and "Mistress of Ceremonies" at the 1995 World Cup Cricket Match held at Eden Gardens, Calcutta. Also, after winning the Miss Universe/World titles, Sushmita Sen became the spokesperson for Coke, and Aishwarya Rai became the spokesperson for Pepsi, following in the footsteps of cricket stars like Sachin Tendulkar, Kambli, and Kapil Dev. Arjun Appadurai has pointed to the manner in which Indian cricket has been decolonized and spectacularized (Appadurai, 1996:89–113). He notes that the initial Victorian practice intended for the "moral disciplining of the Orientals" has through a series of indigenous sponsors (native princes, corporate and state patronage, vernacular print, and the media) become both a masculinist nationalist and trans/nationalist enterprise.²² I find the bond between the beauty and cricket industries compelling, especially since beauty contests too carry with them practices of disciplining bodies and souls. In the 1990s, both projects (the cricket and beauty industries) appear to be recruiting from communities relatively diverse across socioeconomic class, ethnic, caste, and linguistic lines—marking itself as a project of equal opportunity and regulation.

Just as cricket is “. . . quintessentially [a] masculine activity encoding virile nationalism, sportsmanship and unquestioned loyalty” (Appadurai, 1996:108), beauty queens are trans/nationalist India’s ambassadors who embody the “essence” (albeit conveniently quite fluid) of the contemporary Indian woman. Says Sushmita Sen, “The origin of the child is the mother, and is a woman. A woman is one who shows a man what love and sharing and caring is all about. That is the essence of a woman.”²³ The beauty industry produces “the new Indian woman,” who is marked by a sex/gender hierarchy, and who is loyal to her nation, community service, and essence. However, a key purpose in being a “metacommodity” like her cricket male counterpart—is that she is available to promote a trans/nationalist heteronormative ideology of true Indian-ness and an economy—through herself and her ancillary industries such as Coke, Tips and Toes nail polish, Wonder Wings Maxi Pads, Fair and Lovely Bleach. The photograph (see photo 3.1) of Sushmita Sen, advertising for Wonder Wings “India’s first premium feminine napkins,” is set in an all pink background with images of pink birds flying on the packet of napkins. Sushmita says, “Traveling abroad, I picked up so many new things . . . clothes, shoes, ideas. And, yet, I found something truly international right here in India! New Wonder-Wings.” Both Sen and Rai are part of a series of advertisements for Trupthi touting that they are “Aaj Ki Naris” (Contemporary Women). Trupthi is a Chennai-based company (part of NEPC Agro Foods Limited) that produces Basmati Rice, Flour, Cream of Wheat, Mineral Water, Salt, and Masalas. Trupthi claims to be a company that has a passion to excel and be perfect, fearlessly competitive, uncompromising, and most of all pure. Trupthi salutes these qualities in Aishwarya and Sushmita: “aggressively feminine,” a go-getter, powerful, smart, world traveler, and Indian.

Increasingly, women with the supposedly much-coveted “international look” (claimed to be marketable amongst populations in Latin America, Africa, Middle East and Asia) who are “discovered” in pageants held in geographic Third World are said to highlight offshore relocation grounds for post-Fordist production. Contestants below 5 ft 6 in are not considered by Femina Miss India while the average height for Indian women (according to the Indian census) is between 4 ft 10 in and 5 ft 4 in. In terms of height and weight, she is to match her comrades from the United States or Europe and thus the Indian weight loss industry has also benefited from the beauty boom. Exclusive fat-farms (more marketable if “all natural”) with long waitlists cater to the upper- and upper-middle-class, despite the fact that

Introducing
WONDERWINGS!
 India's first premium feminine napkin

"It's Truly International!"

"Travelling abroad, I picked up so many new things... clothes, shoes, ideas. And yet I found something truly international right here in India! New WonderWings."

SUSHMITA SEN
 MISS UNIVERSE 1994

NEW WONDERWINGS.

Photo 3.1 The ad. with Sushmita Sen for New Wonder Wings Feminine napkins.

Source: Femina Girl © Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd.

there have been lawsuits against them. The very same upper- and upper-middle-classes have been subjected to dangerous bodily and health damages by the weight loss industry claiming “health” benefits and body-capital flexibility for the new trans/national bodies. For the mid- to lower-middle-classes there are some reasonably priced

options: the classic body wraps that promise to melt away fat in five hours, the ever affordable fast dedicated to the Goddess of *Motapa* (fatness), weight loss clinics with low-end gyms with body vibrators from the 1950s, and the neighborhood yoga institute. The trans/national “look” shuns her premodern body hair free (specifically, legs, arms, and face) and she is expected to have her “traditional” long hair with minimized *Dravidian* curl. If there might be unacceptable curl she can always fall back on the growing “hair-straightening” industry. “Dark Dravidian or Adivasi looking”²⁴ women, say recruiters, need not apply either. Then there is “Fair and Lovely” a “natural” lotion to bleach your skin in case one gets burned with “unnatural” salon bleaches (used to beach facial and body hair). Increasingly, representations in Indian popular culture (television, movies, advertisements, etc.), employ racist-imperialist imaginary to construct the fair, enlightened-and worldly trans/national self against the backdrop of the passively witnessing dark, parochial, and subjugated tribal other.

For those really serious about modeling careers, as well as backup career prospects in multinational India, capital has found the answer for upper-class Indians: Barbizon-India. Barbizon is the U.S. based chain of modeling schools that has branches worldwide in about 200 countries. The New Delhi branch boasts of its “political correctness” and “equal opportunity” policies. Barbizon “. . . accepts students regardless of height, weight, bone structure and age.” In fact the youngest successful applicant is five years old. Barbizon prepares young women not just to be models, but to apply their training in looking and acting like “the new woman” in backup careers after marriage, such as interior design, boutique ownership, and becoming beauticians. Male clients, too, get training in backup careers such as bank executives and sales managers. The Vice-President of Barbizon, Jyotika Jhalani (an ex-model) claims, “Everyone has the right to look like a model, if not actually be one. If a 4ft 2in girl walked in, I wouldn’t turn her down” (Sen, 1995:3).

There are two reasons Barbizon claims that an applicant would be turned down. One, is not meeting the costs. The 72-hour “female Modeling Course” costs approximately Rs. 27,000 (approximately \$800) and the 45-hour “Male Modeling Course” costs about Rs. 15,000 (approximately \$450). The other reason an applicant gets rejected is if s/he can’t speak English. “How do you translate ‘tuxedo’ into Hindi?” explains a successful applicant. The owners of Barbizon not only want their students to be linguistically “comfortable,” but get rid of their supposedly “outdated” notions of gender practices. “Sissy stuff” like

manicures, hand care, and “sashay walking” are to be learned and valued by the new woman and man. A reviewer of *Barbizon* says that even though *Barbizon* has pink and purple balloons and streamers at its inauguration party—the “official colours of the gay and lesbian movement in America,” “nobody seems to worry too much about sending out the wrong message. There’s a certain innocence about that” (Sen, 1995:3). The reviewer of *Barbizon* informs *Business Standard* readers that the 1990s is “the post Sen-Rai era” and “the Age of Anorexia” in which “. . . the key to feeling good about yourself is to work from the outside in” and, most importantly, “. . . the Indian psyche is open to the great American dream” (Sen, 1995:4).

Subordination and privilege are recast as dreams and liberation. Resistant ideas and motifs from movements across the globe are co-opted and touted as open-mindedness towards the “Americans.” In a land where hunger is not optional for many hunger is rearticulated as a cool dreamlike openness to “American” culture. And, “eating problems” are solely set up as the disorder of the middle-class and wealthy Indian woman who want to look just like her white-Euro/American-well-to-do-sister.

Fearless Mother India: Stunt Woman, Lieutenant, & Cheerleader

In 1947, Pramila (whose given name was Esther), an Indian-born art student in London, was offered the role of the first version of the film *Mother India* by “Imperial Movies kingpin,” Ardeshir Irani. Pramila went on to work with moviemaker J.B. Wadia²⁵ (who is noted to have “discovered” the infamous stuntwomen Fearless Nadia) as a stunt actor and freelance movie star. In addition to designing the costumes and sets, Pramila/Esther played the role of a foreign-educated Indian girl who returns home to realize her true roots. *Mother India* turned out to be the first Indian film to be shown in Buckingham Place and had a successful 82-week run in London. Pramila/Esther was also the first Miss India, chosen by media professionals in 1947, the year of Indian independence. Morarji Desai, the then Congress Party member, awarded her her crown. The *Mother India* of 1947 was less well known than the *Mother India* film of 1957. The foreign-return girl plot may have been too early for its time. *Mother India* of 1957, the Mehboob Khan film, portrayed Nargis as the quintessential, suffering, stoic Indian mother and woman: the mother

of famine torn village India, a poor peasant victimized by a scrupulous moneylender, and a mother of four sons deserted by her husband. Nargis' success in India and the "... Soviet Union, West Asia and North Africa . . . made her the ambassador of 'Indian culture' on a world stage."²⁶ This film, some feminists have pointed out was intended to dismiss claims made by Katherine Mayo in her controversial book, *Mother India* (1927) during British rule.²⁷ For instance, Mrinalini Sinha has pointed out that the imperialist-nationalist debate over Mayo's book enabled the early twentieth century notion of the modern-new-Indian Woman (especially for middle and upper classes): A modern woman who was capable of staking a claim to active citizenship as an agent of modernity. Sarojini Naidu, who coined the saying, "India cannot be free until its women are free and women cannot be free until India is free" was the first unofficial international ambassador following the Mayo controversy. *Mother India* (1957), as personified by actress Nargis, was a projection of Nehruvian socialism, whereas Miss World and Universe are urban, middle- to upper-middle-class, trans/national, and diasporic in potential. The failure of Nehru's postindependence policies and the promise of trans/national global capitalism are embodied and symbolized by *Mother India's* successors—such as Miss World and Miss Universe.

The tradition of Miss India contests continued on into the 1950s although the only available information is somewhat sparse. The contests become regularized in early sixties (via *Eve's Weekly* and *Femina*) and organizers began to send contestants to international contests such as Miss World and Miss Universe. The contests of the 1960s produced two Indian women stars. First, its 1965 winner was Persis Khambatta who went on to Hollywood to play Lieutenant Alia in *Star Trek*. Persis was referred to by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as "the pride of India." Persis loaned her swimsuit to the 1966 Miss India winner, Rita Faria, who ended up winning the Miss World title that year.²⁸ Eric Morley, the CEO of Miss World, writes about being struck by her lack of interest in the contest, the fact that she showed up in London with only three pounds, and her pre-medical student "intelligence." Morley ended up having a rocky relationship with her due to what he calls her "tantrums" over money and "diva" behavior. But what is most striking about Rita Faria is that she was invited by Bob Hope to entertain U.S. troops in Vietnam. Despite cautions from the Indian High Commissioner, Rita impressed Morley by going to Vietnam and charming the U.S. troops even "... though she was a colored woman."²⁹

From Kanyakumari to Kashmir: Miss World 1996, Bangalore, India

She's a "...dark stocky woman in a churidar-kurta who rides a scooter." Described further as a Bengali, in her late twenties, a "strict vegetarian" with a masters degree in mathematics and occupation in marketing wooden jewelry produced by rural artisans to showrooms, and who holds a black belt in karate and who has achieved the grade of three red starts in Kung Fu, and a trainer for women's self-defense. She has also been reported to have been seen moving about town with BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) legislator and advocate Pramila Nesargi. The print media thus introduces us to K.N. Shashikala, the president of the Mahila Jagran Sangh (Forum for the Awakening of Women). K.N. Shashikala (and the Mahila Jagran) received significant press coverage during the months and weeks that lead up to the November 23, 1996 Miss World event in Bangalore, India.

These descriptions of Shashikala, by the press, were coupled by quotes from Shashikala vowing to take extreme "direct action" against the Miss World event. The Mahila Jagran's main "direct action" promised a self-immolating suicide squad. Shashikala was reported to have "...threatened to sneak in suicide squads in the stadium and set themselves ablaze" and, outside the stadium, "lead women trained in martial arts" to demonstrate and take on the police. Later, she was quoted as saying, "...many [of us] are worried about the agony of burning. We will each have a cyanide pill to escape the agony."³⁰

Other women allies of Shashikala, as reported by the press, included prominent politicians of the right wing Hindu party (Bharatiya Janata Party) such as Premila Nesargi (a local party legislator) and Uma Bharati (a Member of Parliament). Uma Bharati stated that she would "kill or get killed" if the show was "an insult to womanhood"³¹ and Pramila Nesargi objected to the "economic and cultural invasion" she said "the Miss World contest is nothing but flesh trade. It's going to be a parade of nude bodies . . . the swimsuit is part of the culture we are opposed to."³² Other organizations and individuals included other right wing groups such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, local farmers' groups (such as The State Farmer's Association) whose leader, Najundaswamy³³ also threatened to torch the venue of "cultural imperialism," student caucuses of political parties (of the left and right), and groups from Left political parties.³⁴ In addition to several weeks of protests (involving several thousands

of people) and a petition filed by Nesargi and Shashikala to the Karnataka High Court,³⁵ a 25-year-old worker of the Marxist Democratic Youth Federation of India, Suresh Kumar, set himself on fire while shouting slogans against the contest near the Periyar bus terminus (Chennai). He died in the hospital of severe burns.³⁶

The opponents of the Miss World pageants came from fairly diverse constituencies and registered multiple objections to the contest. Their opposition to the event stated that it was obscene; it involved economic and cultural imperialism, and the commercialization and exploitation of Indian women; that it would create permissiveness among Indian teens, and spread HIV; that it would create an inferiority complex among women and wreak havoc in their lives; and finally that state funds would be wasted into supporting a beauty contest (through the beautification of the city and police) rather than investing into the state's weak infrastructure and poor. The supporters of the contests responded with the following: the contest would be a "a catalyst for economic liberalization (J.J. Valaya, businessman)," and that the world would see "that we're not a primitive country anymore and . . . can do it better than a Western country (Amitabh Bachchan,³⁷ owner of ABCL)." ³⁸

Bollywood had a key role in the programming. The theme, as directed by filmmaker Priyadarshan was "From Kanyakumari to Kashmir" to demonstrate the kaleidoscope of *Indian culture*. Interestingly, Priyadarshan was a member of the Karnataka Hindu right wing but said that his party members understood not to interfere with his job or his creative potential. He said, "[M]y aim is to showcase all that is good in Indian tradition. If the protestors watch how I do India proud with a traditional extravaganza, they might see change in their viewpoint. I am a patriot first. I will never direct a show that is vulgar or show Indian values and art forms in a poor light." Furthermore, the artistic emblem of the pageant consisted of the bust of an apsara from the Ajanta caves where "the dusky Indian beauty is adorned with a bejeweled crown offset by feather of the peacock, India's national bird."³⁹ Music and dances were produced by musicians A.R. Rahman and Illyaraja, along with a special performance of the song "Made in India," by pop star Alisha Chinai. The discourse of tourism, a la Bollywood, constructed a mythical-traditional India ripe for problem-free investment in India's own Silicon Valley, Bangalore.

Some liberal women's activists who had Bollywood histories and connections (such as Waheeda Rahman and Protima Gauri) who strongly supported the event said that this was more of a political ploy

of the main opposition party (the Hindu right wing—BJP) against the ruling Janata Dal and that it would not infringe on India's cultural heritage, and that women's activists should be concerned about real serious issues such as domestic violence. They pointed out that beauty pageants have always been held in India, such as the Femina Miss India contest, and these had never received such opposition. Despite the protestors, a bomb blast, threats of suicide squads, and one suicide, the Miss World event, held in the Chinnaswamy Cricket Stadium, took place as scheduled and was finally telecast to over 2.5 billion viewers in 180 countries.

Trafficking in Essences: Mother India to Ms Worldly

Dominant femininity produced through the notion of ambassadorship, for the beauty contests industry, link and co-constitute the body, modernity, and womanhood through narratives of essences and ornamentality. For instance, let's take the example of the narrative of the essence of the new Indian woman or the millennial woman. Such discourses of essences, whether about Indian-ness or womanhood, many scholars have pointed out, are configured within a spurious separation of the private and public sphere within the larger historical context of Indian nationalist thought and social reform. In the much invoked essay by Partha Chatterjee,⁴⁰ Chatterjee has argued that such a specious bifurcation is foundational to Indian nationalist thought and that it resolved the question of Indian women comfortably with such a logic (1989:237). Indian women (from materially respectable backgrounds) in this logic were relegated to the private sphere and served an ornamental function signaling national progress or shame and into the public sphere with social reform activity.

Nationalist cultural politics of the early- to mid-1800s, such as the "Bengal Renaissance," were characterized by the impulse toward and strategic urgency of social reform. Social reform included either extricating glorious pasts or expunging embarrassing practices. The reforming of "unenlightened" practices also meant that nationalists and social reformers would be in control of and gain autonomy over any "civilizing missions," especially in the area of maternal politics. The premise and claim of British colonial rule in India and its corollary that Indian *swaraj* (self-rule) was unimaginable and impossible, was that they (the British) were a force of liberation in India, especially for [Indian] women. The colonial position that they themselves were the

legitimate facilitators and architects of the fruits of the Enlightenment tradition in India was contradictory on many fronts. For instance, Joshi and Liddle⁴¹ have pointed out that while the British claimed that they wanted to ban backward patriarchal practices of *Sati* (widow burning), they simultaneously eroded certain matrilineal traditions among the Nairs of Kerala. In 1896, *sambandhams* (relationships) between women and men that involved sexual relations and children were required to be defined as a monogamous “marriage,” in which the women and children became properties of the husband. Fathers and husbands among the Nairs now gained rights to inherit the Nair woman’s properties.

At this juncture in Indian history, “. . . the fate of the woman and the fate of the nation become inextricably intertwined.”⁴² In her analysis of the indigenous and colonialist discourses on *Sati*, Lata Mani has pointed out “. . . women are neither subjects or objects, but rather the ground of the discourse on Sati” (Mani, 1989:113). Furthermore, she maintains, for the parties involved in the nineteenth-century debates, women represented either “embarrassment or potential,” or “both shame and promise.” Such discursive ornamental constructions of essential womanhood anticipated litmus tests to prove that privileged brown women would ultimately occupy a complex dual role as public caretakers in the arena of social work and public service.

The “woman question” evolved within this context for nationalists and social reformers, in the early 1800s. Social reform issues particular to Indian women included *sati*, legalizing widow re-marriage, abolishing Kulin⁴³ polygamy, women’s education, reforming marriage laws, and raising the age of consent for girls (many of these issues have been addressed by various Indian feminists). Although some women, especially middle- to upper-class women and upper-caste women may have benefited to a certain extent from these reforms, by the end of the 1800s it was assumed by the nationalists that “the woman question” had been “resolved.” As far as the nationalists were concerned, it had been resolved as “social issues” and now it was time to really concentrate solely on the political issues in the arena of the public sphere. This dichotomization, scholars of colonial India have suggested, was a fundamental characteristic of Indian nationalist thinking, in which cultural reality was organized into two distinct spheres of the “material/public/political” and “spiritual/private/social.” Within the binary of the material and spiritual, Indian women became the grounds on which the spirit and essence of Indian-ness was built.

The “material” domain one that is dominated by the claims of Western civilization, science, technology, rationality, forms of economic and

political organization, and modern methods of statecraft. The “spiritual” domain was where the true identity or essence of people was housed. This classical liberal dualism parallels intellectual thinking that dichotomizes the “political-economic” from the “social-cultural” or the “public” from the “private” or for that matter the “personal” from the “political.” The picture of Aishwarya Rai, Miss World 1994, in *Femina* with the caption “An international face with an Indian soul. A cold Grecian marble face with the smile of a temple apsara”—embodies this split thinking. But in the twenty-first century, ambitiousness, entrepreneurship, and assertiveness in the public realm is extended much further to respectable women, and the explicit support from current nationalist reconfigured the inner domain in new ways. This tenacity has much to do with the strong ties between compulsory normative heterosexuality, service work, and social work.

When nationalists and social reformers introduced the “woman question,” nationalist women gradually began entering certain arenas of the debates and activism. Kumari Jayawardana has noted that, of the many “. . . women activists and pioneers in the 19th century and early 20th century, the majority [were] linked by birth or marriage to social reformers and nationalists . . .”⁴⁴ Nationalist women’s activities included addressing issues pertaining to women’s education and medical training.⁴⁵ Social work activity such as sewing and first aid classes also provided avenues for mobility outside “the home.” Additionally, women activists and nationalists were involved in addressing issues pertaining to widow remarriage, and in helping political prisoners and trade unionists—all of whom were tied together in a complex web of anticolonialist and social reform activities. By the early 1900s, women were not only members in anti-imperialist organizations, but also in bodies that were solely under their control. For example, the All India Conference for Educational Reform⁴⁶ (1927) concentrated on reforming women’s access to education and marriage laws, making education compulsory for women, abolishing child marriage and raising and fixing the legal minimum age of marriage for women to fourteen.

Mobility, from “the family” was facilitated, for certain classes of women, via activism in nationalist struggles, social reform projects, and increasing access to education and universities. Nationalist women who were perceived by nationalist men as being too threatening to local patriarchal practices/institutions were often subjected to ridicule and accusations of being loyal to the imperialist

agenda. These women often ended up living in exile (and conducted their anti-imperialist activities from other countries) or sometimes, like Pandita Ramabai, converted to Christianity and traveled around the world with their activism.

Nationalist and pioneer women were often lauded for being good *satyagrahis* (nonviolent and noncooperative activists following the path of truth), but were also recruited for violent and “militant” forms of nationalist projects. Radha Kumar has noted that in Bengal, nationalist women got more involved in “revivalist and extremist elements” of nationalism (1993:45). Revolutionary terrorism tapped into two overlapping forms of gendered nationalism: a militant mother-centered and a goddess-centered nationalism. Mother India (Bharat Mata) and Mother Goddesses (such as Kali, Durga, and Chandi) became intertwined in meanings, political rhetoric, and revolutionary violence. “. . . Kali, who was still then the goddess of marginal groups such as dacoits, thieves, thugs and—significantly—prostitutes (themselves symbolic of *vagina dentata*, or devouring sexuality), was fore fronted as a goddess” (1993:45). Revolutionary means and rhetoric included death (self-inflicted or otherwise) and the “immortalization of death” for the goal of national liberation. This often comes through in popular figures/icons that embody the image of a stoic killer and unscrupulous maternal feminine politics like: Indira Gandhi, Mamta Banerjee, Uma Bharati, Phoolan Devi, and sometimes, J. Jayalalitha.

Sarojini Naidu would put it, “. . . the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world” (quoted in Liddle and Joshi, 1986:46). Sarojini Naidu’s version of Mother India as the inner-spiritual power of woman-ness and motherhood was supplemented by another version, which claimed that healthy, strong mothers produced a healthy race or nation. She also strongly supported the objective of women’s education, which was to produce emotionally and intellectually strong homemakers, wives, and appropriate socializers of children/future capital for the nation. Although respectable middle-class and elite women were more easily identified with Mother India, working-class women were given the responsibility to produce healthy workers for plantations, factories, and armies of nation-building men. Nationalist women like Sarojini Naidu who seemed to embody the nationalist ideal of the then—“new woman” (or, in other words, the carrier of tradition and an anticolonial activist) and who articulated challenges to Katherine Mayo’s version of Mother India, were perceived by some nationalist men, as “. . . the best unofficial ambassador for India in the U.S.” This is reconfigured in new ways, via the ideology of

“beauty with a purpose,” for the late twentieth century and twenty-first-century millennium woman.

MCPs, Arranged Marriages, and Dirty Finger Nails

On the cover of *Gentleman*, a magazine for the urban middle- to upper-class heterosexual man, it says, “Are you ready for the New Woman? She is Single. She earns more than you. She swears. She doesn’t care for silicon. She demands satisfaction. And she doesn’t give a damn” (Thayil, 1995:23).⁴⁷ These claims are explored further through photographs and interviews with the “new women” of the “liberalized” India. The phrase “the new Indian woman” enters the national vocabulary once again at a time when late 20th C India is undergoing economic, political, and cultural changes.

According to author Jeet Thayil, the “new Indian woman” is nothing like her mother or a sister a man may have grown up with (one would think the sister too would be like a new woman). She “. . . may or may not be a feminist but she has no penis envy at all” (Thayil, 1995:23). The “new Indian woman” is independent more than ever— “. . . economically, sexually and psychologically,” and even knows it. Most importantly, Thayil maintains, the “new Indian woman” is sexually (read “heterosexually”) “aggressive.” She does not have to be “forced” into arranged marriages any more; she can find men who don’t ask for dowries. She can smoke and drink in public places and maybe drink in front of her parents. “She uses four-letter words. She likes frank talk about sex. She is aggressive, ribald and cocky” (Thayil, 1995:24). In other words, Thayil says, the new woman of the 1990s is in control of her body, mind, thoughts, desires, her career, and sexual activities.

Thayil attempts to prove his point through interviews. There is Chandini Sehgal, MTV’s new CEO, who declares, “Women have a great scene going in this country. The status of women in India is far higher than most other countries with similar socioeconomic conditions” (Thayil, 1995:26). However, Sehgal claims, the rural women of India are “far more liberated. They don’t have any conditioning.” Kamal Siddhu, a V-J (Video Jockey) for television hosts the “1995 Gladrags Manhunt Contest” and says, “A good man is hard to find, but a hard man is . . . good.” Magazines like *Gladrags*, *Savvy*, *Society*, and *Femina* cater to the middle- to upper-middle-class cosmopolitan woman, and these magazines sponsor the nation’s major

beauty contests. For example, Miss Femina-India launches national and international careers for the “new” women. Before going to interview Farzana Versey, a self-identified feminist, Thayil wonders whether this “proud feminist” who may very well “hate all men,” would be a “leather-clad dominatrix deriving pleasure from pain, self-inflicted or otherwise” or a “bitch-goddess, siren, witch.” or a “coquette, femme fatale, muse.” Or, he wonders, was she a stereotypical feminist type—all “scruffy and hostile.” But he was relieved to find that Versey “. . . was extremely well turned out, perfectly dressed and coiffed” (Thayil, 1995:32). Versey “. . . enjoyed looking feminine . . . and being a woman.” In fact, she claimed that she did not fit into the stereotypical Indian feminist look of having “dirty finger nails” and “coarse saris,” a stereotype I hadn’t heard of before. Not only did she enjoy looking like a “real” woman but she got a “thrill” and lots of “pleasure” when she menstruated. Menstruating was after all, she exerted, “an assertion of my womanhood.”

There’s more. Versey proudly defines her feminism. She is quoted as saying that women’s “public postures” need not coincide with their “private practices.” In other words, women should have the “choice” of being publicly feminist, that is, challenging male chauvinism or “Male Chauvinist Pigs (MCPs),” but should be able to change their minds privately. So, on one day a woman can “challenge” MCP behavior and on another she should be entitled to the joys of a man opening doors for her. Another woman, Rehmat Jamal Muthana, who is married and has children, says, “Marriage stinks!” and that “it is not your duty to have orgasms.” Muthana is all for “love marriages” in which men and women are friends and partners and “non-monogamous” (1995:41).

Thayil’s piece proceeds with more interviews with more women between 21 and 35, who are fashion designers and models, both unmarried and married. For all, especially if married, “work comes before everything except family and God.” Some women would prefer living with a man before marriage, but would prefer it if “their man” made just a little more money than they did, since “Indian MCPs are so insecure.” Ritu Beri says that she wouldn’t respect her man if he wasn’t insecure about such things because she is “willingly looking for a submissive role” (Thayil, 1995:41).

Thayil’s article points to the various layers of “non-conformity” and complicity that some “postfeminist” women engage in. His article is on the one hand reactionary, uninformed, and represents a libertarian style misogyny, and on the other hand reveals the assimilation of women who have significant class privilege and a new

heterosexual consciousness. Most were upper- and upper-middle-class women, all were from major urban centers (like Delhi or Bombay) and all were espousing some form of normative heterosexual “freedom.” By some form I mean, that either they were married or had boyfriends or that it was a key goal to have a husband or boyfriend (monogamous or otherwise). The forms of normative heterosexual identity included only wanting love marriage, only wanting arranged marriage, okay with either, a main goal in life of being married, and wanting male lovers as a way of expressing sexual freedom from older versions of repressive-segregating patriarchy and arranged marriage.

Having competitive and well paying jobs in the corporate sector may very well be “progress” and upward mobility for women in a male dominated corporate world. Like the beauty contestants these women are also beauties with degrees in finance. They are corporate CEOs, “independent,” “aggressively feminine,” and most of all relentlessly heteronormative. Other gains that these women may have “won” could include the following: having a “choice” to work outside the home as well; the possibility of smoking and drinking in public or in front of parents and relatives; openly challenging MCP behavior (but not too far); challenging sexual duties to husbands; and openly valourizing the pleasures of (hetero)sexual practices. Women publicly talking about their sexual practices and preferences (with friends, lovers or in the media), who they want to marry, or why “marriage stinks” are in themselves a definite shift from a repressive urban-upper- and middle-class culture and the formation of a new heterosexual subjectivity. This consciousness blends conformity and rebellion toward old-fashioned heterosexuality. One could say that the “new woman of the 1990s” or “the millennium woman” is almost the same old “new woman” (of early twentieth-century nationalist discourse)—essentially and respectably heterosexual, or more specifically aggressively and much narrowly heteronormative.

Transnational Service Economies

It could be argued that the beauty contest industry in India is part of a longer trajectory of a modern service economy where women as a group tend to “naturally” fit into the service sector along side the unskilled and skilled continuum/construct. Within this serving sphere, the female body has the potential cultural capital for ambassadorship work aided and abetted by a youthful/thin regime and reproductive discipline. For instance, in order to successfully qualify a contestant

must be between 18 and 27 years; cannot be married, pregnant, or have given birth; and must remain single through out her *reign*. Although “natural beauty” is encouraged, there are no restrictions on cosmetic surgery or padding (which supposedly discourages surgery). They train several months before the contest (including regimens of diets, talking and walking techniques, etc.), possibly before and after depending on their career and socialization processes into girls. The training into performing their femininity is labor-intensive and bodily. The winner is involved in showcasing and ambassador services like representing nations, charities, organizations, tourism departments, and corporations. Her duties revolve around charity work and social/political work. In the making and disciplining of normative femininity, the sheer somatic focus and emphasis on being “fit” or “beautiful” brings together a form of high-end physical labor for upper-class femininity.

The stigma of bodily labor in this kind of service work is reduced and rewarded by the pay, perks, prestige, showcasing, and overall improved working conditions. Many college women I spoke to commented on the increase in respectability, especially for Hindu and Muslim girls from “good” families. It is interesting to note that early contests and winners came from Jewish, Parsee, Anglo-Indian/Christian, or courtesan backgrounds very much like early Bollywood women. A winner gets prizes, cash, contracts, luxury apartment deals, first-class fares possibly anywhere from \$500,000 and up. As a poster girls for social reform and self-development, this further leads them to future income possibilities such as Bollywood, television contracts and modeling. And, eventually and ideally a suitable boy. One could also argue that this form of feminized labor complements the body-shopping boom of the Information Technology Revolution (the other “high” skill, high-end, masculinized service work exported from the geographic South). Furthermore, I would argue that the long history and progressive respectability (and boom) of this industry taps into an age-old reserve of body/ambassador service designated for women. Additionally, this boom is simply another avenue for “income-generation” for middle- to upper-class women in India. What was supported by the State and local capital is now ferociously supported by global/local capital, international institutions, several governmental institutions (especially tourism, advertising, entertainment, and fitness/beauty industries). This concentrated nexus of low- and high-end service economies is highly gendered, racialized, and classed. It assumes several divisions of labor especially across national boundaries, valorizes pop nationalism, pop individualism, pop

multiculturalism/diversity and bolsters the global “family of man” rhetoric. In other words this form of trans/national service work speaks to a globalized American dream, dreamt up by modernization theorists like Rostow, where all nations of the world are part of this global capitalist “democratic” family/melting pot of mankind where everyone has the same desires, the similar opportunity to pull themselves up, and thrive and catch up with the successful if they work hard.

The July 1991 response to the fiscal and balance of payment crisis by the Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh government involved Brettonwood lead measures of structural reforms and macrostabilization. The 1991 governmental response to international agencies was decisive, deeper, wider, and a considerable turning point in Indian privatization. Many economists have pointed out that since 1977—and more specifically in the 1980s—(during Indira Gandhi’s government and later Rajiv’s), sporadic measures were taken to implement economic privatization measures. Political scientist Ashutosh Varshney has argued that economic reforms successfully passed in 1991 represent the ironies and contradictions of what is perceived of and mobilized as elite and mass-based politics. He points out that the minority Rao government successfully passed the economic reform package in almost all areas due to the rise of “triangular” politics of coalition-building in the 1990s, versus the “bipolar” Congress/Gandhi/Nehru monopoly between the 1950s and 1990s. The left and lower caste-based political parties collaborated with Congress (against the growing power of the Hindu nationalist BJP government, then the second largest party) amidst the tensions of the 1990 Babri Masjid violence and passed the economic package. The economic package Varshney suggests reflects changes in areas that seemingly directly impact “elite politics.”⁴⁸

Varshney points out that these reforms have for the most part not touched areas that catalyze “mass politics.” They include agriculture, labor laws, farm subsidies, and the public sector. According to Varshney, in the last ten to fifteen years “mass” based politics, driven primarily by ethnic/religious/caste-based politics, have influenced this triangulation, repressed an overt debate on economic reform and yet passed them. Varshney points out that the clout of the farmer’s lobby and the organized, industrialized working class (with links to the peasantry and the potential to organize this segment of the electorate) provides the largest resistance to the incursions of privatization. What is interesting about Varshney’s argument is that he points to the irony of the relatively privileged, organized urban and rural workers that

ignores the needs of the mushrooming unorganized/informal sectors of workers. This, in turn, generates more economic reforms in areas considered not critical to mass politics: tourism and hotels. At the low-end unorganized service work level more and more women are being recruited into this sector (such as sex-workers, domestic workers, laundry workers, hawkers, and factory workers). Simultaneously, a burgeoning middle-class and upper-middle-class opens up more high-end service work. The mid-end work similar to low end work tends to be mostly unorganized. This includes airline stewardess, secretaries, beauty parlor work, hotel receptionists, nurses, and teachers. And higher-end service work tends to be in areas such as the beauty world, Bollywood, modeling, IT and MBA professionals, hotel management, and interior and fashion design. The beauty business is thus part of this bifurcated and hierarchical service economy in India.

A clear example of this development can also be seen in India's diamond industry. The "elite" based reforms have specifically impacted the burgeoning middle-class and product-needy consumers. The growth of cheaper consumer goods, and the increased attention to India as an "emerging power/economy" have been coupled with a doubling of exports. India still taps into some of its traditional exports: garments, textile, and jewels, which constitutes 50 percent of its exports.⁴⁹ Although IT software and "skilled labor" of IT workers (touted as "brains not beauty" by its executives) are still star exports, diamonds and garments constitute a large percentage of exports. It is interesting that Indian has the world monopoly on small cut and polished diamonds. Diamond cutting and polishing is highly labor intensive and replaced work in small agricultural communities in western India.⁵⁰ These diamonds are now being advertised by Nakshatra Diamond Jewelry via Aishwarya Rai, the 1994 Miss World winner, with the slogan: "What the stars tell me I keep close to my heart" and "A Diamond Is Forever." The two slogans interplay with multiple patriarchal meaning systems of what woman's fate and aspirations could be if she had the diamonds.

The contestants in the beauty business are involved in work that is highly visible and invisible at the nexus of "skilled" and "unskilled" labor. They are very much in the formal sector but in the language of USAID and the World Bank, are "micro entrepreneurs," "heralders of free society" engaging in "income-generating projects" with the help of the patriarchal State, local and global capital, and private organizations and funders, at the nexus of developmentalist and corporate logics. But, unlike poorer and marginalized women (urban and rural) they seem to really have more of a "choice" in their income-generation,⁵¹ not to

mention their sexuality/gender. Self-help and self-empowerment is recast as the philanthropic impulse toward the truly oppressed Third World woman and girl-child. There is a simultaneous humanist ungendering of themselves through the role of ambassadorship and developmentalist patron.

Finally, Varshney's notion of triangular politics was ultimately demonstrated in the 1996 Bangalore protests at the Miss World gathering in Bangalore. As the gateway to "brains not beauty" (India's Silicon Valley and IT centers) and at the nexus of "beauty and brains" (the actual contest) Bangalore provided a temporary avenue for "elite" and "mass" political confrontations. As Rupal Oza has pointed out, the Bangalore protests facilitated a process wherein grievances, dissatisfaction, usual and unusual party alliances, and power plays concerning farmer subsidies, organized labor, poorly funded social and educational services, internal and external economic reforms, patriarchal/nativist anxieties, and maternal power could all be registered.⁵²

Agency Discourses

Neha Dhupia, Miss Universe 2002 semifinalist, introducing herself:

I believe if you smile your way through life the world shall smile with you. In one word, I would describe myself as *positive*, because I always look at the sunnier side of life. (CBS Television, May 2002)

Yukta Mookey, Miss World 1999 on what makes a perfect Indian Woman:

Someone who is very warm at heart, someone who has her *Indian essence* very well positioned in her mind and come what may, does not forget her tradition. But at the same time, she is a *very modern woman*; she is open to good ideas and better ways of living. She basically likes to add an Indian touch to it. She can smile all the time. (*The Hindu*, February 2, 2000).

Lara Dutta, Miss Universe 2000 (during the Q&A sessions):

Q: What are the contributions that pageants make to today's woman?
Gone are the days when pageants were called beauty pageants . . . Pageants like Miss Universe have not only produced world class ambassadors, but they have also given women the *confidence* and *opportunity* to forge ahead and excel in areas of their own.

Q: If you become Miss Universe and have a chance to represent the women of the world, what is the primary goal that you want to accomplish?

I come from a country that is still in the process of developing. India and its surroundings have all had women leaders. If I had the honor of becoming Miss Universe, I would promote the education of the child, especially the *girl-child* so that she may have the platform to voice her *opinion* and make her *choice*. An *educated mother* means a healthy baby, which, in turn, means a mature individual of the world.

Q: What would you say to those who condemn the contest as an affront to women?

Pageants like Miss Universe give us young women a platform to foray into the fields that we want to and forge ahead, be it *entrepreneurship*, be it the *armed forces*, be it *politics*. It gives us a platform to *voice our choices* and *opinions* and it makes us *strong* and *independent*.

Priyanka Chopra, Miss World 2000:

Each country has its own philosophies. In India, the appreciation of life and relationships is very high, whereas in the U.S., individualism and absolute freedom of all kinds is valued. (“Level of Education among Girls has improved: Priyanka Chopra,” *The Economic Times*, April 9, 2000)

Anne Cronin has pointed out that Western consumerist discourses often position women as both saleswomen and commodity.⁵³ Thus women are located as primary purchasers and frivolous consumers, versus man the rational/economic producer. Furthermore, as modern individuals—or autonomous and free willed subjects—women are encouraged to continually reconstitute themselves in projects of selfhood via discursive practices of self-actualization, self-transformation, and choice. In the case of the beauty contestants/winners from India, a particular self pre-constituted via decisive disciplining of one’s body and by the performance of dominant femininity, allows for the win and subsequent access to a future self (one that is even more self-realized by charity work, future jobs, scholarships, and education). Her cultural and bodily discipline brought her to lucrative public spheres and she leaves with more cultural capital for herself and others (as saleswoman, commodity, and consumer).

The liberal humanist idea that the individual is fundamentally constituted by the innate capacity to “choose” and to have “choice” provides both the ideal and avenue to individuation. Cronin points out that “compulsory individuality” is installed by “this self-expressive

choice” involving constant rituals whereby one has “no choice but to choose if we are to express ourselves as individuals” (2000:279).⁵⁴ For the Indian contestants this sentiment comes through the most when they express and perform ambition. For instance, Lara Dutta, speaks of how as a participant and modern Indian woman from a “developing” nation she has been able to enhance her confidence and life choices. As a result of cultivating a strong independent voice she can now make this a possibility for girl-children in India. Thus a preexisting self allows for her to be the natural winner and in turn will be more realized through public service charity work combined with entrepreneurial ventures (“beauty with a purpose”).

As a vital conduct manual for urban-middle- to upper-middle-class women and sponsor of contests and contestants, *Femina* forges new identities through social reform. In 2001 *Femina* began the Little Princess Foundation for the girl-child. The Foundation “. . . look[s] into the nutritional, social, and emotional needs of the girl child—in fact, to better the life of the girl child in India. To, this end we highlight the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals, compile a directory of these, encourage our Femina Miss Indias to contribute their time and effort towards this cause, and generally work to raise awareness and funds to better the life of the Indian girl child.”⁵⁵ As promised every other issue of the magazine features NGOs that support services for rural and urban girl children, between ten and thirteen years of age, who are either street kids or children of day wage-laborers. The organizations work on literacy, helps out with school tuition and uniforms, provides counseling, sex-education, body education, provide housing, place the children in families interested in adoption, and provide vaccinations.

The relationship and self-management between the “self that exists” (unique, actual, and often expressed as local heterosexual essence) and the “self that will exist” (the universal, potential, future self often expressed as modern, extra transgressive of private–public, and transnational) co-exist in uneasy ways for subjects who have not had the usual access to the epistemological status of selfhood, privacy (particularly in the case of Indian women), and citizenship. This “unevenly conferred epistemological status,” Cronin argues reproduces and recasts privilege and subordination in a new guise. It sets up privileged women (via body/cultural capital) from the geographic Third World as trans/national ambassadors of ornamental diversity and social reform. With Lakme, Revlon, and governments in tow, they makeup the new faces of the global family of nations.

SimEve, Bollywood Barbies, and the Girl-Child

“*Dil mein hai chaah, aankhon mein sapna, banungi main Miss India.*” (“There is desire in my heart, my eyes dream, I’ll be Miss India.”) Two young girls, with their arms around one another, are happy and seem to be smiling at something or someone. It’s an advertisement for the new Hero Miss India girls/women’s bicycle (photo 3.2). The advertisement in the recent teen magazine *Femina Girl: Keep out of Reach of Adults*, a new magazine for the upper middle- to upper-class girl-child. It is hoped that this girl-child will one day eagerly support “The Femina Little Princess Foundation” and successfully engage in a relationship with Bollywood Barbie culture. The foundation seeks to “empower girl-children in India” and to recognize and highlight the work of NGOs. However, *Femina Girl* solicits the more privileged girl-child one who is also “the global subject of UN discourse” and increasingly a consumer group targeted by Mattel’s transnational Barbies.⁵⁶

What is interesting are the linkages between working for “unprivileged” children (who it is hoped will realize their self potential and attain mobility against immense marginalization), the corporatized visibility of girl-child activism through the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and a body-obsessed self-hood of the ambassador beauty. In *Barbie Culture* Mary Rogers points to the cultural logics of “consumer somatics,” a technology of the body driven by the idea that our bodies can be whatever we like if we devote money and attention, that constitute an “emphatic femininity,” “a body-centered self-hood,” and a highly malleable “plastic-self.”⁵⁷ This is a self that performs a femininity that is extreme, fantastic, and unattainable, and also presents itself as pastiche and flexible. One can be this self and shop for this self. In the case of Miss Worlds and Universes one has an “essence”—sometimes referred to as Indian or Woman—but it continually adjusts and adapts to a flexible public-private sphere. Her body and self-performance pushes the old style look-but-don’t-kiss-on-the-mouth sexuality of Bollywood. But offers even more body spectacularization and sexual tension. This new, overt, aggressive heterosexuality is served up as the modern, preferred, chosen orientation, the essence of Indian-ness, her unique-ness thus preserved. The Princess Foundation offers another somatic: bodies that don’t have a choice to go hungry.

Lara Dutta confirms some of what Sarah Banet-Weiser has suggested about beauty pageants. Banet-Weiser points out that pageants are much more than “passé,” archaic, and overdone public spectacles.

Dil mein hai chaah
aankhon mein sapna
banungi main Miss India

HERO CYCLES

NEW HERO MISS INDIA

HTA.5097.200 2

Photo 3.2 The ad. for Hero Miss India

Source: Femina Girl © Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd.

She suggests that beauty pageants offer constantly changing and complicated stories about the nation and that social concerns are continuously “mediated through women’s bodies on a public stage” and are highly visible performances of gender—in particular normative femininity within “an indefatigable grid of heterosexuality” (Banet-Weiser, 1999:2–3).⁵⁸ In particular, Banet-Weiser says that it would be inadequate to consider the participants as “cultural dupes,” but also points out that their rehearsed performances (and the author’s interviews of the contestants) reveal a contradictory female subject. This subject, Banet-Weiser argues, is a contradictory role of “independent femininity.”

The role of “independent femininity” is quite similar to Roger’s notion of fantastic/emphatic femininity. A self that is constituted by liberal individualism in which the rhetorics of free choice, self-agency, democracy, self-confidence, ambition, individual achievement, and assertiveness are coupled with self-sacrifice, love of family, voluntarism, moral custodianship, and love of education. The “millennium woman” significantly negotiates an assertive “independent femininity” with duty, a national identity with transnationality, and Indian-ness with westernization. Some of this is evident in the public language of Lara Dutta (who presents herself as a confidant, entrepreneurial, and independent woman who has many choices and modern maternal politics), Yukta Mookey (who wants the modern Indian woman with the Indian touch and essence to flourish), and Priyanka Chopra (who warns against the absolute freedom and individualism of the United States and offers her take on the Indian philosophy of loving life and relationships). In addition to performing normative, “taxonomic,” and “independent femininity,” the “millennium woman” is also a performing empire within a larger rhetoric of global humanism and within a “family of nations” and a “ritualized and institutionalized evocation of common humanity.” She has found a seat for Miss Universe (or should we say Miss United Nations) at the global meltdown of the United Nations. This taxonomic femininity within global humanism is eerily similar to Donna Haraway’s SimEve. Haraway proposes that the “computer-generated” multicultural SimEve in *Time* magazine’s New Faces of America of the late twentieth century, embodies the multiple morphings and mutations of blood, race, population, genetics, and nationalist discourses. SimEve personifies the ideological thrust of human biodiversity projects (thanks to the U.S. Human Genome Project of 1988) characterized by some indigenous organizations as “vampire projects” of patent regimes/monopolies.⁵⁹ As *Time* magazine’s U.S. immigration special SimEve is a genetic/racial composite (via computer

simulation) of several races, a sign of liberal multiculturalism. Her DNA, skin color, and nation are her fashion accessories of a “stylish pan humanism.” These morphing practices of DNA/skin/race/nation are ornamental multiculturalism’s promise and threat. They draw historical weight from the ideological impulses of miscegenation and population management. The morphing U.S. global family described by Haraway is a close cousin of the international faces of Miss Worldly Millennium Woman.

The global humanist ethos is very specifically addressed in the 2002 Miss Universe show via special workshops for the participants. Special theme programs called “international women” and “misconceptions we had about the other countries” are aired. The first “discussion group,” points out that now they know that Chinese women can speak English, Miss Sweden can be black like Tyra Banks, Miss Canada can be brown and of South Asian descent, and that women “come in all shapes, colors and sizes.”⁶⁰ The “international women” section interviews Miss India who clarifies for the international audience and her peers that the greatest misconception “. . . people have about women in my country is that we are conservative, but I am an example. I wanna take everyone with me and show the world. We are *excellent homemakers* but that’s not the only thing we do.” Miss Singapore and Miss Namibia agree. Miss Singapore adds that “Asian women are thought to be subservient,” but she points out that this is Western myth because Singapore leads the world in equal rights and opportunity for its women. Miss Namibia says despite their recent date of independence (1990) Namibian women are uplifting themselves quite nicely. Miss Northern Marianas adds another twist. She says that when people think “. . . traditional they think male domination,” but “. . . historically in Micronesia women have had power and even in modern times have access to land and business.” Many contestants comment on their multiracial/cultural backgrounds. Miss Germany is part Venezuelan; Miss Canada is of South Asian decent; and Miss Panama is also part Ukrainian and Polish.

Local, national, and transnational discourses of diversity and unity, of unique essence and universality, and of inner soul and visual bodily representation/performance tap into the historical weight of practices of eugenics, global humanism, ornamental and pop hybridity, and empowerment. But, simultaneously a willful, assertive, sexual national subject is promoted. Constantly inviting analysis that may give one clues of an accommodated and willful subjectivity within the matrices of transnational forces. These self-productions link the girl-child, millennium woman, Bollywood Barbie, and Miss Earth—within the

matrices of nativism, global capital, and social reform and forge identities as markers of rates of development.

If modernization theorist and economist W.W. Rostow could have queered and gendered his analysis of how a five step programme of “takeoffs” for global economic development would ultimately lead a so called developing nation to the premier stage of the “age of mass consumption,” he might be quite pleased with developments in India ever since Rajiv Reganomics in the 1980s and full-fledged decisive economic policy reforms in 1991 were claimed for the successes of the 1994 India “double whammy,” and 2000 “quadruple whammy.” Rostow’s 1963 essay, “The Economic Take Off into Self-Sustained Growth,” argued that through the necessary “penetrations” of colonization and industrialization lesser-developed nations could through a series of five progressive evolutionary stages reach the fifth and mature stage of industrialization or modernity: that of the age of “mass consumption.”⁶¹ Rostow added that reaching this final stage required a shift in people’s consciousness and sense of self, preferably to a modern liberal self-driven by entrepreneurship, ambition, hard work, competition, and liberal individualism. *Traditional* notions of the self—as defined by duty and/or kin obligations—would evolve in favor of a highly modern, atomic, productive, and consumptive individualistic self. Although evolutionary theories of modern and traditional selves (cast within the binaries of modernity versus tradition) are not all that novel and have tended to assume masculinist/male metropole subjects and the rational economic man model, this form of social Darwinism has implications for a transnational analysis of sexual subjectivities and identities. Even prior to Rostow, European sexologists and racial scientists suggested that primitive societies (constituted by degenerate forms of kinship and practices of sexuality) would eventually evolve into modern forms of sexual practices (such as those of normative heterosexuality and state sanctioned institutions such as marriage).

In this essay, I have argued that the emergence of a particular form of female subjectivity in India at the turn of the twenty-first century is historically specific. This subjectivity navigates the ideologies of “compulsory individualism,” duty, taxonomical universal humanism, nativism and cultural nationalisms, the promise and threat of transnational mobility and transgression, and traveling theories of feminism (in particular the 1970s liberal feminist Betty Friedan’s thesis in *The Feminine Mystique*). Underlying the corporate, media, and state sponsorship of the mass fantasy of the essential Indian woman of the 1990s are reincarnations of earlier nationalist visions of the “woman problem.”

The economic, cultural, and political sponsorship of this essence via normative sexuality, I demonstrate, is also about the construction of postcolonial nationhood and cultural identity and a renewed version of “the new subject position of women as self-appointed bearers of modernity.”⁶² I have however not been successful in addressing a question posed to me by a colleague, which was: Is this a good development? In other words was this form of high-end service work and dominant femininity and volunteer work for the girl child a good thing? Was this form of corporate volunteer work just insincere shallow guilt ridden self-aggrandizement? If anything it raised more questions for me about the gendered politics of help and selfrealization (helping one-self and helping others) and how one can be an effective ally across privilege and subordination.

The following chapters explores how the ideology dominant femininity constructs its evil twin—the over-the-top-modern and now degenerate and perverse Other (such as the “modern Indian lesbian” to “women who have sex with women”). This hypermodern, degenerate, and perverse Other is located at the intersection of the millennium woman, the new Indian gay, and modern sexual minorities (such as men who have sex with men). I explore their formations in relation to the activism of sexual minorities in the following chapters.

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Chapter Four

Taxonomic Desires, the Sutram of Kama,¹ and the World Bank: “Sexual Minorities” and Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code

Gupt Gyan (or Secret Knowledge) was a movie that was regularly featured at Tiger Cinema in Kolkata in the 1980s. As young teenagers, we were warned by parents about going to watch any film at Tiger Cinema, once a premier movie house on Chowringhee Road. *Gupt Gyan* was a domestically produced film that was designated a “blue film” (or pornographic film). Along with *Gupt Gyan* other “blue films” Tiger Cinema featured was the Silk Smitha series.² Silk Smitha, a “southie” (South Indian) porn star, gave the then Gulf-boomed Malayali blue film industry a reputation in the North. The parental warnings were more than just concerns about our (girls in particular) accessing “the secret knowledge.” It was also privileged, secret, taboo, and dirty space, certainly not for respectable girls. Parents were concerned about the discharge and the discharging men in the packed halls of Tiger Cinema. So-called “eve-teasing” by men on the streets was a familiar ritual to us, and so we were more than happy not to deal with potential discharge or pre-discharge situations. Despite our tremendous curiosity about “blue films,” middle- and upper-middle-class anxieties, and concerns over discharging and groping men (especially non-consensually in public spaces) some of us experienced a temporary high when we managed to successfully physically confront the “boys (who) were just being boys” on the streets and theaters of Kolkata.

As a graduate student in the United States, I came up against and faced a small glimpse of a perverse, taboo, secret, and dirty space but on very different terms. It wasn’t necessarily a privileged space. And, it was a space that sometimes in parallel fashion appeared to be least interested in agentic khush female sexuality but provided for me a crucial starting point to explore conceptual and cultural silences about the perverse. It was a place that constructed me as deviant, dirty, unIndian, not respectable, repugnant, unnatural, and pathological, and the space

from which activists and scholars were carving out a forum to fight for the rights of “sexual minorities.” In this chapter, I examine the political economy of and the context within which the public awareness of “sexual minority” rights in India occurred via the debates of Section 377 of the IPC. I begin at the discursive shift from a utilitarian agenda of population explosion/control by international and national bodies to a seemingly less reproductive orientation of AIDS/HIV/STD explosion/control. These ideological shifts and continuities in the management and surveillance of the Indian population (“the masses” or “high risk groups”) represent the effects of what Arjun Appadurai has referred to as the “enumerative practices” of governments. Subsequently, the new management of individual sexual behaviors of the Indian population/“high-risk groups” by the state, which was increasingly being constituted by local human rights activism, has led to significant, unintended, and predictable developments. They include: the growth of civil rights activism based on “sexual minority rights,” growing NGO-ization and World Bank inspired policies of global sexual health in a privatizing India, and the subsequent contention amongst activists concerning the differential value placed by funders on rights based *identities* and “indigenous” sexual *practices*.

Postcolonial and colonial India have been historically constituted as sites suffering from “population explosion” and needing “population control.” Current developmental concerns of “threats to development” and “poverty alleviation” due to unruly population growth (now over 1 billion) include Y6B alerts.³ Since the late 1980s, India has also been identified by international and governmental organizations (such as by the World Bank, UNAIDS, World Health Organization, and National AIDS Control Organization) as a “time bomb,” an “epicenter,” and a “national security issue,” as well as a “threat to development and poverty alleviation” in relation to the AIDS/HIV pandemic. “. . . India, which in population is second to none and in HIV second to none . . . has a fifth of the world’s HIV infection . . . it is a man made socially neglected and Government sponsored calamity” (Indian Health Organization, 1998). It was characterized as a foreign disease (most probably from visiting “African” students in urban centers) and spread by and through *loose* migrant women. After the discovery of the first case in 1986, the narrative of AIDS/HIV in India has an origin story familiar to many. A.S. Paintal the Director-General of the Indian Council for Medical Research, stated: “Sex with foreigners and NRIs should be

banned . . . you don’t have the right to have sex with anybody if it can destroy the country.”⁴ Interestingly, Paintal also said that the most promiscuous group were (Indian) “married women after the first child.” The origin story was unlike America’s “gay disease,” at least initially; it was considered primarily as the problem of certain “heterosexuals” (sex workers, foreigners married of migrants, and intravenous drug users) and for blood/organ consumption and sales.

The Ministry for Health and Family Services, who received the World Bank’s first social sector loan in 1972, became the First Population Project to “alleviate the threat to development and poverty.”⁵ The same ministry, twenty years later, received \$84 million from the World Bank, also to “alleviate the threat to development and poverty,” and resulted in the decisive formation of National AIDS Control Project (NACO).⁶

International attention and postcolonial census practices, the continued and ongoing projects of postcolonial state bio-politics, domestic organizing, pressures of structural adjustment (specifically since the 1991 economic reforms), and the national reluctance regarding AIDS/HIV education have drawn in intertwined discussions of pollution and culture, duty and tradition, and a slew of identity/behavior categorizations and populations under the gaze of international development and health—they include commercial sex workers, sexual minorities, IV drug users, migrants, homosexuals, and men who have sex with men. More specifically, the discursive field of AIDS/HIV education has to some degree facilitated local/national attention and visibility around the “Indian Gay” and “men who have sex with men.” Although there are many shared concerns between targeted “high risk groups” I focus specifically upon on the discourse on “men who have sex with men” whom in turn have heightened the visibility in regards to debates regarding homosexuality, the “Indian gay,” sexual rights, anti-sodomy statutes, *modern* identity formation, *indigenous* sexual fluidity, and political advocacy.

Condom\Condemn Nation: (Hetero)Sex Please, We Are Postcolonials!

Condom advertisements in the public sphere with a “family planning” focus are a familiar feature of urban (and rural) Indian landscapes.

Since the mid-1960s, the Ministry of Health and Family Affairs began to take on public policy initiatives in regards to population control and birth control. One of these projects was the formation of the government-owned Hindustan Latex, Ltd., which began the production and dissemination of Nirodh condoms.

Prior to the current national discussions on AIDS/HIV (since the late 1980s and early 1990s), respectable procreation or family planning was (and still is) promoted by polite sports metaphors such as: “After Two Declare” (the advertiser for Nirodh condoms using cricket terminology to promote the two-children-should-be-enough-policy for correct family planning) or “*Hum Do, Hamare Do*” (We are two and we make two).

The Indian condom business, which was primarily a public sector operation, has become more privatized and today is one of the largest exporters of condoms worldwide.⁷ Condom advertisements in the early 1990s sought to go beyond the utilitarian development ideology of population control. “Love making has come of age,” comments a reporter on the 1990s condom industry. For example, for the urban landscape there is Kama Sutra (originally from J.K. Chemicals, a private company), Moods (from Hindustan Latex a Government undertaking which supplies up to 50 percent of government orders) Kohinoor (from the TTK-LIG Company), Fiesta (the competitor for the urban higher priced Kama Sutra also produced by TTK-LIG), and Durex (TTK-LIG). In addition to Nirodh, the rural markets are being courted by condoms with names like *Maasti* (play) and *Sawan* (monsoon) both made by government subsidized undertakings, and *Sajan* (or Lover) by Ansell-Raymond. Other intriguing brand names now include: *Mauj* (enjoyment), *Mard* (man), *Ustad* (studman), *Rakshak* (Protector), and *Lifestyle*.

Different strategies are deployed for the urban and rural markets. The urban sector ads generally promote more upscale brands that signify “excitement,” “pleasure,” and “protected danger.” In the rural markets there generally are no price hikes but the theme of play, natural fun, and nature are evoked: *Maasti* (play), *Sajan* (lover), and *Sawan* (reference to a season). The ideological differences between sex in the urban versus rural sectors and sexual practices amongst the “upscale” versus “the masses” draws from a long tradition of colonial Indian sexual science. Indian sexologists and economists often framed the population problem, which resulted in crime, vagrancy, poverty, unemployment, and agricultural lack of productivity, as a result of “mindless procreation,” and “thoughtless irresponsible extensive breeding” of lower classes/castes and rural classes. The mindless

copulating *masses* did not have access to what middle- and upper-classes/castes had: the modern notion of sexual pleasure. This is an interesting irony where “pleasure” is valued by sexologists within a procreative-marriage-based upper-class culture and economy. Many sexologists also advocated for birth control because they thought the natural Indian male sexual instinct was inevitable, like wanting food and shelter. And some still went further to advocate for only female contraceptive devices because they believed *coitus interruptus* would injure the male organ, and would cause neurosis and create sacral pain and weakness in women.⁸ The earlier concern for the lower-class/caste breeding women and naturally discharging men held by “population control” experts today includes the poor, perverted, playful, naturally discharging man and the loose nonbreeding woman—the HIV/AIDS “problem.” Apparently, seminal truths where boys will be boys—rural, urban, indigenous, modern, high class, of the people/masses—with or without dutiful wives.

The first foray of Kama Sutra condom advertisements had Bollywood actress Pooja Bedi and model Marc Robinson inscribe new meanings onto a contemporary cultural climate of “(hetero)sex please, we are postcolonials” (see photo 4.1). The new Kama Sutra condom ad re-packages Indian tradition and culture (or the sutra(m) of kama or “the magic/knowledge of desire/lust/love”), postcolonial sexual shame and progress, STD awareness, modern upscale pleasure awareness, the utilitarian development ideology of population control, national security, and liberalized heterosexual desire. Marika Vicziany in her study of the Kama Sutra condom industry and HIV/AIDS in India, suggests that in the highly competitive international condom business one of the “best” things that has happened is the new improved Indo-Australian venture of the Kama Sutra condom.⁹ Vicziany’s Maharashtra study suggested that more work needed to be done amongst “men who have sex with men” whose “high risk behaviors” don’t neatly fit into homosexual or heterosexual especially since they (MSMs) include men who have wives (or those who will have future wives), men who also are sex workers, men who will have future contact with sex workers and biological men who don’t identify as men.¹⁰ Additionally, her study in Maharashtra confirms existing literature that points to Maharashtra as the Indian epicenter of HIV/AIDS. Interestingly enough, the new Kama Sutra condom plant is in Aurangabad, Maharashtra.¹¹ Vicziany suggests strategies for education regarding cultural taboos of condom use, which she argues need to be coupled with new high quality condoms like Kama Sutra.



Photo 4.1 Kama Sutra Premium Condoms.

Courtesy: J.K. Ansell, Ltd.

From AIDUS to AIDS Amma

An HIV/AIDS activist at a conference in India commented that in the early 1990s many clients that she encountered in the city would

ask them “*Yeh AIDUS kya hai?*” (What is this AIDS?). Now in the early twenty-first century with much more visibility, public campaigns, and NGOs there is a Goddess of AIDS (AIDS Amma/Mother) in the South Indian city of Mysore. The heightened attention and the numbers, however, garner a very mixed response from activists, scholars, business, and government officials. Some activists welcome the recent shift in the Indian government’s views that now sees AIDS/HIV as less of a “foreign disease.” They also are encountering a shift where certain government agencies receive national and global funds, some (albeit problematic and inadequate) public formal recognition of multiple actors who are marginalized by the epidemic (“loose” wo/men, sex workers, drug users, and migrants), and that there are more spaces opening up for discussion and education by advocates around sexuality, gender, safety, and civil rights. On the other hand many are dismayed about the sorry state of health care for the majority of Indians (and other related social services that structurally reproduce the AIDS/HIV industry), a lack of a systemic approach/analysis of the “HIV/AIDS problem,” the dominance of biomedically framed World Bank interventions, and the constant yet double-edged provocative number games of AIDS explosions/calamities.¹² Regarding the growing “number games” professed by sexual health groups Lawrence Cohen has remarked:

AIDS in India is the disease of the masses, for metropolitan elites; AIDS in India is Forster’s muddle, for international experts; The growing numbers is a disease of the numbers, of the masses, of an Other which is no longer specified as just the Bad Woman or the User of Drugs but as the halls of expertise, the numbers confirm what was known all along, the Wordsworthian image of the dog at its vomit. These certainties—the inevitability of it all—are as deadly as the logic of the retrovirus.¹³

In 1994 the discovery and rise of AIDS/HIV in India’s largest prison, Tihar Jail, Delhi, led to a survey coordinated by Indian Medical Association President, Dr. K. K. Aggarwal, which concluded that two-thirds of Tihar prisoners had participated in “homosexual activity.”¹⁴ This finding resulted in some doctors and activists’ demanding distribution of condoms to all prisoners as part of an HIV-prevention policy. Agents of the state, including high-profile police-woman Kiran Bedi, then head of Tihar jail, resisted condom distribution on the grounds that it would amount to legalizing homosexual activity. Kiran Bedi claimed that “the number of

homosexuals in jail is very small and the jail is too crowded for their acts to go unnoticed . . . we just need to sort out the gays by giving them medical and psychiatric help” (Trikone, 1995:9). Her solution, if forced by the courts to provide condoms in jails, would be to separate the homosexual and heterosexual prisoners. “We will greet all new arrivals at a special reception desk with the query: ‘would you prefer a gay room or an ordinary cell, please?’ ” (Trikone, 1995:10). Bedi’s solution was echoed by Janak Raj Jai’s demand “that suspected homosexual prisoners should be segregated and neon lights be used in the wards during night hours . . .” (Trikone, 1995:10).

Subsequently, Janak Raj Jai, a lawyer and President of the Family Conciliation Service Center, filed a petition supporting the official position. Jai, a Gandhian-socialist who was jailed during Indira Gandhi’s Emergency, claimed that decriminalizing homosexuality would have upset Mahatma Gandhi. He stated that in Gandhi’s lifetime AIDS was unknown and “male white fluid” was not wasted. Semen-loss anxiety, some scholars suggest, point to the Brahmanical–patriarchal one-drop-theory and love of semen,¹⁵ which states that one drop of semen equals forty drops of blood. Blood, another complex body fluid within this logic has generated much shame, fear, and anxiety—especially when it has anything to do with women and menstruation.

For instance, Mahatma Gandhi espoused this Brahmanical theory through his practice of *satyagraha* (a course of action in his philosophy of anticolonial resistance) through *brahmachari* (sexual abstinence) and actively opposed birth control and population control activists, such as Margaret Sanger, in India. His opposition was more concerned with brahmanical–patriarchal concerns over semen loss, sexual abstinence needed for an overactive, animalistic, and predatory male sexuality, and protection of naturally passive female sexuality, than with any possible eugenic/neo-Malthusian concerns for population control. Furthermore, Gandhi had concerns that too much male heat and discharge would weaken and emasculate male bodies. Birth/from sex acts (as in the first child) based on dharma (duty) was preferable to births due to kama (lust). In fact, Sanjam Ahluwalia has rightly pointed out that Gandhi’s anti-modernist cultural nationalism rejected Malthusian and eugenic ideas and pointed to the lack of agrarian, industrial, and land reform as the cause of human misery and inequality.

Like many national (postcolonial) responses to non-normative sexuality, Jai defended a colonial sexual code as “Indian tradition,” and posited any advocacy for the civil rights of prisoners, gay men,

sex-workers, and sexual minorities as elitist mimicry of the West. This official response and Jai's petition catalyzed the ensuing debates around India's colonial anti-sodomy statute.

On April 14, 1994, the ABVA (AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan or AIDS Anti-Discrimination Movement), a nongovernmental organization working on issues related to human rights of people with HIV/AIDS, filed a petition in the High Court of Delhi, engaging the following as defendants: the Union of India, the Delhi Administration, the Inspector General of Prisons, the National AIDS Control Organization, and the Superintendent of Tihar Jail. Among ABVA's requests were: that Section 377 be deemed unconstitutional, illegal, and void, and be repealed; that steps be taken to prevent the segregation and isolation of prisoners identified as homosexual and/or suffering from the AIDS/HIV virus or "... suspected to have participated in consensual anal intercourse;" that condoms be made available free of cost to Tihar prisoners at their dispensary without the threat or fear of persecution for requesting condoms; that disposable syringes be used at the Tihar dispensary; and, finally, that jail officials regularly consult with the National AIDS Commission. This case is still pending as cases in Indian courts often remain pending for decades. Subsequently, several other Indian and diasporic civil rights organizations as also gay, lesbian, and queer organizations have bolstered ABVA's efforts.

In 2001, the "Lucknow 4" case, one still pending in the courts, reopened legal interest and activism regarding Section 377. In, August 2001, four outreach workers and the staff of two NACO recognized NGOs, Naz Foundation-India and Bharosa Trust, were arrested by police on charges of "conspiring to commit sodomy and obscenity." Publications, videos and other materials from the Bharosa Trust office were also confiscated by the police in order to stop what the police claimed to be, a "sex racket," the promotion of homosexuality, the showing of porn, and "threats to national security."¹⁶

According to Aditya Bondopadhyay, a human rights lawyer working on behalf of NAZ Foundation-India, the staff members were detained without bail for 45 days, beaten, and charged with "conspiring to commit sodomy and obscenity." Bandopadhyay stated that the staff of NGOs and CBOs, often sexual minorities themselves, who were working with MSM populations, were often harassed, beaten, and blackmailed by the local police. He also stated that NACO's double standard of paying public lip service to human rights of sexual minorities and to international funders and their domestic indifference to police abuses is due to the fact that "the state does not recognize MSM as beings with human rights."

Additionally, Mr. Bondopadhyay pointed to the contradictory actions of the National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRC). Naz Foundation India had filed a complaint before the NHRC regarding Indian medical establishments' (both governmental and private) continued espousal of homosexuality as "a mental disorder" and its use of "aversion" shock therapy.¹⁷ NHRC dismissed the case, but soon thereafter organized a colloquium and published a report urging for the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. In 2001, Naz Foundation-India (Delhi) approached the Delhi High Court challenging the unconstitutionality of Section 377. Additionally NAZ stated that the statute "is a major impediment" to their work with MSMs and a violation of the rights of "sexual minorities including gay, bisexual and transgender men."¹⁸ This is a decision they are still waiting for.¹⁹

The Colonial Context: The Pukka Sahib and Memsahib

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code must be understood within the context of the consolidation of empire in India, via increasing militarization by the British imperial army. Ronald Hyam, in *Empire and Sexuality*, suggests that expansion of the British empire dictated state policies of sexual-political restraint and relaxation, which framed modes of relation and interaction between rulers and ruled. He argues that sexual politics at the home base, Britain, were driven by "fanatical Purity Campaigns," which were intrinsically linked to those located at bases set up in the colonies. Under the policies of integration in the late eighteenth century, the keeping of Indian mistresses by British men had been a well-established practice, justified as increasing their knowledge of "native affairs." Native mistresses included both Indian and Anglo-Indian women and ". . . a deliberate policy of intermarriage was encouraged by the company, in the interests of building up the army."²⁰ Around the 1890s, however, these policies were reversed. The reversal was influenced by factors that included the 1857 Indian Revolt and shifts in British attitudes toward native governance. This shift led the British to develop an isolationist and indifferent bureaucratic imperial state wherein it was imperative that the rulers maintain their sexual, social, and racial "purity."

Special economic and social measures were taken to prevent miscegenation by army men. Increase in venereal diseases, called "the clap," was seen as a major threat to the well being of the imperial

army. While some white British women were exported to India to serve the project of racial and sexual purity, this was not a viable solution for the whole army as marriage quarters and allowances would have proven too expensive. There were concerns that not having wives would encourage the imperial army to become “. . . replicas of Sodom and Gomorrah”²¹ or, as Lord Elgin put it, to pick up “special Oriental vices.”²² The fiscal solution was to turn unofficial, unregulated brothels into officially regulated ones for the army. The mid-1850s saw the establishment of state-regulated brothels in which native women had to register and undergo regular medical exams. These regulated brothels or *Lal Bazaars* (Red Markets) were primarily for white use, although “. . . Indians could use them while whites were on morning parade.”²³

In 1894, Viceroy Elgin claimed that “. . . [N]o prostitutes meant even more deplorable evils . . . there is already an increase in unnatural crimes” such as homosexual activity.²⁴ A popular cure for men (both Indian and British, civilians and soldiers) who might deviate from normative sexuality or “pukka-ness,” was sending them to female prostitutes. For example, in October 1893 an advice column in *Sanjibani*, a Bengali weekly edited by Keshab Chandra Sen and Krishna Kumar Mitra, suggests that Indian schoolboys who engaged in “unnatural and immoral habits” be cured by visits to prostitutes.²⁵

In the second half of the nineteenth century, debates about sexual behavior in Britain traveled to India. Christian and feminist Purity Campaigns in the metropole targeted many forms of non-procreative sexual activity. Their opposition to brothels, primarily frequented by married men, had led to the Anti-Contagious Diseases Act of the 1860s that ended state-regulated brothels in England.²⁶ In the 1880s, *Lal Bazaars* began facing criticism and were officially suspended in 1888. These campaigns exported categories of manliness and womanliness wherein the ideologies of *pukka sahib* and *memsahib* and their projected brown counterparts were to maintain a fiscal imperial polity and economy free of common vices such as prostitution and “special Oriental vices” such as homosexual activity.

Anti-Sodomy Statutes in the Metropole

The first civil injunction against sodomy in British history, passed in 1533 by Henry VIII and the British Parliament, had made the “detestable and abominable vice of buggery committed with mankind

or beast” a felony. According to Ed Cohen, the “transformation of sodomy from an ecclesiastical to a secular crime must be seen as a part of a large scale renegotiation in the boundaries between the Catholic Church and the British State.”²⁷ The Buggery Act was piloted through parliament with the help of Thomas Cromwell,²⁸ in an effort to support Henry VIII’s plan to reduce the legal authority of the ecclesiastical courts and to seize Catholic Church properties. The new Buggery Act allowed the monarch to issue death sentences against those convicted and to appropriate their property.

The statute against sodomy involved a shift from the canonical laws of the Catholic Church to the secular laws of the British state, monarchy, church, and legal imaginary. Sodomy shifted from being a sin against God to being also a crime against the state. The statute was deployed against Catholics whom reformers often accused of indulging in sodomy in monasteries. The connection between criminalizing sodomy and challenging papal authority can be seen in the history of the Buggery Act during the sixteenth century under monarchs of different persuasions. Under Henry VIII, it was reenacted in 1536, 1539, and 1541. Under Edward VI it was repealed, but reenacted in 1548 with amendments so that the felon’s property was no longer forfeited to the crown. Under the Catholic Queen Mary, the Act was repealed in 1553, and under her sister, Queen Elizabeth I, who wanted to establish her claim as true heir to her father Henry VIII, it was reenacted with the same severity as in 1533.

Within three centuries after the 1533 Buggery Statute was passed, jurist Edward Coke, in his legal treatise *Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (1797) that systematized the English Penal Code, defined buggery as “a detestable and abominable sin among Christians not to be named, committed by carnal knowledge against the ordinance of the creator and order of nature by mankind with mankind, or with brute beast, or by womankind with beast.”²⁹ Here the civil and legal, ecclesiastical and canonical, are intertwined. According to Coke, carnal knowledge was acquired or inflicted only if the body “bore the marks of *penetratio*.”

In 1826, the Offenses Against the Person Act recriminalized sodomy as a capital offense and dropped the need for two simultaneous proofs for conviction. Only proof of penetration was required. The earlier emphasis on procreation was rearticulated into a moral standard for individual behavior. This was in line with the creation of the new British middle-class masculinity of the nineteenth century. The movement to raise the age of sexual consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen, co-existed with, defined, and reinforced the political

discourse on “gross indecency.” Thus, the Labouchere amendment of 1885, which outlawed “gross indecency” between men, a category wide enough to cover any type of sexual activity, was passed as part of the debate around the age of consent for girls. This legal provision, under which Oscar Wilde was convicted, wasn’t duplicated as a capital offense in India. Buggery remained a capital offense in England until 1861, and from then until 1967 it was a conviction punishable by imprisonment for a period that could extend to life.

Colonial Homogenizing of Indian Law

British commercial interests were consolidated in India with the creation of the British East India Company in 1600. Armed with a charter from Queen Elizabeth I that gave the company full trading rights in Asia and Africa, the Company, comprised of merchants from London, politicians, and British royalty, acquired judicial powers to form its own constitution, to regulate its affairs in India, and to set up factories in India. Between 1612 and 1690 factories were set up in the towns of Surat, Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta by acquiring the company’s land rights or *zamindari*³⁰ from the Mughal emperor, from Muslim and Hindu kings, and from earlier European traders such as the Portuguese.

In 1668, the Company shifted from being a trading association into a territorial sovereign when it was authorized to declare war and make peace for the Crown. In 1726, overall control over Presidency towns³¹ was given to an appointed Governor. In a charter issued by George I in 1726, a uniform judicial system was created for the three Presidency towns of Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta. Each Presidency had a Mayor’s Court, and the rules and regulations in these towns were formulated and enforced by Englishmen (following the principles of English law) on both Indians and Europeans. *Mofussil* courts in areas adjoining the Presidency towns primarily followed Muslim criminal law, although English criminal law was introduced for selected issues (such as delineating punishment for different crimes, declaring witchcraft a capital offense, and removing the exemption of Brahmins from capital punishment) in 1790 by Cornwallis.³²

The Company increased its political authority by 1757, after winning more wars and Divani rights³³ (such as the Battles of Plassey and Buxar, and the Divani rights of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa). In 1772, the Company claimed bankruptcy and asked the British Parliament for loans. This resulted in the Regulatory Act of 1773, whereby the British Parliament gained significantly more control over

company affairs. In 1774, the first Supreme Court with a Chief Justice was set up in Calcutta, followed by Supreme Courts in Madras and Bombay. Beginning with the first Governor-General, Warren Hastings, the First Plan of Reform intended to unify, standardize, and translate Anglo-Indian law, was initiated. Although some Indian judges were allowed in the lower ranks of the judicial system, they could handle only civil cases (such as matters of inheritance or succession among Muslims or Hindus), which the British labeled “personal law.” The British decided that native Muslims and Hindus had separate “personal laws” that applied principally to marriage, inheritance, succession, and “other religious matters.”³⁴

One of the earliest English translations and codifications of Hindu law was conducted under Warren Hastings’s governorship. Pundits selected by Hastings and his collector, translated works from Sanskrit to Persian (since there were no Europeans in Calcutta who knew Sanskrit) and Persian-to-English translation was done by British civil servant H.B. Halhed. Heterogeneous Islamic communities also underwent colonial homogenization as “Muhammedans” (British term for Muslims). Until 1860, many criminal courts (excluding Presidency courts) selectively followed Muslim law, after which many more courts (*mofussil* courts) were incorporated into British criminal law. Also, by 1864 court *maulvis* (Muslim scholars) and the Persian language were replaced altogether in the criminal courts by jurors trained in English Law and the English language. This change reflected the shift in power from the Muslim rulers to the British. These shifts were significant for same-sex practices. Saleem Kidwai has pointed out that, despite Emperor Akbar’s (1556–1605) disapproval of homosexuality, men engaging in same-sex sexual behavior did not face legal prosecution in pre-British India.³⁵

A charter of 1833 instituted a series of law commissions that met from 1833 onward to codify a uniform criminal and civil law for the whole of India. Although the British intended to “carefully” consult scriptures and/or scriptural experts like pundits/brahmans, maulvis, and quazis, while establishing the “personal laws” of Hindus and Muslims, British law was the basis for codification. The Law Commission was chaired by Lord Macaulay, Governor-General of British India.

In 1857, Indians revolted against British rule in what the British termed the “Sepoy Mutiny” and Indian nationalists declared the first major war of independence. In 1858, after this revolt was crushed and the last Mughal emperor imprisoned and exiled to Burma, Queen Victoria assumed direct control and administration of India and proclaimed herself Empress of India. This resulted in the dual role of the

Crown overseeing economic expansion and state making. In 1860, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was passed and in 1861 the Code of Criminal Procedure was passed. In describing the task of codifying all law (criminal and civil) for the whole of British India, Macaulay claimed:

I believe that no country ever stood so much in need of a code of law as India and I believe also that there never was a country in which the want might be so easily supplied. Our principle is simply this—uniformity when you can have it; diversity when you must have it; but, in all cases, certainty. (Macaulay, 1897:56)

Those who prepared the Indian Penal Code drew on English law, Hindu law, Muslim law, Livingston’s Louisiana Code, and the Code Napoleon.³⁶ Disregarding the numerous complex variations of customary law and practice prevailing among Hindus and Muslims in different parts of the country, Macaulay decided that all Muslims were governed by the *Quran* and all Hindus by the *Manusmriti*. The Indian Penal Code, passed after revisions in October 1860, dealt with substantive law³⁷ and the Code of Criminal Procedure, passed in 1861, dealt with “adjective law.”³⁸

The colonial enterprise, whether it advocated policies of coercive integration (under Warren Hastings) or policies of coercive isolationism (under Lord Cornwallis) with the native populations, rearticulated, dismantled, destroyed, collaborated with, and froze existing modes of socio-political-economic relations in India. The Indian Penal Code may have fulfilled William Jones’s prophetic analogy of the “British as Romans.” Jones liked to compare himself to Tribonian, the compiler of the Justinian Codes, but in a “scientific mode,” and, by association, Governor-General Cornwallis liked to consider himself to be “the Justinian of India.”³⁹ Hastings’s and Jones’s quest for the “Ancient Indian Constitution” was rearticulated as “English law as the law of India.”⁴⁰ In the next section I illuminate and examine the context that lead to the visibility of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in the 1990s and the political and cultural context of IPC’s codification, and explore the genealogy of the statute (via judgments and commentaries).

Section 377: The Politics of Penetration

The Indian Law Commission, presided over by Lord Macaulay, introduced the colonial anti-sodomy statute, Section 377, into the Indian Penal Code on October 6, 1860 in British India.

The section reads:

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation. Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section.

Comment. This section is intended to punish the offense of sodomy, buggery, and bestiality. The offense consists in a carnal knowledge committed against the order of nature by a person with a man, or in the same unnatural manner with a woman, or by a man or woman in any manner with an animal.

The earliest case mentioned in the commentaries as related to Section 377 is dated 1832.⁴¹ Since Section 377 was codified in 1860 this case appears to relate either to heterosexual rape or to a British anti-sodomy case. The judgment in this case is not available, but the brief interpretation of the case in the IPC commentaries raises two issues. First, it occurred almost thirty years before the anti-sodomy statute was promulgated in India. Second, the judge commenting on the 1832 case cites it to discuss the nature of “penetration.” What counts as penetration continues to be an ongoing, arbitrary, and unsystematic discussion in several ensuing judgments and commentaries. Section 377 states that “penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section.” The commentary in the 1832 case suggests that the presence or absence of “seminal emission” (sometimes referred to as “spermatozoa” or “ejaculation” in the IPC commentaries) is not necessary for a conviction. However, judges maintain that its presence can certainly offer important evidence.

Later judgments also make distinctions regarding what it is that is penetrated. For instance, in *Brother John Anthony versus the Madras High Court* (1992), the judge identifies two types of penetration as grounds for prosecution under Section 377. Brother John Anthony was a sub-warden of a Boarding Home attached to St. Mary’s Higher Secondary School in Tuticorin. His petition claims that, since 1987, “an impression was gaining momentum” in the school of his “perverted sexual assaults” on the inmates of the home. M. Thiagarajan, a minor and an inmate of the home, filed a report with the Tuticorin police stating that the school administration had taken no action despite reports lodged with them. Thiagarajan claimed that the administration threatened students who complained with

expulsion. Brother Anthony's counsel filed a petition rejecting the public prosecutor's case that several violations under Section 377 had occurred. The judge points out that the case law for Section 377 is slim but that "sexual perversion takes shope [*sic*] in manifold forms" going by different names such as "sodomy," "buggery," "bestiality," "tribadism," "sadism," "masochism," "fetichism," and "exhibitionism." He then goes on to define and describe each form of sexual perversion.

The next question the judge ponders is whether or not all of these forms fall within the purview of Section 377. In order to answer that question he explores how penetration should be understood in relation to prior cases filed under Section 377 and to definitions of "intercourse, carnal knowledge and coitus." The judge concludes by stating that, in fact, two kinds of penetration had occurred in this case. He points out that both kinds were against nature and carnal because they were not intended for "coitus." Both entailed a process where a "visiting organism is enveloped at least partially by the visited organism."⁴² The first kind involved the "insertion of the penis of the petitioner into the mouth of the victim boy and doing the act of incarnal [*sic*] intercourse up to the point of semen into mouth."

The judge supports this definition of penetration by referring to the case of Lohana, Vasanthlal, Devchand, 1968.⁴³ This case involved the rape of a boy, Babulal Vithaldas, by three adult men (Lohana, Vasanthlal, and Devchand). Two of the men anally raped Babulal Vithaldas and the third man raped him orally because "the boy complained of acute pain" and the accused "did the act in question by putting the male organ in the mouth of the boy and there was also seminal discharge and the boy had to vomit it out."⁴⁴ The contention presented by the appeal was that the third act was not an offence under Section 377. The judge in the Vithaldas case consults other Section 377 cases and also consults "the learned author Mr. Havelock Ellis, in his book *Psychology of Sex*." The judge quotes Ellis:

Cunnilinctus (often incorrectly termed cunnilingus) and fellatio cannot be regarded as unnatural for they have their prototype forms among animals, and they are found among various savage races. As forms of erection [*sic*] and aids to tumescence they are thus natural and are sometimes regarded by both sexes as quintessential forms of sexual pleasure though they may not be considered aesthetic. They become deviations, however, and thus liable to be termed "perversion," when they replace desire of coitus. (AIR, 1968, 1277)

The judge concludes that the third man committed an imitative unnatural carnal act where "there was the enveloping of a visiting

member by the visited organism. There was thus reciprocity; intercourse connotes reciprocity" (AIR, 1968, 1281). It is interesting that the judge is complicit with Ellis's social Darwinist understanding of the savage races' propensity for primitive and degenerate sexuality. Ellis associated acceptance of homosexual practices with backward classes and races:

On the whole, the evidence shows that among lower races homosexual practices are regarded with considerable indifference, and the real invert, if he exists among them, as doubtless he does exist, generally passes unperceived or joins some sacred caste which sanctifies his exclusively homosexual inclinations.

Even in Europe today a considerable lack of repugnance to homosexual practices many be found among the lower classes. In this matter, as folklore shows in so many other matters, the uncultured man of civilization is linked to the savage.⁴⁵

All three men (Lohana, Vasanthlal, and Devchand) were convicted and their petition was dismissed.⁴⁶

Returning to my discussion of Brother Anthony, the second kind of penetration identified by the judge was the "manipulation and movement of penis whilst being held by the victim" to "create orifice like thing" and to allow for "insertions and withdrawals" and ultimately an ejaculation. Thus the judge defines manual sex as penetration, a definition that differs from a commonsense definition. The judge supports his interpretation by referring to a 1969 case, in which the penis was defined as a "visiting organism" "enveloped" between thighs ("the visited organism") and thus made a "connection" that counted as carnal intercourse.⁴⁷ In that case, the accused (K. Govindan and Kannan Nair) were convicted both for heterosexual rape (under Section 376 IPC) and unnatural offences (Section 377) against a fourteen year old "*dhobi* girl" Narayani. The sessions judge had rejected Narayani and her mother's first petition and the conviction was the result of their successful appeal. The enveloping of the "male organ" between Narayani's thighs was understood as unnatural sexual intercourse. The judge in the Brother Anthony case also concluded, without adducing any reasons, that of the sexual perversions he had originally listed, only sodomy, buggery, and bestiality would "fall into the sweep" of Section 377. One reason could be that key words such as "penetration" and "intercourse" were missing from the judge's definition of the other sexual perversions.

Consent Irrelevant? Voluntary Catamites, Habitual Sodomites, and "Homosexual" Rapists

Contradictory and overlapping definitions of "sodomy," "buggery," "the sin of Gomorrah," and "the sin of Sodom" coexist alongside the discourse on penetration. The "sin of Sodom" and "sodomy" almost always seem to refer to anal penetration (*per anum*), whereas "buggery" and "the sin of Gomorrah" include oral penetration and "bestiality" (*per os*).

Arrests, convictions, and successful appeals can be broadly categorized into five major themes. They involve (1) adult male(s) and a child,⁴⁸ (2) an adult male and a nonhuman creature,⁴⁹ (3) 2 adult males,⁵⁰ (4) an adult male and female, and (5) adult "habitual sodomites."

The first category is by far the most prevalent and most convictions occur in this category. In general, it involves an adult male accused of raping (or attempting to rape) an unconsenting child (referred to as "lad," "boy," or "girl") between seven and thirteen years of age, with an adult relative, parent, or co-worker reporting the alleged incident to the police. *Rape* gets entirely conflated with *sodomy* in these cases.

In some judgments involving an adult man and a child (usually a boy) the judge considers the possibility of a revenge motive is inciting a false accusation. For instance, in *Mirro vs Emperor* (1946), the judge attempts to discern if there was any "communal feeling" between "Musalmans" and "Hindus" or between the "*chamars*" (caste group) and "non-*chamars*" which may have led to accusations and counter-accusations. *Mirro*, a "Musalman" and a "notorious bully," was charged with sodomizing *Ram Dayal* (a young *chamar* boy). In the lower sessions court *Mirro* was sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment. The judge who presided over *Mirro's* appeal in the Allahabad High Court overturned the sentence due to lack of evidence. He was convinced that there was no revenge plot, since a "Musalman" police officer, *Imdad Husain*, had turned in *Mirro* and none of the Hindu assessors in court (*Mehendra Singh*, *Narain Singh*, and *Chhattarpal*) did not find *Mirro* guilty. Furthermore, despite the fact that semen stains were found on *Mirro's* dhoti the overall medical evidence was in favor of *Mirro*. "There is no question of any communal feeling. *Sakoor* the principle prosecuting witness is a Musalman. All of the assessors who found the accused not guilty are Hindus."⁵¹

The second category involves human penile penetration of animals such as a bullock and a “domestic fowl.” It is defined as “buggery” or “bestiality” and always involves a short conviction. In the case of *Khandu vs Emperor* (1933), Khandu was a convict undergoing a jail sentence. A fellow convict, Allah Yar, caught Khandu with his penis up the nostril of a bullock that was tied to a tree. The judge denied Khandu’s appeal to reduce his sentence (five years of rigorous imprisonment) and stated: “. . . he [Khandu] showed a highly depraved nature and set a degrading example of sexual immorality.”⁵² Although no cases have been cited, a commentary by judge Dr. Hari Singh Gour states that women too should be convicted if they use inanimate objects to penetrate animals.⁵³

In the third category, wherein the parties involved are two adult men, the issue of “consent” continues to be unproblematized in the judgments. Within this category, three variations emerge. In one case, Charanjit Singh, a truck driver and employee of an engineering company, was convicted when his co-worker, Ramesh Chand, another adult male filed a charge of “forcible sex.” The judge was impressed by Ramesh Chand’s braving of “social stigma” to “expose the culprit.” This case was corroborated by medical evidence and by testimony that indicated that forced sex had taken place.⁵⁴ It is important that the word “rape” is never used in any of these judgments.

In another case, two consenting men, both under twenty-one years, were involved. The incident took place on March 5, 1978, but the circumstances, as detailed in the 1988 appeal judgment, are vague. Abdul Nur was fifteen-and-a-half-years old and Ratan Mia was estimated to be around twenty when the incident took place. They were sentenced in 1981 for a length of time that is not clear in the 1988 judgment. Their first appeal, on the grounds that they were “first time offenders,” was rejected by the sessions judge, who remarked that this argument should have been introduced in the initial hearing. In 1988, when they had completed six years of their sentence, they appealed again, this time more successfully, since the judge first gave them six months and then changed it to seven days of rigorous imprisonment. Not once in this judgment was the fact that both men were consenting parties raised as an issue.⁵⁵

There are very few convictions in the fourth category in which one or more “habitual sodomites” are involved. If the “victim” of allegedly unwanted unnatural acts is suspected of being a “habitual sodomite” the charges are usually dropped and the victim is viewed as equally liable. This is similar to the tendency of judges not to uphold rape charges when a female victim is proven to be sexually

promiscuous. For example, in *Ratan Mia vs State of Assam*, two witnesses, Solomon and Gulabdin, lodged a complaint with the local police to "protect" an eighteen-year-old "lad," Ratansi, the employee of their neighbor, Nowshirwani Irani, a restaurant keeper. In this case, the judge was unconvinced by the witnesses' conflicting and inconsistent accounts and also by their claim that Ratansi was a victim. The judge described Ratansi as a "hefty young man" who "appears to be a despicable specimen of humanity." The judge decided that Ratansi was a voluntary "catamite." The judge's description of Ratansi's hefty body seems to illustrate Mrinalini Sinha's point about the colonial imagination's contradictory tendency to assign hyper-virile masculinity and thus degenerate sexuality to some colonized males (often associated with the non-intellectual class) and hyper-effeminacy (often paradoxically associated with the colonized elite who were the intellectual non-laboring class) to others.⁵⁶

According to the judge, since Ratansi, "on his own admission is addicted to the vice of a catamite," and since the medical examiner's report suggested no recent penetration, the charges should be dropped. It is interesting that, despite medical evidence and despite the nature of "penetration" being in doubt (since witnesses' accounts varied), Ratansi's vices remain a strong component of the judge's ruling. Although consent is immaterial under Section 377 and the commentaries assert that if the so-called victim of penetration is consenting then "he" is equally liable, the judge does not pursue Ratansi's liability or punish him in this case.

The judge describes the two witnesses, Solomon and Gulabdin, as "equally queer" due to several factors. First, because as witnesses claiming to protect an unconsenting Ratansi, they quietly watched through a peep hole the unnatural act of Ratansi's sitting on Irani's lap while Irani ejaculated. Second, the revenge motive appears again, since the judge finds that Solomon and Irani bear grudges against one another because Solomon does not pay regularly or fully for refreshments at Irani's shop. And, third, because initially Solomon concealed the fact that he was a member of the police force.

Three of the earliest cases, *Khairati vs Emperor* (1844), *Ghasita vs Emperor* (1844), and *Esop vs Emperor* (1836), are mentioned in commentaries, but judgments are not available. Since Section 377 was not codified in 1844, I am speculating that the courts employed British anti-sodomy law. Both *Khairati* and *Ghasita* and their "victims" were suspected to be "habitual sodomites" (or confirmed sodomites) who also habitually cross-dressed. *Khairati* is described as a man who habitually wore women's clothes and exhibited physical signs of

having committed the offence. The judges state that such factors should not be used to convict him since corroboration and medical evidence are required for a conviction. Therefore, charges made by the “victims” were dropped. In another contradictory commentary a judge describes “hijras” as those “who form a class by themselves and who dress in women’s clothes and dance and sing and ape the manners and vices of nautch girls” but who, like young boys, cows, mares, fowl, and buffaloes are especially targets of adult male penetration.⁵⁷

Esop vs Emperor (1836) suggests a “consensual” situation in which Esop, who was on board one of the East India Company’s ships, was accused by his superiors of sodomy.⁵⁸ Esop’s defense was that he was a native of Baghdad and his act was not considered to be an offense there. Esop’s defense was rejected and he was convicted. Arthur N. Gilbert has suggested that British Navy ships often used certain guidelines to arbitrarily convict servants or officers (British and non-British) and that the rates of convictions varied depending on whether or not active wars were being fought by the British Navy. He describes the British Navy as a “total institution” (as described by sociologist Erving Goffman) wherein buggery was on the one hand viewed as rampant and inevitable and on the other pursued as something to be vigorously eradicated and publicly punished (often more so than murders on ship).⁵⁹ Esop’s case demonstrates one of the British Navy’s extra-special concerns on board.

The fifth category is that of heterosexual married couples and there are very few cases in this category. Grace Jayamani petitioned for divorce from her husband, E.P. Peter, on the grounds of sodomy.⁶⁰ Jayamani and Peter are identified in the records as Protestant Christians married in 1971 by proper religious rites. Grace Jayamani’s primary ground for the petition is sodomy, but she and her father, the corroborating witness, also introduce other factors, such as cruelty. Jayamani states:

At the time of having sexual intercourse, the respondent used to put his male organ into my mouth or he used to put it into my anus. He was not prepared to have sexual intercourse in the usual way nor was he prepared to have sexual intercourse at my desire in the usual way. He used to conduct with me in a very cruel way the time of having intercourse. (48)

Grace Jayamani’s main witness, her father, corroborated:

My son-in-law was troubling my daughter like anything. He was biting her breasts. He was beating her. My son-in-law i.e., the respdt. [*sic*] was

forcing my daughter for sexual intercourse during menstrual period. He was coercing her when she was ill. My daughter used to fall unconscious because of over indulgence on the part of respdt. in sexual intercourse. My daughter developed fear foebia [*sic*] on account of cruel attitude of the respdt. towards her. . . . My son-in-law was behaving like a beast. (48)

In the judgment, the district judge spends an unusual amount of time discussing how sodomy should be defined in the case of a heterosexual married couple, since he believes that the early colonial legislators “in keeping with delicacy of the earlier writers on English Common Law were reluctant to set out in detail the elements of sodomy because of its loathsome nature” (48). After consulting sources such as the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Jowitt’s Dictionary of English Law, American Jurisprudence, II Edition Volume 70, and some earlier cases such as *Jellyman* 8 C & P 604 in 1838 (a case involving a heterosexual married couple where the judge found the wife not guilty as she did not consent to anal penetration by her husband), the judge stated that sodomy is “non-coital, carnal copulation with a member of the same or opposite sex, e.g. per anus or per os. Thus a man may indulge in sodomy with his wife” (48). In other words, the judge decided that a husband could be “guilty of sodomy on his wife if she was not a consenting party.” The lack of consent led to a decree for the dissolution of the marriage. This was the only Section 377 case involving two adults in which the issue of consent was actually articulated. It is interesting in one case a wife’s lack of consent (to perform nonprocreative intercourse or anal sex) serves to release her from a marriage but an adult male’s consent (also to perform nonprocreative intercourse and in many instances anal sex) sex lands him in prison.

Of the total of twenty-seven cases pertaining to Section 377 that I have examined, judgments are available in nineteen, while the other eight are discussed in commentaries. In fifteen of the nineteen judgments, convictions are handed down, and in three of the eight cases discussed in commentaries convictions occur. Section 377 states that punishment can be imprisonment for life or up to ten years.

The severest punishment was handed to Ratan Mia and Abdul Nur, who had already completed six years in prison, and were appealing their case for the third time. This was one of the few cases where both parties were consenting men. Their third appeal (as discussed above) reduced their sentence to seven days of rigorous imprisonment. It is unclear what the length of their sentence was in their original 1981 trial. This case is significant since the sex here was consensual. Much

of the legal activism around Section 377 has been aimed at legalizing consensual sex and identifying non-vaginal forced sex as “rape” (sometimes problematically referred to as “homosexual rape”).

The mildest punishment was two months imprisonment, inflicted on Chitaranjan Das. This judgment was extremely brief and did not indicate whether the circumstances involved unconsenting or consenting parties. Chitaranjan Das was described by the judge as a “highly educated and cultured person suffering from mental aberration” who “will suffer loss of service and serious consequences for his career.”⁶¹ Although the judge makes no reference to Havelock Ellis in this case, the circumstances seem to echo Ellis’s claim that true sexual inversion (often coupled with “neurotic and degenerate” tendencies) exists within two groups, “men of exceptional abilities” and criminals.

***Chhakkas*: Everyday Implications of Section 377**

Street level perception, though, lumps homosexuality with all other types of alternate sexuality. Therefore the eunuch, transvestite, transsexual and homosexual are *chhakkas*. This term can and is often used in threatening situations by homophobic persons and hustlers.

(*Bombay Dost*, 1990:20)

It’s Wednesday morning in Calcutta. We’re discussing numerology and NGOs over madras coffee and idlis. I ask Vivek, Dilip, and Sayeed (who are all self-identified gay men and activists who work for a sexual health advocacy group) about *chhakkas* and what the publicity of Section 377 has done for khush politics and people in India:

Vivek: Increasingly in today’s culture there is a lot of antagonism directed against hijras and this is transferred onto gay men. A lot of abusive terms are borrowed from the *hijra* community⁶² and changed into derogatory words for both *hijra*, gay men and MSMs. Also in Hindu numerology, the triangle pointing up symbolizes the male and the number 3. The triangle pointing down or with its apex pointing downward is female and also the number 3. When the two are superimposed or joined, you get number 6 and gender ambiguity.

Dilip: Isn’t this what some numerologists refer to as the joining of *prakriti* (nature) and *sanskriti* (culture) or *prakriti* (nature/woman) and *purush* (reality/man)?

Vivek: Yes, that’s another way of looking at it. You also get a state of androgyny at number 6, or *chhakka*, which may be how hijras see the category as symbolic. This word is now used derogatorily

against gays, who are often understood as *hijras* . . . especially gay men or men engaging in homosexual behaviors who like to be penetrated . . . like *kothis*, it’s equated with being castrated, like a hijra, like a woman, not a man, or *napumsak*. *Chhakka* is also used synonymously as *gandu* (from *gand* or ass—and so giving ass) or *lund-baaz* (*lund* meaning penis and *baaz* meaning sort of excessively desirous of penises)—meaning a male who is both penetrated and penetrated—“*Karte hai aur Karwate hai*.”

Dilip: The police know who not to mess around with. They know who can speak in English. My specs [spectacles] and *gaalis* [swear words] in English may stop him from going any further. *Gaalis* [swear words, insults] sometimes are enough to send the message to the police that I am an English speaker, which automatically accords more respect. On the other hand, if you identify as gay or if you are a MSM you will be familiar with such blackmail and generally be nervous and apprehensive any-ways when you see the cop—you know you’ve fallen right into his trap. If they decide that they can mess around with you, they will do in any of the following ways: blackmail you for cash or your watch; if you resist arrest they will threaten to take you to the police station—where violent rape awaits you; or simply threaten to sodomize you and beat you.

Sayeed: You know the practice of men having sex with men outside of marriage is so common. But men having sex with men is an open secret. A married guy in one of our consciousness-raising groups raised this point. The men know what is going on—it’s like breathing. It happens at all class levels. The families know what is happening but pretend it’s not going on. It’s inside the house and outside the house where the police also knows. The police will simply assume men are having sex with men in public spaces like the park—whether it’s happening or not—but most importantly they will assume that the other guy, who doesn’t seem middle class and an English-speaker, is the perpetrator. Before Section 377 was publicly challenged, they didn’t have the law or legal language to tout—now with the publicity given to the case and to AIDS, the cops have added ammunition. These arrests are about appearances, class appearances, and, sexual open secrets.

Generally, urban public spaces in cities such as Kolkata are symbolically and literally occupied by men. The “manning” of urban spaces is also very much classed. Shops, government offices, and businesses are owned and “manned” by them; most taxis, cars, cycles, and scooters are driven by men; and one often sees men sit around in groups near a *paan* shop or a *dhaba* smoking cigarettes or *bidis*. This

is not to suggest that women and/or gendered others aren't around in public spaces. But women occupy a disproportionately smaller percentage of public space in cities even though we comprise approximately fifty percent of the population. Generally, if women are in urban public spaces, they are usually with a man or in a group (with other women and/or men). The women in this particular instance are pressed to occupy this public space as "respectable" middle- and upper-middle-class women (versus sex workers).

Male mobility and access to public space is also a prerogative of gay men and those who are referred to by the sexual health community as "men-who-have-sex-with-men" (MSMs). Often parks are the preferred spots or "major cruising zones" for gay men (and heterosexual men) who, in some instances, may not have much private space in their homes. Park cruising areas are also marked by the socioeconomic class, overlapping interests, and heterogeneity of gay-identified men and MSMs. However, along with this male "access" to public space and park desire comes arbitrary harassment, extortion and blackmail via the police. Public space (and ultimately private spaces) that is deemed naturally a male preserve is policed, and polices gay men, MSMs, sex-workers, women, and lesbians in different ways. (This is discussed later in the next section and more fully in the following chapter.)

My conversations with the activists occurred during the period when ABVA contested Section 377's unconstitutionality in 1994 and thus predated the "Lucknow Four" incident and its subsequent challenge to Section 377. Most importantly, this conversation anticipated upcoming points of contention—namely that of "gay identified men" versus "men who have sex with men." The growing national and international attention to HIV/AIDS (like the population "problem") continues with a longer tradition of what Arjun Appadurai has called "colonial numerology" or the enumerative practices of population management. Appadurai argues that the counting and classifying of peoples and group-identifications went beyond an interest in taxation or land revenue. This "orientalist empiricism" (via the census, surveys, and ethnographic data gathering) also provided the colonial State the pedagogical functions of learning about subjects/peoples for various levels of bureaucracy; invention, re-definition and re-qualification of group-identities; and increased disciplinary State power. Explosive statistics of populations carry this historical weight.

This is not intended to deny that there is real misery, suffering, and inequality in India precisely because of the economic impact of existing cultural-sexual-gender regimes. The past ten years have also seen relatively more "visibility" and information gathering on MSMs (versus "homosexual" men) by growing numbers of NGOs, and

growing numbers of programming and workshops on sexual behavior and health. Through these conversations and meetings of “sexual minorities” have emerged discussions about indigenous practices, group-identities, gay rights, self-representation, political advocacy, and funding tensions. But, prior to discussing the debate over self-identified gay men versus MSMs, I would like to identify four general responses to same-sex sexuality (once again with more of a focus on “anatomically male” sexual behaviors) in India. At times, some of these responses intersect and overlap. These positions influence the debate surrounding the “gay identified men” versus “MSM” as well as underlying concerns over identity, westernization, political rights, elitism, coalitions, and survival.

Fixed Western Identity *or* Fluid Indigenous Behavior?

First, the official homophobic nationalist response is that homosexuality is a western/white disease/phenomenon and therefore does not exist in India. A second response argues that India is known for historically accommodating fluid homoerotic spaces, especially since it is so sex-segregated and homosocial, and, in fact, being straight in India is almost queer. The emasculated Indian male is not simply a colonial fantasy, or nationalist reactionary shame and self-hatred. In other words, the proponents posit the “the queer Indian fluid soul theory.” A third response is the “global gay” narrative, which argues that the global-modern gay identity is an inevitable consequence of modernity, globalization, and the exchange and movements of ideas and persons. Thus local globalized gays have arrived to claim their spaces and rights, just like “western” queers. A fourth position suggests that indigenous same-sex/gender sexualities co-exist easily and uneasily with postcolonial modern forms of same sex sexualities. Identity formations represent shifting political powers; their historical weight and meanings shift accordingly, and are thus premodern, modern, precolonial, and postcolonial re-configurations. Group affiliations such as sexual categories and their political economies in India are not always the same as in the “west” but are always marked by it in uneven ways. These four positions are not hermetically sealed—they leak into each other and make the strangest alliances. I’ve outlined these positions to use them as a heuristic device and map to weed through the various debates on khush sexuality. These strange alliances can also provide potential models for coalition and solidarity.

The first position equates India and its inner core/essence/spirit as female and innately heterosexual needing constant protection from “the

West” and its corrupting forces of imperial homosexual exploitation and domination. This classical nationalist/colonial position, maintained by several nations, particularly ex-colonies, also adopts the virulent homophobia of its colonizers (for example, Section 377 of the IPC). Non-normative heterosexual practices (including women and MSMs in prostitution, unmarried status, single motherhood, and widowhood) can thus be cast out as “westernized,” “corrupted,” “loose,” or inauthentic.

The second position suggests that India and Indian culture is innately fluid, heterogeneous, and adaptable, as unfixed, unlike the essentially fixed position. There are three versions of fluidity within the second position. The first suggests that since India has such a fluid and open culture the mere suggestion that homophobia exists in India is ludicrous and just a matter of a few individual xenophobic persons. The second variation implies that scholarship is increasingly pointing to a long tradition of same-gender/sex practices. This scholarship challenges Foucault’s eurocentric suggestion that the homosexual was invented in nineteenth century Europe, and that ancient and medieval Indian sexology is pointing to sexual *natures* of persons or the “personage” predates the nineteenth century. The reduction and constriction (but not the total elimination) of these practices and persons, albeit uneven, is attributed to various forms of colonization (vedic-brahmanism, the rise of local forms of patriarchal cultures, particular ideologies of Islam, victorian-puritanism and American style MTV heterosexuality).⁶³ This position of fluid sexuality is often problematically associated with “essentialism.” I say problematic because feminists have pointed out that the discourse of “essences” used in the Aristotelian sense is only one way to understand nominalism. Thus all historical analysis do not automatically claim a trans-historical nature or essence or nominalism.

The third variation of India as fluid is based on the fluidity of contemporary communities (versus the second variation’s focus on ancient, medieval, and some contemporary texts). Much research has surfaced in this area since the 1990s. First, there is the “third gender” research on hijras that suggest that hijras present contemporary and historical communities that are “neither men nor women.” Recent scholarship on hijras has also pointed to the inadequacies of the “third sex/gender” category and have suggested that thirdness too is internally heterogeneous and embodies multiple practices of identification and identities.⁶⁴ Second, there is research on the contemporary heterogeneous constellation of MSMs. “MSM,” which arose within the sexual health NGO movement in the early 1990s is meant to be a “more culturally appropriate” term for same-sex sexual interaction

and desire. During the early activist period sexual health workers and advocates sometimes included self-identified gay men in this category but soon made a distinction between the two groups. For example, activist Shivananda Khan has called for a “*Kothi* Framework” to understand contemporary MSM realities. Many activists, like Khan, have pointed out that within the MSM constellation there are a number of *kothis* (anatomical men who are effeminate, who generally are defined by and desire the “passive” role of being the one who is penetrated, who do “women’s work,” and who identify with women). *Kothis* include commercial sex workers, generally do not identify as gay and often identify as *kothi*; they come from poor, low, and middle income sectors from all over India. According to Khan, “. . . this *kothi* framework dominate the MSM contexts in South Asia . . . which represents over 70 percent of the population.” Some *kothis* take oral contraceptives to develop breasts and due to marriage pressures many are married to women. *Kothis* are also known as *dhurranis* (in Calcutta) and *Menakas* (in Cochin).

Kothi partners are usually *Panthis* (anatomical men who understand themselves as real men, and who desire the “active” sexual role of penetrator). According to Khan, *Panthis* come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and occupations, and are often married or will get married and do not identify as “homosexual.” They, “are less clearly defined, being men of all ages and types . . . who, at least at times enjoy sex with other men or stated they could not access females, and they could not control their “body heat” and “needed to discharge.” There was a strong sense of immediacy, urgency, opportunity, and availability to their sexual behaviors with the *kothis*. In other parts of India *panthis* are known as *giriya*s (in Delhi) and *sridhars* (in Cochin). They often describe their sexual encounters with *kothis* as a “need to control discharge and body heat.”

Sexual health activists have also pointed to those who are known as “double-deckers,” “*chhakkas*,” “*gandus*,” “*do-paratha*,” and “AC/DC” (those folks who both penetrate and are penetrated—and are scornfully viewed by some MSMs as inauthentic to their social/sexual roles). Gay men are assigned an identity closest to the *chhakkas* (by some MSMs, and gay men, as well as by the “straight” public) but as those who are more urban, educated, middle- to upper-middle-class; who have access to the English language; and who identify their desires for the same sex and orientation. Under the “*kothi* framework” Khan argues that it is necessary to understand this fluid and playful sexuality, one where “*khel*” or “*masti*” (play), immediacy, mischievous fun, quick erections and discharge are paramount

realities. He argues for a fluid gender framework (based on sexual behaviors) rather than a rigid identity based sexual orientation/sexual framework that is generally used in modern understandings of homosexuality as desire between anatomically same sexes.⁶⁵

Khan points out that India has plural homosexualities ones that have been described as others as “behavioral,” “situational,” and “Latin style bisexuality.” He points out that this is due to economic and cultural pressures and obligations, pressures of duty and procreative marriages, lack of access to privacy, personal identity/same/honor bound up with family/clan, sex segregation, and a high degree of homosociality. The context and circumstances provide the opportunity for behaviors. Thus lack of cultural capital denies access to identity, which is possible for gay identified men. In fact, another activist, Anjali Gopalan, points out, that although there are gay men in India as well as something called gay-identity, “identity is sort of a luxury that doesn’t extend beyond the educated upper-classes. The majority of men who have sex with men don’t see themselves as gay or even homosexuals . . . we don’t have a sense of self in our culture . . .” She adds that she was once indignantly corrected by a MSM when she made the mistake of asking him if he was “*samalaingik*” (homosexual)—saying that he was a *mard* (man) not a *chhakka* (fag).⁶⁶

Additionally, Jeremy Seabrook has pointed out that MSM is a culturally appropriate term (versus the Westernized and elite term gay) to describe the “sexual apartheid” and Indian “tradition” of *kothis* (described also as fatalistic and having low-self-esteem like women) and *giryas* (married and closeted men who believe that they are real men and are out to play/khel on Sundays) and their fluid but highly depersonalized, brief, functional sexual lives/encounters.⁶⁷ Seabrook states:

Traditionally, sexuality has always been more fluid, less rigidly categorized, than the categories of lesbian and gay, bisexual or straight. This to many in India is reductionist and does not correspond to the more amorphous, less defined nature of sexual experience . . . something altogether richer and more open than the more crude classification of Western homosexuality. In the villages, in slums, among those less affected by the modern world, some of this unnamed same-sex spontaneity survives.

Although Khan does recognize the simultaneous importance of self-identified categories co-existing with the more fluid meanings, the

contemporary-indigenous fluidity discourses about MSMs create the binaries of indigenous sexuality/India versus “westernized” sexuality. Indigenous sexuality equals unnamed, unconscious, playful behaviors, and sometimes problematic gender role fluidity. A fluidity that is more marginalized (inequalities of income, cultural capital, and career options) but somehow more Indian in essence especially since it does not involve individuality. This version of fluidity closely relates to the third position of the “global gay.”

This third position maintains that increased globalization, modernization processes, transnational flows of ideas and bodies, and intensified communication systems (internet, TV, etc.) have resulted in the emergence of Western style identity politics and discourses of rights. This position can also branch out into a few different versions. One version of the global gay narrative potentially takes on an arrogant position that views this development as the only evolution of higher consciousness, in which the origin of gay politics begins from the “west” and spreads to the “east”—the “developmental narrative” that Martin Manalansan has pointed to in his essay on the 1994 Stonewall Anniversary Celebrations in front of the New York City United Nations.⁶⁸ A second version of the global gay narrative, suggested in a more complex manner by Dennis Altman, asks if the global gay is universal or a “mere replication” of modern identities. Although he does not fully accept the premise that processes of modernity “directed from the west” simply flatten out and homogenize the rest of the world, he still follows what Ella Shohat has referred to as “the Hypodermic Theory” of globalization. Wherein a homogeneous and internally coherent “West” completely erodes, evenly shapes, and wipes out an equally homogeneous, internally coherent but passive “East.” This approach also ignores earlier histories of exchange between communities prior to European/American global power and genealogies of migrations. Finally, this position opens up room for another arrogant position—one that views that all “identity-politics homos” or group-based identities as duped, and Coca-Cola/Oreo Cookies traitors. This view posits that identity-based subjects are victims of modernity, essentially inauthentic, and ironically a cover for an indigenous queer or straight soul.

The fourth position attempts to understand how certain destinies and identities seem fixed, while others seem chaotic, disorderly, unfixed, simultaneous, and new. Varied precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial communities and governmentalities assign and re-configure people and populations. The modern state’s dual commitment to “subject-making” as in providing its subjects the right to life and

development dovetails with the postcolonial state's insertions into governing and managing these subjects via the process referred to by Foucault as bio-politics. Projects of data-gathering, such as the Census Reports, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Indicators of Human Development, and surveys of sex-workers and truck drivers, classify and manage groups and have "the effect of redirecting important indigenous practices in new directions, by putting different weights and values on existing conceptions of group-identity, bodily distinctions . . ." Although Appadurai and Dirks were primarily referring to caste-based identities and contemporary caste politics in India, I use their work to suggest that this could be relevant to some extent in the case of "alternate sexualities," "sexual minorities," and "sexual rights," especially in light of the local, national, and international spaces of advocacy work. These new-old configurations animate their locations within the politics of representation, recognition, and rights in the arena of international human rights sometimes in unruly ways. Also, this position interrogates the uneasy and artificial tensions exist between "identity" versus "behavior," "west" versus "non-west," and "global" versus "local."

Sanjay, an activist in a sexual health program in India, points out that:

The *kothi*-gay tension or divide began with certain changes made with male sexual health programming and meetings. All of a sudden, *Kothis* were given more priority and seen as more legitimate, more indigenous. Gay was seen as western, modern, English and middle-class and not as valid for the Indian conditions. Data collected during our early workshops with MSMs now became valid research. This fissure is complicated. This could be because some individual gays didn't want to associate with MSMs. This could also be because the gays guys had to figure out how to work with *kothis* without being patronizing. And then, some gay guys think why keep giving our energy to some of these closeted married guys—specially *panthis* and *durrannis*—who want to still be real *mards* [men]? Even after we all work together on these workshops on shame, secrecy, duty and gender. Is this just about giving people condoms and lecturing them about safe sex? Also, many advocates for MSMs and NGOs working for MSMs—some who are gays themselves—also have hang-ups about visible gay identity, gay politics, political advocacy. This has created a fissure. Both groups [gay and MSM] are very diverse and can certainly work on co-existence.

Sanjay speaks to some of the ongoing challenges impacting those who are jointly negotiating issues of visibility, violence, and shame, as

well as differences in their experiences of gender, sexual object choices, sexual practices, and cultural capital (based on various axes of identities such as language, education, socioeconomic class, caste, and religion) but who are still subjected by hostile gaze of homophobia and gender-phobia. Many of the activists I spoke to either identified as gay or multiply identified as gay and *kothi*.⁶⁹ What stood out ultimately was that all these “categories” were internally heterogeneous and co-existed, overlapped and brushed up against each other sometimes very easily and sometimes not so easily. It also brought to light the different interests, tensions and political goals of “gay” activists, “gay” or “MSM” advocates, and “MSMs.” The politics of visibility and rights had more salience for most of the gay identified activists I spoke with.

Maya, another activist in the sexual health movement suggests that:

All this bickering about identity and behavior is about funding. There’s money and jobs involved here for all kinds of people. So AIDS/HIV is a big priority now—even for the homophobic government and NACO. And then again there are those people, maybe homophobic ones too, who wonder—now, why is HIV/AIDS getting so much attention—when we have such a bad health system, so many other STDs and diseases? For the government it is easier and more palpable to keep sexual health only about behavior modification. They would be the first ones to say homosexuality is foreign. Modify your behavior—meaning wear a condom, take some responsibility about where your *lund* (penis) has been, because you’ll make your wife, child, youth and other men sick—but be in the closet forever about your sexual behavior, your ideas, and hate homosexuals. Let’s all keep the open secret alive. OK use a condom to save lives but I have a problem with these middle class married men who are so homophobic but can’t control themselves and think they are real mards at the same time. This is *masti* in the patriarchal way. *Masti* is important for life but why is this *masti*? Duty with the wife and pleasure with the *kothi* or *gandu*? What sort of empowerment is this? What kind of empowerment is this for *kothis*, women, poor people, or gay men? There is all this talk about empowerment but how can this be about empowerment when there is a funding preference for behavior modification over political rights? I understand that we all have economic and social pressures—like marriage and all—and we all have to make difficult choices, decisions—but it is equally important to support *kothis* and gays in all of their struggles. I am not anti-*kothi* and pro-gay. All are blackmailed and not recognized in our society. Both are dealing with fucked up cultural ideas about what masculinity and femininity is. Both groups can’t live openly in today’s society. Both groups need to celebrate who they are. Why should happiness and celebration be seen as not a valid aspiration in India?

Seema, a college student and Maya's friend, adds to the conversation:

It's too late for "this is Indian" and "this is Western." It's not all the same, but we are such a hodge-podge. We are so far gone into a world where it's hard not to find the intermingling of cultural ideas. Some of these mixings are good and some not so good. But who decides? What do you do with these ideas? Do you perpetuate suffering or can you put it to good use for social good? Can we start banning the Communist Party because they have been influenced by Marx and Lenin? Even Jyoti's (Basu—ex-chief minister of West Bengal's Communist Party CPI(M)) relatives win beauty contests and are homos. What about the contraceptives and hormones some *kothis* take? Who brought such contraceptives to India? Would that not be considered westernized behavior or values? Borrowing and adapting from different cultures is not such a bad idea. People have always done it.

These activists bring to light many ironies of sexual minority politics in postcolonial India and issues pertaining to the complex processes involved in social justice work. Also, these conversations bring up issues insights raised in the fourth position.

Maya and Sanjay's comments challenge multiple dichotomies Group-identity, individuality, the act of identifying, needing recognition (both privately or publicly), and fairness, decisionmaking roles are not exclusive features of the "west." This orientalist logic has deep roots in India and the colonial imagination. The notion that South Asian culture doesn't recognize individuals has its own history of orientalist social sciences via Louis Dumont's "collective man" or McKim Marriott's "dividuals." Indian activists arguing for individuality and individual freedoms not just in regards to sexuality have presented an alternative vision of individuality—one potentially more complex than liberal humanism's atomic individualism—such as that of "relational individuals."⁷⁰ For example, community/clan/kin loyalty that seek to dilute "personal identity" or a sense of personhood have tended to value sons, fathers, and husbands—who in turn exist in a hierarchical relationship to one another via age and procreative marriage. Women loyal to this set up (usually through networks of normative heterosexuality—blood and marriage) gain access and privilege accordingly. In this case a supposed lack of self on the part of patriarchs or loyalists seems to produce another version of atomic individualism—one of a vampire like self-community. In some of the descriptions of *kothis* and other MSMs there are co-existing narratives of other forms of identification, based on masculinities/femininities, caste, kinship, and place—how untouched are these understandings by external forces/ideas?

Internally homogeneous fluidity is equated with the indigenous and internally homogeneous fixity with the modern global gay, suggesting again that identification, or group identity associated with individuality, is unknown to the real India, or that fluidness and fixity have to be in opposition and mutually exclusive visions of living. Do our practices not impact who were, are, or become? And does who we believe we are or what we told who we are not influence our practices?

Second, the final position attempts to understand the consequences of colonial, nationalist and neocolonial interventions and management of populations. And, how this in turn reconstructs the premodern and the modern. An example of the unintended consequences can be seen in the Lucknow-Four and post-Lucknow-Four developments. It is ironic that the economic reforms of 1991 and subsequent structural adjustments have, on the one hand, negatively impacted the same under-funded sphere of health and educational services in India, but, on the other begun receiving World Bank funds since 1992 for HIV/AIDS. Myron Weiner points out that as a result of the 1991 economic reforms, ninety percent of the government expenditures on education and health comes from the State governments. Overall, “[S]tate governments have been given more authority by the Central government to pursue their own policies in the areas of education, health, social services, industrial relations, agricultural and rural development, and road transport” (267). In the new economic order States, compete with one another for resources—with the national as well as international market. Also, for most States, a low priority is set on social services, human resources, primary education, primary healthcare, basic sanitation, and portable drinking water. It is within this context of “decentralization” (that is from the center) that AID/HIV NGOs have gained significant momentum.

As an organized, heterogeneous interest group NGOs (as based on political orientation; local, national, or transnational power and visibility; and size), have mushroomed to fill social sector gaps. Despite some level of growing advocacy power HIV/AIDS NGOs also face forces of “re-centralization,” since AIDS/HIV funding can be routed toward centralized organization of the State and have to deal with competing rhetorics of human rights commitments for “sexual minorities.” Re-centralization involves a return to greater bureaucratization and institutionalization. Fewer and more select groups get funding; selective patronage maybe accorded to some groups by the government, and competition and divisions can be caused by national and international donors. For example, activists have pointed out that the

Indian government publicly commits to protecting “their” sexual minorities at the UN or with funders but turn a blind eye to State level police harassment of sexual health workers or marginalized groups. Additionally, Dennis Altman has pointed out that commitments from national governments and the implications for their NGOs to do HIV/AIDS work need to be contextualized within the increased international sex-industry, tourism, travel patterns of people in search of work, patterns of drug use and consumption, the dominance of indigenous and foreign biomedicine/pharmaceutical industries, and growing militarization; these in turn are constituted by the ideological frames of patriarchies and economic progress. At the 2001 AIDS Conference in Barcelona, explicit concerns were raised again concerning the occupational health of industrial workers in urban industries and military bases. Therefore, he argues, the “new public health policies” of international developmentalists create the ongoing tensions of decentralized UN fostered models of “community organizing,” “grassroots participation,” or agency projects, while actively undermining social services that create health inequalities. The forces of decentralization, re-centralization, and bio-politics, constitute the realities of NGOs and sexual minority advocacy work.

The Ladies (or Lesbians) Are Lucky

Within the limited and litigious discourse of Section 377, the issue that remains unaddressed by activists is the unconscious and conscious privileging of the phallogocentric reality even in the denaturalizing of compulsory procreative heterosexuality and normative femininities/masculinities. Although, non-normative and non-procreative, penile penetration and presence (at the very least a biological one) continues to be re-centered in gay and MSM politics. Some gay activists maintain that sex-segregation, lesbo-sociality, seclusion of women, and invisibility of lesbians in the public and private sphere makes life less difficult for lesbians. Furthermore, some activists have suggested that that “the ladies [or lesbians] are lucky. Section 377 doesn’t really affect lesbians.”⁷¹ Despite the structural and cultural relegation of women to the private sphere (where maintaining honor and purity, preventing shame, and reproducing national culture are valued) and despite the conceptual invisibility of female sexual autonomy in the overt legalisms of Section 377, this law has been used against some women who have wished to live as long-term lovers or friends and create new forms of kinship.

Although no women have been convicted so far, the statute is used to intimidate women. Some women who have tried to apply for marriage licenses in civil court have been threatened with Section 377 by their fathers or by civil servants at marriage registries. Newspaper reports of such cases suggest that many of these women are from working class or lower middle class, semiurban, and non-English-speaking families. In a piece entitled “Gender Jam: Case of A Curious Marriage,” in *India Today* reported that Tarunlata, aged 33, underwent a sex-change in 1987 to become a man—Tarunkumar—in order to marry Lila Chavda, aged 23, in December, 1989. Upon finding out about the marriage, Lila’s father, Muljibhai, filed a case in the Gujarat High Court, stating that since “it is a lesbian relationship,” action should be taken on grounds of Section 377 to annul the marriage. His petition states that “Tarunkumar possesses neither the male organ nor any natural mechanism of cohabitation, sexual intercourse and procreation of children. Adoption of any unnatural mechanism does not create manhood and as such Tarunkumar is not a male.”

Muljibhai’s lawyer claimed, “[E]ven an impotent Hindu male can marry because impotency is no bar to his marriage. In this case Tarunkumar was not a Hindu male at the time of birth.” Tarunkumar and Lila declared that even if their marriage was found null and void by the Gujarat High Court, “we shall continue to live together because we are emotionally attached to one another.” Muljibhai won the case, the marriage was found to be void and was annulled. The couple now live in Tarunkumar’s parents’ home and they assert that the real reason Muljibhai objects to their marriage is that he will not get “dowry” from the groom. They belong to a community in which the groom pays dowry to the bride’s parents.⁷² Furthermore, more attention needs to be paid to women in prostitution who desire women. This was pointed out to me by women who are referred to as (and identify as) *shamakami* (desiring one’s equal). Being “straight for the money” (and what it may bring with it) whether via prostitution, marriage, and professed loyalties remain at the core of khush women’s political economic possibilities. Phallogocentric activism can therefore continue to re-marginalize plural non-heteronormative sexualities and practices.

Dirty Research for Gupt Gyan

My interest in exploring the workings of the economies of compulsory and normative heterosexuality, and in particular, the impact on khush women, took me first to something tangible—sodomy and the law.

My “dirty research,” as it was characterized by a man helping me finding the case law, took me to what seemed to me divergent phallogocentric realities. The power of the phallus, its function, its seminal products, and what one can or should do with it seemed to constitute and shape the discursive landscape of sexual politics continually. However, not everyone has to prove his or her masculinity (*mardangi*). Not everyone enjoyed the privileges of *mardangi* in the same way. When I first began looking for judgments for Section 377 cases in Calcutta, I would often have to go through certain rituals and encounter particular responses from lawyers, librarians, and photocopying centers. Once I managed to access law journals that had judgments for cases, I would mark the pages and take them to the photocopying shops/centers to get copied. On returning to collect my copying I would get photocopies of the journal’s Section 376 judgments. Section 376 is the rape statutes of so-called “natural” crimes or opposite sex rapes.⁷³ The man at the photocopying shop hoped that I, an English-speaking, middle-class, graduate student in the United States and seemingly female, couldn’t possibly be so “loose” in character or background as to do “such dirty research.”

At a gathering of khush South Asian activists and scholars in India, an activist, Dilip, commented to me once about being loose and what “modern” gays and lesbians in India could potentially learn from hijra communities:

I heard that some people from the hijra community were invited to this gathering. Who knows if they’ll show up—why should they? What do we have to offer them? We have some privileges over them but they are far better networked and organized than us. They have their own languages an actual tradition. But now we may have to work on HIV/AIDS issues together. We join hands over death and disease. But the new hostility and disrespect they get from non-hijras is thrown back in their face by hijras. They take shame and gaalis to a whole new level to give it back to these hypocrites. They are a diverse community based on hardship. And now they are taking on electoral politics—many hijras are attempting to enter politics at the local, state and national levels. Even some politicians are courting them! But still they are giving the public lines like “You don’t need genitals. You need integrity.” In a society that puts such a premium on shame, secrecy and appearances—we could learn how to be total shameless hussies and change this culture!⁷⁴

The second case filed against Section 377, by Naz Foundation-India, is still in litigation. Heteropatriarchal ideologies of shame and duty, coupled with cultural and structural violence, continue to be

powerfully articulated by post/neo-colonial forms of homophobia. These ideologies shape and are constituted by the unequal economic systems of health, education, and resources. This continues to co-exist in tension with mushrooming queer, national, and diasporic activism, organizing, writing, and research. For example, there are a growing number of organizations, newsletters, conferences, transnational/translocal linkages and projects, support-groups, listserves, resource guides, archival projects, petitions to the Indian government and the United Nations, and public (and private) protests.⁷⁵

These tensions carry the promise of further re-visionings of tradition, rights, kinship, relational individuals, and transnational community. The unevenly enumerated docile bodies, seemingly unruly, come together and file a charge with the Delhi High Court and hope to “shame” the Indian Government at the UN. And, finally, these processes with their unintended consequences constitute the very conditions by which “sexual minorities” access fairness, dignity, quality of life, rights, recognition, legitimacy, safety and—“new strategies of mobility, status politics and electoral struggle . . .”—that is, via the same routes and logics marked by bio-politics (Appadurai, 316). The next chapter explores how death and the conceptually invisible, namely *lesbian* suicides and kinship making strategies court local, national, and international attention.

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Chapter Five

Inverting Economic Man: Pleasure, Violence, and “Lesbian Pacts” in Postcolonial India

Perhaps it was the golden glints dancing in her tawny eyes or the radiance and freshness, she exuded each time she turned her head to face someone. Or, perhaps, it was the liteness of her magnificently structured body, with its long, toast brown legs, narrow waist, and breasts that stood out- proud, high and firm . . . However, it was when Amrita laughed, throwing back her head and allowing her rich mane of hair to flow around her face like the sea, that she was irresistible . . . Amrita knew the effect it had on people . . . and that always made her laugh some more. (De, 1992:3)

Amrita Aggarwal, an aspiring model from a middle-class Punjabi family in Delhi in Shobha De's novel *Strange Obsession*, is exemplary of the millennium woman of a liberalized India. She is *beautiful* and thus *pleasing* to the eye. On the first day of her modeling assignment, in Mumbai Amrita nearly gets run over by oncoming traffic. While she lies flat on her face at the busy intersection she sees a woman offer her a helping hand. Meenakshi Iyengar, or Minx as she preferred, introduced herself as the Bombay Police Inspector General's daughter. Minx, who is ethnically Tamilian, is also the queen of the Mumbai underground with several *dadas* (“hooligans” and leaders of gangs) and police buddies.

When Amrita completes her modeling shoot, she is delighted to find Minx waiting for her outside, across the street in her jeep. Minx shoos away her loyal company of local *dadas* and says to Amrita, “At your service, Your Highness,” with a “sardonic laugh.” Amrita hops into the jeep and as they drive away she catches Minx staring at her strangely, a look she had never received from any woman or man (De, 1992:6).

Minx's *courtship* of Amrita has begun. The next day Amrita receives a bouquet with a note that said, “To your eyes.” Minx now waits for Amrita after every shoot to bring Amrita home. The third

day, Amrita finds one of her panties missing, but is amused by her new friend's pranks, since Minx has also left behind a telltale musk-scented handkerchief. However, on the fourth day Amrita's amusement diminishes when she finds a crystal vase with a black stemmed rose and a diamond ring inside the rose petals in her bedroom. On the fifth day, she finds another present from Minx in her freezer. The gift is a chopped-off, but very fresh calf's heart, tied with a red satin bow.

Minx rapidly permeates and invades every possible moment of Amrita's life. Minx begins to keep tabs on Amrita's whereabouts and religiously stalks her. No one in Mumbai dares to confront Minx, who incites fear and repulsion. However, Amrita finally decides to confront Minx, especially after receiving yet another gift—a pair of silk underwear with the message “Wear them and think of me.” By now Amrita was all out of patience and she “snarled,” “That is it! I don't want to be your friend. Why can't you accept that? We can never be friends. You are weird. Abnormal. I knew girls like you at school” (De, 1992:22).

To which Minx responds,

Abnormal? What are you talking about? You think I'm a bloody lesbian, don't you? Well, guess what? You are wrong. And so are all of them who've been telling you that. I'm not a dyke. I am not kinky. And I'm certainly not crazy. Don't ask me to explain it to you—but I am in love with you. I love you. I adore you. It is not sexual. I don't want to go to bed with you. All I want is to be around you. That's all. You'll have to accept my presence in your life. (1992:22)

Shobha De's¹ *Strange Obsession* offered me a much-needed opportunity to navigate an elusive, messy, deep void. It was a powerfully negative silence and space of conceptual exclusion that contained and managed contemporary *khush*² women. It was a place where homo-sociality, sex-segregation, and the privatization of women produced unnamed, unfathomable realities.³ De's Mills & Boon⁴ like lesbophobia, was an amusing and disturbing gift. It captured that part of urban Indian reality that was colonized, invisible, and caught in between the figures of the “millennial woman” and the “global gay.” Most significantly, the novel was meant primarily for the *Femina*, *Savvy*, *Society* reading world of urban, middle- and upper-class, and English speaking audiences—many of whom are deemed to be “westernized.” The two main characters in De's novel, Amrita (who symbolizes the new Indian woman of the liberalization era and is

quite *western* and sometimes in conflict with her earlier reincarnations—such as urban Mother India and Minx (her ultra-*western* and hyper-urban aberration)—bring to light the tensions of being disloyal to the normative heterosexual economic contract, and the pleasures and dangers of modernity and development. Minx embodies a perverse modernity that is dysfunctional and unruly in comparison to Amrita's more rational modernity. For the protagonist, Amrita Aggarwal, who champions the essence of "the new Indian woman," the antihero—the figure of the modern lesbian—is her *raison d'être*. Just as the savage was anthropology's *raison d'être*, the lesbian allows for the possibility of the discourse on cultural authenticity, nativism, and respectable progress.

"Yes, but aren't these concerns of the middle-class or upper classes?" This was the frequent question and common insinuation I encountered during my writing on and work with lesbian/*khush* issues in India. In this chapter, I would first like to explore this question by intermeshing moments between some lives in "print" and some in "flesh and blood." The underlying skepticism behind the question: "Isn't being *khush* (or aren't *khush* realities) a matter of luxury in India?" underscores ways in which many "tolerant" Indians tend to understand and frame issues of *khush* sexuality. It is assumed that being *khush* is like "choosing" a luxury item: a fur coat in a hot country, an individual fetish or choice, or a mildly tolerable aberration infused with too much modernity or dysfunctional modernity. It is after all about (*upper/middle class*) pleasures and whom you "choose" to have "sex" with. Pleasure therefore is about individual choices and therefore not about politics, "the masses," or the "grass-roots." It doesn't seem to inflict "the masses" who presumably have other important unpleasurable issues like "politics" or "economics" to deal with. Besides *khush* women aren't real victims—most of them (at least the ones spotted) can speak English and have other forms of cultural capital. Therefore, socioeconomic class is problematically used to dismiss political interrogations of normative sexuality and gender. Similarly I am not suggesting that there is a "generic *khush*" woman with common political interests. Instead I argue that normative heterosexuality and gender, via "traditional" institutions such as the wedding-industrial complex, structure and displace the economic and political well being and lives of *khush* women.

Tolerance is tinged with an urge to define *khush* women or desi dykes as the economically privileged "Western" impersonator. *Western* or *westernized* in this discourse operates as a sign that inconsistently

draws from the following: the decadent, superfluous, English-speaking, sell out, traitor, passive/active mimic, privileged, not “oppressed,” individualistic, anti-structural/social and with capital. *Real* issues, many khush women have been told, in a Third World nation are about economics and politics: poverty, the environment, development, caste violence, religious fundamentalism, structural adjustment, literacy, and population control—all of which supposedly do not exist within a postcolonial political economy of sex and obligatory heterosexuality. Feminist work has pointed to the disproportionate feminization of poverty. This unevenness is also directly configured by an economy of compulsory heterosexuality, simultaneously constitutive of women’s experiences of caste, religion, and region, which gains surplus value off of the service economy of women’s erotic and non-erotic labor. The heteronormative economy deeply structures intimate lives and the avoidance in political analysis of the intimate leads scholars to reduce “sexuality” to individual choice. I believe anti-intimate political analysis has deep roots in the following: first, an arrogant distancing tendency among certain scholars to represent and give voice to “the masses” and an unwillingness to examine one’s personal privilege; second, a nativist and orientalist suspicion of individuality in India; third, a tendency to understand subjects through one axis of identity (and thus a limited analysis of subjectivity and subject positions); and, four, the deployment of a bi-polar victimology framework.

The first point, mentioned above, refers to a particular academic-activist middle-class guilt that seeks only to represent and speak solely for “the underdog.” The representing subject either assumes a self-sacrificing “activist” role or seeks to be unmarked. The potential of being an ally or building alliances is subsumed under an authoritative, objective, “down with the masses,” self-sacrificing mode.

Second, the suspicion of anything “personal” has much to do with the quick dismissal of individuality as solipsistic atomic individualism. For example, claims such as, “Indian culture is not known for individualism or individuals.” Individuals and individualism is conflated, and individualism is seen as a western phenomenon, which in turn deals with personal concerns such as sexuality. This automatically precludes an analysis of (hetero) sexuality as a normative institution that differentially benefits actors economically, culturally, or politically.

Third, actors are primarily understood through only one axis of identity. For example, being a rural farmer may still benefit the subject as father, husband, or son through male and heterosexual privilege and concurrently through economic class or caste. Accusations of

middle-class-ness are stretched to meaningless-ness in order to silence projects that seek to understand subjects as constituted by multiple axes of privilege and subordination.

And, finally, by the bipolar framework of victimology, I mean an extension of the third point. In this framework, actors are understood solely as victims or perpetrators, as subalterns or dominators, and never in a complex nexus. Complex subjectivities produce contradictory, ambiguous, and imperfect politics. Complex agents struggle in ways that accommodate and protest systems of subordination. It is from this contradictory, ambiguous, and imperfect position that I begin to address this question as well as my own not so innocent interest in media accounts of lesbian pacts.

My first response to the question “Isn’t khush reality a luxury?” was that of the righteous activist ready to provide compelling evidence of “real” tangible violence to that which was a negative void. I wanted to collect as much visible documented evidence of death, violence, and punishment. To formally enumerate the unenumerated. What Section 377 in its phallogocentric conceptual and epistemological exclusions (un)marked as “the lesbian” was given a hyper public face in De’s *self-hating predatory butch dyke* Minx.

This essay does speak to that first impulse to visibly document but also explores that what cannot be counted or seen between the fissures of heterosexual women’s sexuality and gay male sexuality. Many queer and lesbian feminists have shown lesbians are often subsumed within gay sexuality or homosexuality. Teresa de Lauretis, in her theory of sexual (in)difference, and Luce Irigaray, in her notion of “homosexual,” have pointed out that, within the conceptual frame of sexual (in)difference, “the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects.” Therefore, there is only one sex and “female desire for the self-same another female self cannot be recognized” (Irigaray, 142)⁵ Female desire is determined by “male tropism,” and females who are known to desire females are not accounted for in reality. Or, as Marilyn Frye, states, “[T]he king does not count lesbians.” If khush women are not considered to be part of reality and only as part of male tropism it is understandable how they/we are non-economic, non-political, non-social, not included in the usual processes of governmentality, and simultaneously expendable and superfluous. The multiple cases of “lesbian pacts” of double-suicides and marriages, now documented by khush activists, spoke powerfully to me. The women (and their lives) in print, through multiple translations, don’t and can’t speak, but resonated with many khush women I spoke to. The lives in print spoke to many of their/our

realities. Their inadequately translated lives connected with many of the practices and decisions of the khush women I met. As a feminist anthropologist the ethnographic/social science impulse was then to “find the indigenous lesbians” and represent them or to find “the archives” and avoid dealing with the mess of “giving a voice to the natives.” This essay then is marked by an imperfect simultaneous struggle against the documentary impulse or the archival turn in anthropology.

My research and activism with khush women and transnational queer politics introduced me to the Sakhi Collective in New Delhi in 1993. At the time, it was the only public organization for Indian lesbian and bisexual women. About four women formed a core group that maintained the small operation. Sakhi received letters from women from all over India and the diaspora and according to its founder, Giti Thadani, the letters repeatedly spoke of isolation, joy, sexual fantasy, double-lives, duty, despair, and hunger.⁶ The members of Sakhi were instrumental in media efforts, organizing seminars in Delhi, discussion groups, consultancy work with particular NGOs, and starting the Sakhi Archives. It was in the Sakhi Archives that I first came across media accounts of lesbian “double-suicides” and “marriages.” Death, marriage, and new forms of kinship were some of the ways by which khush women were dealing with their circumstances and living out their lives—often in places and spaces far away from many of sakhi’s khush activists. They often came from small towns, weren’t always English-speaking or their first language, often were not college educated, varied in their caste, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

In this chapter, I explore accounts of these “double-suicides” and “marriages,” alongside accounts of khush women in particular urban centers. My accounts of khush women in the city include conversations with activists as well as their reflections on the media accounts. The accounts in print refer to the women as “lesbians” based on their indicated interest in being together as a couple or family, police reports of love letters, and interviews with family and neighbors. I therefore refer to the women in these stories as the “khush women in print.” To the women activists I interviewed in Delhi and Kolkata, I use khush, lesbian, dyke, “shamakami,” queer or the “flesh and blood” women. These were terms used variously by them/us. In intertwining these accounts I hope to address the question “isn’t khush sexuality or being khush a luxury?” by interrogating the narrow notions of economics and politics assumed in the question.

Is Khush Sexuality a Luxury in the Geographic Third World?

Giti Thadani, an independent scholar and activist, and founder of Sakhi, points out:

India lives at the level of discharge. When things get too hot, there is more discharge. Do you ever wonder why we have the world's largest movie industry? This country has managed to invent and mythologize the procreative logic and at the same time hide behind sexuality. Who we are and what we do—usually brainwashed as duty, religion or marriage—is to procreate. If there was any sexual identity it is simply based on procreation. How come sexuality is such a taboo—and I mean any sexual identity like heterosexuality or lesbian sexuality—in a culture that has such a long tradition of recognizing different forms of eros and ecstasy? Take heterosexuality for instance—how many Indians even would recognize they have a sexuality? People just learn how to become male or female in order to get married and procreate. Wives provide the real capital—children, boy children preferably. Boy children are rural and urban capital for the farmer, the chemical engineer or CEO. So women, especially lesbians, who get out or want to get out of this loop are in danger and dangerous threats. What good is a girl who is not available for this major economic and political transaction? This may sound crude to many but all this occurs in respectable garb. Women's sexuality is a fundamental economic issue. You have all these fancy NGOs who want to help women get more empowered in India and control their fertility. What's the point of distributing more condoms? They run into husbands, brothers, and fathers and in-laws who want them to fulfill their economic and religious duties—procreate and have more boy children. They say education will empower women. What kind of education? Okay, say women get more skills as agriculturalists, which most rural and economically dis-privileged women know already, aren't they still ingrained to become a wife and care take for their husband, children and parents? It is not a shared responsibility, as it should be. But this just will double or triple their workload. If women want a life autonomous of the procreative logic, as unmarried women, or as friends or lovers they are in an economically Catch-22 situation. If you don't participate in heterosexuality you lose the privileges of being a wife or mother or if you leave your family of origin you lose the advantages of other male protection—from your father or brother. But if you stay with your family of origin or participate in heterosexuality as wife and mother you are trained to be economically and culturally dependent on male protection. This is felt most by middle class women when they lose a husband or divorce. Women become women by being trained to depend upon and serve men. It's a Catch-22.

Thadani, who dropped out of Class Ten from the Convent of Jesus and Mary in Delhi, founded the Sakhi Resource Center in 1992. It was a resource center for lesbian and bisexual women. The resource center was funded by small grants, mostly from organizations in Canada and the United Kingdom. In December 1993, along with the support of activists in India and the diaspora, Sakhi was instrumental in organizing a Seminar of Alternate Sexualities in Delhi. Thadani's comment on the Catch-22 economics for women and lesbians is also echoed by feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye. Frye demonstrates the many ways in which institutions and conceptual schemes of dominant reality, namely in heteropatriarchy, in "complex and paradoxical" ways, maintains, sustains and reproduces itself.⁷ According to Frye, institutions "are humanly designed patterns of access—access to persons and their services" as well as "artifacts of definitions" (Frye, 1983:107). The nexus of institutionalized access and its conceptual apparatus that defines citizenship and membership in heteropatriarchy deals with women and lesbians in different ways. This complex and contradictory predicament that women are placed in involve being at once courted, needed, and romanced and simultaneously assaulted and ignored. The "seesaw of demand and neglect" that Frye points to ensures that women's exclusion from patriarchal culture is not "simple and absolute." This paradoxical situation can be seen within the tensions of what counts as an authentic or traditional Indian woman, a westernized woman and the new woman of the 1990s. These tensions frame what women can access (e.g., whether they have a "choice" to have love marriages or arranged marriages), what they/we can invest their/our energies into (e.g., "choosing" to be beauty queens or join the women's caucus of the party opposing the obscenity of beauty contests in India) and be what they/we can committed to. Frye maintains that the situation for lesbians "is radically different." According to Frye, lesbians are excluded and erased from this scheme and are exiles.

Lesbians are not invited to join-the family, the party, the project, the procession, and the war effort. There is a place for a woman in every game. Wife, secretary, servant, prostitute, daughter, assistant, babysitter, mistress, seamstress, proofreader, nurse, confidant, masseuse, indexer, typist, mother. Any of these is a place for a woman, and women are much encouraged to fill them. None of these is a place for a lesbian. (Frye, 1983:166)

Thadani's statements point to what many feminists have suggested about how traditional economics and economic arrangements are

defined in terms of the public sphere of the rational-economic man. Feminist economist Marilyn Waring has demonstrated how calculations of GDP, productivity, and services continue to ignore the crucial invisible work of women. Chandra Mohanty and other feminists⁸ have demonstrated how women's work, fundamentally crucial to everyday economic and social well-being, is constructed as flexible, temporary, secondary, unskilled, and labor-intensive. Such constructions continue to render women's work invisible and frame it as un-productive and un-countable to the workings of an economy or community. Feminists have also demonstrated how women's work continues to interrogate the spurious divisions of "public" and "private." Furthermore, the kind of flexibility attributed to women's work locates women continuously in service-work—which can often be labor-intensive, dangerous, low paid, repetitious, and often hidden from the public eye. The informal sector—one that generally isn't accounted for, or enumerated for value or data is often where many women are located. As (re)productive Others in the intimate (re)production of capital such as children and the home most *khush* women are deemed useless (non-economical) particularly in the private realms of life.

Women's sexuality is constituted by service-work and constitutes service-type work. This service work is also what Frye has called the women's place or sector where the political (and thus natural) category of being female is defined less by geographical boundaries but rather by function. Frye argues that "women of all races and classes" are usually segregated by function—one of service-work—rather than geography. She points out that although the details, interpretation, form, and perceived interests vary across race and class (and I would add nation, religion, and caste) there are some continuities. These include three elements: personal service, sexual service, and ego service. Women of upper-classes usually delegate housecleaning, childrearing, or cooking by hiring other *fe/male* service workers—maids, nannies/*ayahs*, cooks. But she still has the responsibility for managing these activities. Those who cannot afford to hire others get to do all the different forms of service work. In some communities in India where "the girl-child" is seen as a liability or other's people's wealth (*paraya dhan*) she still is expected to be the primary caretaker of aging parents. Service work involves tremendous investments of the body: looking pleasing, bearing children, cleaning and cooking, providing sex—procreative and non-procreative, and providing personal and emotional attention. Although Frye specifically speaks to biological women, I would add that those perceived to be women, feminized or female-identified often take on the performance of the service sector women's work.

The placement into servitude or servicing contradictorily brings with it intense responsibility and powerlessness. Service providers, within the “seesaw of demand and neglect,” are held responsible for the well-being of their intimate circles of community and showcase for the larger imaginings of that community (such as those of caste or nation). The crippling power of the nexus of responsibility and powerlessness can be seen through the notions of duty, honor, and shame inscribed upon and through women in the Indian context. Normative heterosexuality is constituted by intimate structures of duty and responsibility, via the socio-economic arrangements of blood and marriage, to service the networks of family, kin group, caste, class, government, party, and nation. And within these arrangements “disloyalty” to caste, class, party, nation, and family must be negotiated by khush bodies. Denial of khush reality by the pressures of duty, “community” honor, and personal survival contributes to the maintenance of the normative hetero-patriarchal economy.

This deep interiorization of women has different implications for khush and non-khush women. For khush women “disloyalty” to the usual labor processes, as in labor for service-work and procreative labor, comes with the threat of “exile.” Exile from the economic networks of family, caste, work place, and community. These economic networks structure sexuality. Not participating in these networks in the right way makes the khush figure non-economic and unsustainable for reality. I say the right way to include other potential non-economic/procreative actors such as widows, unmarried “single” daughters, unmarried mothers, or women in prostitution.

Cathy Cohen’s distinction between “heterosexual” and “hetero-normative” has been particularly useful in this context.⁹ Cohen points out that heterosexuality, as sexual identity, must be understood as qualitatively different from hetero-normative, which includes identity (compulsory heterosexuality) and the privileging institutions of power. Likewise, in the Indian context, hetero-normative then also takes into account the complex intersections of compulsory heterosexuality, and the institutions of place (urban, rural) and high-end or low-end service-work. Hetero-normative exile also embodies different degrees and typologies of violence. The deep interiorization of the service sector almost “privatizes” women’s contributions and women’s concerns out of sociality and institutions. It is no wonder that sexuality—particularly sexuality that could break the dominant socioeconomic nexus—is disqualified as an “individual” problem or issue.

Another example, of narrow economic analysis on sexuality has been pointed out by J. Devika and Praveena Kodoth in their analysis

of two recent cases of sexual violence in higher education and public sector workplaces in Kerala. They argue that the response of “the mainstream Left culture,” which considers itself progressive on “gender issues” was to cast the women who were the targets of sexual violence as anti-class and anti-caste or simply as bolstering divisive politics. In contrast, those opposed to the “mainstream Left” portrayed the women as “morally outraged” by lower-caste/class men. The women therefore could only be recognized as bourgeois victimizers (the educated middle-class victimizing the lower-class/caste men) or respectable middle-class/upper-caste victims (threatened by lower-caste/class males). Devika and Kodoth also demonstrate the Left’s resolution of the “woman question” via the upper-class literate mother-worker and the working-class toiling worker-mother. Although some gains have been made by women in Kerala under the “mainstream Left” (especially poorer women), the authors “despair” about the possibilities for autonomous feminist politics within this cultural space which continues to support “livelihood” issues of “poor women” by “separat[ing] sexuality from labour power, virtually disembod[ing] the worker and . . . the association of sexual rights predominantly with middle-class/elite women, who are then identified almost entirely with the bodily sphere.”¹⁰

Shobha De’s Strange Obsession

Amrita’s fears of being stalked by Minx are temporarily put on hold and things look up for her when she is “savagely kissed” by the “ultra-macho” “boytoy” model Rover the Rogue. Rover the Rogue was “maddeningly handsome” and “it was his utter lack of interest in anybody other than himself” that Amrita is strangely drawn to. Nevertheless Amrita falls in love with Rover the Rogue, despite the fact that he is a “narcissistic bore,” and (especially) since they have painful yet pleasurable sex, and he wears crotch hugging pants, and has “Richard Gere eyes.” After Rover the Rogue decides to break off the relationship, Minx simply has him brutally beaten up and left to rot in his excrement and blood in a prison cell. Minx refrains from “chopping off Rover the Rogues’ balls” or even death by “bamboo up their ass” treatment. Minx’s reign as protector also includes protection from other women (especially models) who competed with Amrita for modeling assignments. For example, Minx throws acid on Lola’s (an aspiring model) face and minces up Lola’s insides with a switchblade shoved up her vagina (De, 1992:68).

Minx's pathological protection of Amrita enters a new phase when she pledges herself to Amrita at an old church, by slitting her (Minx's) wrist and placing her blood on her "*mang*" (the parting of hair on her head). The practice of putting red powder or sindoor on a woman's head is practiced in many North Indian communities, and it is meant to symbolize a woman's marital status, fidelity, and her reproductive standing. Also, Minx's "total control" over Amrita gets more sealed after their first "sexual" encounter (at Amrita's parent's home). No details are provided by De only the insinuation of rape. When Amrita escapes for a while to her parents home Minx arrives in Delhi and officially declares her undying love for Amrita, which is followed by their first sexual encounter. After "sex" a jubilant Minx goes over to the local Kali temple, sacrifices a goat and dances around the goddess with bloody hands and purchases a ring for Amrita.

On her return to Mumbai a *weak* and *trapped* Amrita moves into Minx's apartment. Minx's protective-predation now includes managing and investing Amrita's earnings, managing her career and time, and buying retirement plans. Amrita is not allowed to meet or talk to anyone when she was done with her shoots and is given a monthly shopping allowance. The days when Minx feels that Amrita was having a bit too much fun with her co-workers or spent too much time at work, she flies into a rage and beats up Amrita, has violent *sex*, gets Amrita drunk and videotapes her in the nude. This is then followed by apologies and unusual and expensive gifts from Minx. Minx also warns Amrita to stay away from men or else they would become hijras.

Amrita's paradoxical existence in De's patriarchal setup depends on the othering of lesbians as pathological or invisible and on hostility directed toward her as a *loose/western* woman. Due to the contradictory nature of postcolonial patriarchy if one is too modern a woman, (that is, one would leave one's parents home unmarried and with a job) one would be subjected to all kinds of predators on the prowl (like men or Minx), or one would be corrupted and become a predator (a *she-man* like Minx).

Another dynamic in this equation is the North Indian Amrita vs the South Indian Minx. Shobha De's obsession with particular signs of the Metropole can be identified by the usual markers of *westernization*. Characters smoke imported cigarettes and horde imported chocolates. Amrita is asked by one of her male lovers to go get some sun on her legs. Usually in India, one is told to get out of the hot sun since it would make one's complexion darker, as fairer skin is more valued. The valuing of fairer skin coupled with and Amrita being asked to

“getting some sun on her legs” represents a contradictory internalized racism.

While Amrita may arouse admiration, Minx provokes repulsion. Minx is a deficient woman and an incomplete man. As an incomplete man, she deals with this handicap by exhibiting excessive “man-like” behavior (namely, pursuing and sexually wanting women), and by being hyper-violent and *over-sexual*. Minx’s behavior makes it hard to imagine her as a *real* woman. Minx’s sameness to a man and in particular a hyper-masculinity is symbolized in the following ways: she drives a jeep although it is not terribly common to see women in urban India driving vehicles; she smoked imported cigarettes (one does not see too many women who smoke openly in public); she primarily wears jeans, jackets and boots—*western* garb usually reserved for Indian men; she does not have a “mane” like Amrita (short hair is often symbolic of the loss of womanhood); she did not wear a bra, in fact she hated her breasts and often wanted to tie them down; she has sexual feelings usually for models assumed to be and “look” heterosexual; she is never sexually attracted to any men; she is aggressive with men, in fact hung out with cops and *dadas*; she stalks, batters, rapes and controls just “like a man”; and she is possessive and territorial of her woman, whom she pursued relentlessly and managed. In all of these ways Minx is also not a woman. The only time during which Minx appeared feminine (to Amrita) was when she was a victim of rape and battery, or when she was nurturing, that is, finding out Amrita’s favorite recipes from her mother. Minx’s rape was possibly a heterosexist explanation of why she “became” a lesbian or its corollary—why she hated men.

Despite discouragement from her husband and sons, who feel that a modern girl like Amrita will choose a man all on her own, Amrita’s mother pursues the arranged marriage route. Mrs. Aggarwal finds the perfect boy Rakesh Bhatia, a successful businessman and NRI (Non-Resident Indian or Greencard holder) from New York. NRIs prove to be important for the Indian wedding-industrial complex.

After initial opposition by Amrita, who feared for Rakesh’s life, violent protests by Minx, Rakesh rescues Amrita and marries her. After a smooth marriage ceremony in Delhi, (and a brief fire, set by Minx, in the room adjacent to Amrita and Rakesh’s honeymoon suite at the luxurious Oberoi Hotel), Amrita and Rakesh go on their honeymoon to Nainital, a hill station in India. The honeymooners are interrupted by a resilient Minx. Both are kidnapped and tortured by Minx. She makes Rakesh and Amrita strip and have sex while she videotapes them. In her “psychotic trance,” Minx begins wildly

dancing and sets the whole shack on fire. Minx's policeman father arrives and rescue all three, but Minx is hurt the most and needs to be hospitalized. Amrita, still the concerned friend, confronts Minx's father for all the nasty things he did to Minx.

The book ends with a pregnant Amrita and Rakesh, who return to Delhi from New York after a two-year period for a holiday. Amrita catches the day's headlines in the *Hindustan Times*: "Meenakshi Iyengar passed away on 7th of August in Bombay under tragic conditions. No condolences please." After reading the headline De concludes: "Amrita was free at last" (208).

In a paradoxical manner De implies that lesbianism is an aberration and a by product of too much *western style* freedom, power, money and/or mimicry. An uncontrollable perverse modernity. Further, De introduces and titillates her readers with her cross-fertilized (*Indian/Western*) forms of lesbophobia. This form of assimilationist cross-fertilized (*Indian/Western*) thinking assumes the Indian evolution towards western forms of modern heterosexuality as progress, more freedom and enlightenment. De's classism and affinity with this liberal style heterosexism cannot imagine that queer women (*kootkaris* or *sakhis*) exist in India. The classist assumption is that sexual identity is immaterial to women, especially to rural and working class women (since they *only* have to worry about basics like food, water, and shelter), but is possible for the modern Indian upper-class woman (who has and knows more freedom and has time to explore freedom and enlightened ways of being). Too much progress could cause perverse sexuality (the modern lesbian) or too little progress could cause degenerate sexuality (the primitive lesbian or *sakhi*). A similar argument was made by nineteenth-century sexologists (Kraft-Ebing and Ellis): Too much progress could cause homosexuality, or too little progress could cause and make congenitally degenerate bodies for perverse sexualities. De's novel demonstrates a convenient reversal of violence and inversion of reality against *khush* women in India. In the next section I explore accounts of "lesbians" in daily newspapers and magazines in India.

Lesbian Pacts: Media and Police Accounts of Death and Kinship

Since the late 1980s, the mainstream news media has reported incidents of "double lesbian suicides" and "lesbian marriages" and

public contention due to the formation of friendship contracts (locally referred to as *maitri karars*). They have been randomly reported in many newspapers (in many languages) and archived and translated by individual *khush* activists. The media accounts include some information released to reporters by the police and interviews of relatives, neighbors, and friends. Much of my information comes from the archives of the now defunct *Sakhi Collective* (a resource center for lesbian and bisexual women) in Delhi, personal documentation, translations from individual *khush* activists, and most recently from the work of the members of the newly formed *Sahayatrika Project*, in Kerala.¹¹

Interestingly, mainstream media accounts acknowledge a relationship, albeit bizarre, desperate and misguided, between the two women that is “more than a friendship.” To many *khush* activists these accounts seem to represent familiar desires for alternative kinship and economies that break with normative heterosexual kinship, in which women value a commitment (emotional, intellectual, economic, sexual and/or erotic) to one another, wherein adult identity is not fundamentally dependent on, and defined primarily by, heterosexual marriage and kinship, and where one’s sexual desire has to confront everyday violence. The reports of marriages usually occurred in small towns where the women approach temple priests, the police, their families, and civil marriage registries for certification. In some cases immediate family and friends have been supportive, and in most cases the couple encounter problems with government officials at the registries, the local police, and neighbors. In other cases a family member (in this case a woman’s father) has invoked Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (discussed in chapter 4) with local and civil authorities to prevent the two women from being with one another. Also, the media attention from urban centers has often resulted in outright denial of any “lesbian element” in the relationship (by the partners or family members) and/or has resulted in a separation to avoid local punishment and ridicule. In the case of “*maitri karars*” (or friendship-kinship pacts) unrelated unmarried women often run into resistance, with the state and landlords when they want to live together (either as lovers or friends). This is so because it is assumed by neighbors that they are prostitutes, since they are not living with a husband or their family of origin. They are therefore fair game for violence, hostility, and ridicule. In the accounts of the double suicides many women have been high school, or college students, or recently out of school and have at the end of their studies realized their impending separation or marriage. The media reports also mention love letters discovered by the police.

Case 1: The Marriage of Urmilla and Leela

The most widely publicized media case was the marriage of Leela and Urmilla in a small town in North India. Leela and Urmilla affirmed their friendship and commitment to each other by getting married at a Hindu temple (in 1988). The most detailed media account appeared in the now defunct *Illustrated Weekly of India*.

The *Indian Express* (May 7, 1988) reported that the “wedding” of two women constables has caused considerable embarrassment to the Madhya Pradesh Police. Mrs. Leela Namdeo (28 years old) and Mrs. Urmilla Shrivastava (28 years old), two police constables of the Twenty Third Battalion, in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, got “married” in December 1987. Leela the *bride* was a widow of a constable with three children. According to the report, Urmilla’s difficult life prompted her to join the police force. Urmilla, the *groom* was a resident of a village near Jabalpur and was a child-bride. She was married when she was three years old and when she came of age she refused to accept her husband. She too joined the police force as “a way out of a tense situation” with her family and community. The report stated that on joining the police force both women were harassed and subjected to discriminatory treatment—especially since they were unmarried women—one who was a widow and the other who was a child-bride and who had deserted her husband.

According to the *Illustrated Weekly’s* account the two women had become close over a period of eighteen months and suddenly decided to get “married.” They took a week’s leave and got married at their local Hindu temple in a *gandharva* ceremony. According to activist, Sharmila, there have been many different traditions of Hindu marriage. One form was the *gandharva* tradition, one that was not contractual. She says: “Gandharvas were celestial musicians and linked to divine erotic traditions. The *gandharv* form of marriage was based on erotic union with the sex of the partners being unspecified.” Both their parents supported their decision and were present at the temple. On returning to the barracks, Urmilla and Leela, declared themselves as *husband* and *wife* and their “shocked” colleagues immediately informed their superiors. The embarrassed authorities could not talk to them directly but asked guards to keep a strict watch over them. Urmilla “the husband” who was dressed in *male* attire of jeans and a T-shirt and Leela, “the bride,” was dressed in the “traditional” bridal dress and jewelry with lots of sindoor in her hair and a big red bindi on her forehead. Eventually authorities began interrogating the women, kept them in isolation (without food for forty eight hours) and resulted in their

discharge. Leela and Urmilla were also “coerced into signing papers they had not read” (Anu and Thadani, 1993:83). Legal, medical, professional and disciplinary reasons were cited by their supervisors (civil servants) to reporters to justify their action. After their dismissal, Leela and Urmilla were dropped off at the railway station at 2:00 am. The news of Leela and Urmilla’s discharge without notice or any real cause resulted in much urban media attention. The following interviews with Urmilla, Leela and their three supervisors, are excerpts from *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (May, 1988):

Interview with Urmilla (“the husband”):

Q. *Is it true that you were abandoned at the railway station at 12:30 in the night?*

A. Quite late in the evening four or five of them came, took us to a photo studio to be photographed, and left us at the station at about two o’clock in the morning.

Q. *Tell me about your marriage to Leela.*

A. There was no marriage at all. We never got married to each other.

Q. *Then how did the news about your marriage in Sagar originate?*

A. It is all totally false. We were so many girls living together and all of us were having fun this way pretending that she is my wife etc. Like this, Leela too became my wife. Only for fun, there was nothing serious about it.

Q. *For how many days did you go on leave?*

A. Around five or six days only.

Q. *Was there any particular reason?*

A. I was not well. I even sent them a medical certificate.

Q. *What was wrong with you?*

A. The usual, nothing very serious.

Q. *Isn’t it strange that both of you went on leave at the same time, for the same reason?*

A. No, even Leela was not well. Moreover, her uncle had died

Q. *Do you hate men?*

A. No, I don’t.

Q. *Are you attracted towards women?*

A. No.

Q. *Do you know what the word “lesbian” means?*

A. No.

Q. *You got married when you were a child. What has happened to the marriage now?*

A. The man is not employed. He wanted me to work. But after all this gadbad¹² they wrote calling off the whole thing.

Q. *When did you start dressing like a man?*

A. I have been like this right from my childhood.

Q. *But other girls in your company say you started dressing like a man only after your training. After you met Leela.*

A. It is not true. You can even ask my neighbors.

Q. *Have you asked for reinstatement?*

A. No, I have not.

Q. *Why don't you want to go back?*

A. I do not know of this reinstatement.

Q. *Do you plan to sue the police for your discharge?*

A. Yes, I want to but I don't know how to go about it.

Interview with Leela (“the wife”)

Q. *Tell me about your marriage to Urmilla.*

A. It is all false. There was no marriage, we never got married. We are just good friends, nothing more.

Q. *You mean your relationship is not physical?*

A. How can two women have a physical relationship? It is just not possible.

Q. *Then why are you staying here and not with your parents?*

A. I am not staying here permanently. I will be going back today or tomorrow. Also, I keep going to my parents' house to see my children.

Q. *Did you have a happy married life?*

A. You think I would have otherwise had three children?

Q. *It is said that homosexuality is very common among the girls in your company. Is that true?*

A. What you mean has never happened in the barracks. We were so many women staying together, and it was natural that some were more friendly with you than the other girls. Then we used to tease them saying “joda bana liya.”¹³ When you men are working together don’t you get close to anybody?

Q. *How did you get friendly with Urmilla?*

A. It happened during our training. Both of us were feeling quite lonely, and we needed a friend. We just got along well.

Q. *You two are supposed to have gone on a honeymoon together when you were on leave. Where did you go?*

A. What are you saying? How can two girls go on a honeymoon? During our leave we came to Mandi Bamora and from there went to Damoh to meet my parents.

Interview with Mr. Narendra Veermani¹⁴

This interview was conducted after Urmilla and Lila were discharged without a departmental inquiry.

Q. *Was their marriage the reason for their discharge?*

A. There was no marriage as such. No solemnization, no formalization, no settlement, no church or mosque. They, of their own accord, while they were undergoing training had this varmala¹⁵ done. While they were here they got themselves photographed in male and female clothes respectively. Both girls have said in their statements to us that they got into the relationship for permanent security. That was the intention.

Q. *The relationship was not physical in any way?*

A. Not at all. That kind of physical relationship that could be between a man and a woman, or even in a person with homosexual tendencies, that was absent here. There was not even touching, kissing, nothing.

Q. *Have there been such cases before?*

A. No, this is the first time that such a thing is happening.

Q. *Maybe it is the first time that such a thing came to light?*

A. No, this has never happened before. In this case, if it had been two men instead of women, even then we would have discharged them.

We make no distinction here. We go by our norms of professionalism and discipline.

Q. Wouldn't it have been easier to have transferred them elsewhere?

This was a policy decision. Even assuming that we had transferred them elsewhere, to different places, they would have insisted on being sent together. All this cannot be conducive to the maintenance of discipline. Such an act has implications that are not realized by civilians. Because we are an armed force we have our own rules and regulations, and high standards to be met. These two women were discharged because we had to set a precedent so that other women are not encouraged to do similar things, and also because such women don't make good officers.

Interview with Mr. R.L. Amravanshi¹⁶

Q. Why did you discharge them?

A. Can you imagine what effect the behavior of these two ladies would have had on the other women members of my company? Let us just say that it is not permissible to let something like this affect the discipline of the entire force. Moreover, the law does not permit two females, or for that matter two males, to marry each other. They have earned a bad name for themselves, but they cannot be allowed to earn a bad name for the entire company.

Q. Is it true that such pairing off is very common in the barracks? Joda bana liya is what it is called?

A. No, the women in the barracks may certainly be friendly towards each other, but nobody garlands other girls, applies vermillion, dresses up as a male and then gets photographed in this manner. All this violates the force's discipline.

Q. But isn't homosexuality becoming common everywhere?

A. It is not. But even if such a marriage is common, it is a manifestation of an act that has already been committed. We cannot tolerate this in the force.

Q. Have there been instances of men misbehaving with the women?

A. No, no, we are quite strict about this.

Q. How are the women treated in the barracks?

A. I took over the battalion only recently, in February this year. I don't know what it was like before. Under me, I can say that all is fine.

Q. Can I go to the barracks where all the women live?

A. No we have decided not to let outsiders go to the barracks.

Q. *If the couple were to apply for reinstatement, will they be taken back?*

A. There is no saying with certainty. Their appeal will be considered favorably.

Q. *Assuming they are taken back, what happens to their relationship? You don't expect them to break off, surely?*

A. No, but this sort of behavior will not be tolerated by us.

Interview with Mr. B.K. Mukherjee¹⁷

Q. *Don't you think the entire controversy has shown your police force in a very bad light?*

A. You see, in this case actually there has been nothing as alleged, no lesbianism, no sex, no such thing. There was no such thing between them, they got so close to each other during the course of the training that they decided to live together. That's all. Both are quite respectable persons. One is the mother of three children, a widow, the other was married but was not accepted by her in-laws.

Q. *Then why were they discharged?*

A. Though both have good character, they were discharged primarily because we did not want any controversy. We did not want anything to affect our discipline.

Q. *Then what happens to their "marriage"?*

A. There was no marriage, they only had some sort of tie, that is all. This is all totally false.

Q. *Is it true that they started displaying lesbian tendencies?*

A. No, this again is absolutely false. We got them checked medically and found nothing.

The tension and interplay between denial, acknowledgment, invisibility and visible pathology, and the insinuations in the documented words between the reporter, supervisors, Urmilla, and Leela appears to be a consistent feature in the Q & A. One of the supervisors, Veermani, claims that Urmilla and Leela did "this" (or the informal "varmala") for "permanent security." Another supervisor, Amravanshi, says that such behavior will only encourage and promote other "ladies" of the company. Mukerjee, the third supervisor, seems to be absolutely sure that no *sex* or *lesbianism* has occurred, since according to him, both Leela and Urmilla are in essence

respectable persons, have good character, have no medical problems and most importantly since they (the supervisors) have not officially accused the women of sex and lesbianism. Urmilla and Leela can only be accepted as uneducated, underprivileged, misguided victims (a widow and a child-bride) resorting to desperate action (such as wanting permanent security with a friend or same-sex co-worker). Their form of misguided and thus slightly redeemable degenerate sexuality differs from a Minx in that Minx is urban, economically more privileged, English speaking, explicitly predatory, and dresses like a *westernized* wo/man. Leela and Urmilla have too little development whereas Minx is modernity run amuck.

The gender “confusion” and thereby heterosexist explanation for the reporter can be seen in his perception of Urmilla, who “dressed like a man.” He asks her if she hates men and then goes on to inquire if it is her attraction to women or Leela that made her dress like a man. Once again fully convinced that only a man could or would want to adopt codes of masculinity and could desire and be with a woman. As “lesbians” in print their printed responses still provide multiple, meaningful “hidden transcripts” for khush and non-khush audiences. They play within the tensions of jodas versus a “marriage.” Pretend marriages and jodas were done for fun points out Urmilla. Leela responds to the reporter saying that it is natural for people (both women and men) to make jodas when staying so close together. When asked why she (Urmilla) suddenly dressed like a man, she replies “I’ve always been like that right from me childhood.” Perhaps “I was born this way” or “this is my nature” explanation—one that sits better for those suspicious of “this is an individual-choice” route. Simultaneously Urmilla and Leela accommodate, reinvent, and resist sanctioned couple-dom. For some observers they appear to have challenged its “opposite-gender” monopoly. Although they deny (to the reporters) that they got married the reporters paradoxically cannot imagine any relationship (including one between two women) without the framework of marriage.

Further, Urmilla and Leela, temporarily challenged the hegemony of a colonial notion of what constitutes a “sacred-legal” contract with God and/or the state in a postcolonial India wherein communities have “traditionally” recognized many forms of relationships or “marriages.” Leela returns the reporter’s curious question about “What do lesbian’s do in bed” with “How can two women have a physical relationship? It is not possible.”

The next four cases received very little coverage in comparison to the Leela and Urmilla story case, but present very similar themes.

Case Two: The Bold, Beautiful, and the Damned

Shishir Joshi in a report titled “The Bold, Beautiful, and the Damned,” in *The Indian Express*, April 18, 1993, gives an account of an unusual incident in Chandrapur, a small town 160 km from Nagpur. Joshi reports that two women, Vinoda Adkewar (18 years of age) and Rekha Chaudhary (21 years of age), who grew up in the neighboring villages of Patri and Dadgaon, met four years ago at a family gathering. According to Joshi, Vinoda, “the wife” said that they had decided to elope to Chandrapur (about 60 km away from their villages) when they realized that they would be ostracized by their community for living together. Vinoda is said to have informed Joshi that they decided to rent a room and stay after their elopement. Joshi reports that the shocked registrar read their application and asked them to come back in ten days “. . . to buy some time.” The registrar then notified the equally shocked parents and local police. Following this, judicial officers and police personnel went into “urgent deliberations.” Meanwhile, hundreds of people gathered around the court premises for the decision by the Police Superintendent, Hemant Karkare.

However, it “took all efforts” by the Registrar of Marriage, Arjun Kadse, and the Police Superintendent, Hemant Karkare, “to dissuade the lesbian couple” reports Joshi. Although Vinoda was convinced of giving up on the relationship, “the husband” Rekha was “enraged not at the law, but the manner in which she had been ditched by her beloved.” She, Rekha, then “flung the red sari away . . . tears rolled down her eyes as she walked away, making a feeble attempt to smile.” Says, Joshi, “Rebuked by parents and ridiculed by society, the couple, surely the first such instance in the region, have left to sulk in silence.” After being denied their “bold dreams” they are now back in their respective villages.

Case Three: Lesbians Fail To Get Married

The Kolkata paper, *The Telegraph*, reported in “Lesbians Fail To Get Married” (April 17, 1993) that two girls from Sadi Taluka ran into problems with the registrar of marriage and police when they went to get married. Despite the fact that the parents supported the union the police and registrar tried to dissuade them. Vinoda Adkewar (18 years old) the younger and “more educated one” who had studied till class

eight, finally decided against the marriage and went home to her parents. The elder one, Rekha Chaudhary (21 years old), who was “illiterate” was not convinced and “in a rage threw away the saree purchased for the wedding.”

Case Four: Gender Troubles

The *India Today* reported (April 15, 1990) that Tarulata (33 years old) underwent a sex change in 1987 to become a *man*—Tarunkumar, to marry Lila Chavda (23 years old) in December, 1989. Tarunlata and Lila met in 1985 when Tarunlata’s sister, a candidate for the Congress(I) ticket, stayed over at Muljibhai’s (Lila’s schoolteacher father) place. Lila lived in Paldi and Tarunlata in Dasade, two nearby villages. Tarunlata’s sister began getting suspicious of Lila and Tarunlata’s close friendship and revealed her suspicions to Muljibhai. From then on Lila would be regularly beaten up by Muljibhai. Three months later Lila and Tarunlata eloped from the village to get married. On finding out about the marriage Muljibhai decided to go to the Gujarat High Court stating that since “it is a lesbian relationship” action needed to be undertaken on grounds of Section 377 to annul the marriage. The “writ petition” states “Tarunkumar possesses neither the male organ nor any natural mechanism of cohabitation, sexual intercourse and procreation of children. Adoption of any unnatural mechanism does not create manhood and as such Tarunkumar is not a male.” Muljibhai’s lawyer claimed “even an impotent Hindu male can marry because impotency is no bar to his marriage. In this case Tarunkumar was not a Hindu male at the time of birth.

The *India Today* reporter quotes Tarunkumar, “as a child I would don male clothes and play volleyball, football, and even judo and karate with other boys. If I had the money I would have got myself operated during my teenage days.” Tarunkumar and Lila declared that even if their marriage was to be found null and void by the Gujarat High Court, “. . . we shall continue to live together because we are emotionally attached to one another.” Muljibhai won the case. The couple now live in Tarunkumar’s parent’s home and they assert that the real reason Muljibhai objects to their marriage is that he will not get “dowry” from the groom (considered customary in their communities).

Case Five: Woman Weds Woman

The *Bombay Dost* reports in “Woman Weds Woman” (1993) that on July 9 a wedding took place in a temple in NH-3 area¹⁸ in the presence

of family and friends. The wedding was between two women Neeru Sharma and Meenu Sharma. The “husband” Neeru alias Dinesh is self employed and supplies electronic spare parts for TV sets and earns approximately Rs. 3000 a month. Meenu is employed with the ISD/STD phone company on a salary of Rs. 1000 per month and she earns Rs. 3000 per month by singing bhajans in jagratas.¹⁹ She is the eldest in the birth family and the only breadwinner.

Meenu met Neeru in a panchayati jagrata²⁰ in the neighbouring NH-3 area. “It was love at first sight and after that we started meeting regularly. I told Meenu all about myself. But initially she did not believe that I too was a girl,” said Neeru. Neeru who prefers to be called Dinesh (a male name) stated that she has been wearing boy’s clothes since childhood “I have never worn a salwar kameez.” Dinesh/Neeru is reported to speak in “masculine fashion” as well. Dinesh/Neeru was married off 4 months ago to Jogesh Vaid in Faridabad but returned to her parents home after one month. “I hated playing second fiddle to a male” s/he asserted. “That was a marriage against my wishes.”

After the marriage to Meenu the couple rented a home but could only live there for five days due to water logging. They then moved back to their respective parents’ homes—but plan on living together once they find housing.

Another version of the report appeared in the *Indian Express*, New Delhi, “Parents Deny Marriage Between Girls,” by Sonia Wadhwa. Wadhwa states that the parents deny that it was any real ceremony. The parents claimed that the photographer who clicked them duped them into splashing it in various newspapers. Further, the “girls were young and vain and they agreed . . .,” said Kaushalya Sharma (mother of Meeru “the bride”). Neeru/Dinesh’s mother also agreed with Kaushalya Sharma’s statement. She said, “They regret acting so foolishly. Both are staying in their respective houses. This news of a marriage is a farce.” “I’ve become a laughing stock for my friends,” said Neeru/Dinesh’s brother. According to the reporter the person who “. . . is perhaps having to face the worst consequences of the marriage” is Seema, Meenu’s younger sister. Seema, a standard X (tenth grade) student, “has to bear the brunt of her classmates jokes about hailing from a queer family.” Seema says, “Didi’s foolishness has made things so tough for me. I hate going to school these days. Moreover, though it is the year of my board exams, I am so worried by what has happened that I can barely concentrate on my studies.” Seema “prays to God every night so that people will leave her and the family alone,” notes the reporter.

The marriage which has “generated immense curiosity in the neighborhood and the city’s media circle” . . . drew comments from

other locals as well. The city's newspaper circle however, feel "let down" since the Police and Administration have not done enough to discipline the girls. A shopkeeper commented, "... Neeru would smoke and drink and court Meenu all day. And Meenu would always manage to find excuses to visit the market whenever Neeru was around." Senior citizens "expressed their horror" at the "ghastly and unnatural acts" and "an octogenarian" Ram Singh said, "if this is not undone, Faridabad [the town] will be cursed by the Gods."

Only one example of "maitri karar" or friendship-pacts between unrelated adult women has been archived.

Case Six: Asaruna and Sudha

The *Indian Express* ("Marriage of Two Women," May 7, 1988) reports that Asaruna Gohil (31 years old) and Sudha Amarsinh (29 years old), both Panchayati school teachers at Vadadhali village, Naswadi Taluka, "created a sensation of sorts on Friday when they entered into a contract marriage by signing a statement before the notary republic and decided to live together." They had been living together for the past ten years and "since they did not want to get married and continue living together they decided to enter into this friendship contract called 'maitri karar' in Gujarati." Aruna and Sudha declared that they have known each other since 1978 from teacher training school and work together at different places in Baroda. This is the second "maitri karar" in Gujarat this year.

In all four reported cases of marriage it is automatically assumed that one woman, usually the "masculine looking one" analogous to European sexology's "invert," desires like, reacts like, and wants to be a *man*. The possibility that s/he may not identify as a normative woman or a man, or identify in some differently gendered ways is not considered. Nor is it considered that a conscious decision may have been made by two women (who want to be together in a committed relationship) to be more accepted in a small town, by living and expressing an opposite gender but a same sex relationship (perhaps analogous to certain forms of traditional butch and femme relationships). The condescending tone of the reporter marks such behavior as "uneducated," "illiterate" and therefore belonging to lower-class, non-cosmopolitan locals. Thus once again a lack of modernity is cited as the problem of their degenerate sexuality. Tradition is deployed and manipulated at various times. For instance, the Gujarati traditions of "maitri karars" creates controversy and the fact that Tarun Kumar

was not “traditionally” a Hindu by birth not that s/he was an “impotent male” is used to ban a marriage

Some “Flesh & Blood” Desi Dykes

At the seminar organized by Sakhi I met two acquaintances from my high school. Both were actively involved in khush activism in Delhi, Calcutta, and Bombay. Their involvement included participating in public demonstrations regarding HIV/AIDS policies towards, prisoners, sex-workers, gay men, and “msms”; writing for local newspapers and the gay newsletter *Bombay Dost*; and organizing small but growing khush groups. As an “out” khush Nafisa was often invited to join in on conversations about coalition work between gay men and lesbians. Since her return from the United States with a college degree Nafisa was currently helping her family out with their business. One thing that my peers and I remember about Nafisa in high school was the “running away” incident. The other thing I remembered about Nafisa was that she often liked to present herself as a “filmi hero”²¹ around her peers, especially around other girls.

The “running away” incident happened when I was in high school. An August evening Supriya, my neighbor and peer in high school, burst into my house with news that her classmates Nafisa and Vibha had run away together from home after cutting a half-day at school. “Well, I think it’s just too disgusting!” Supriya huffily declared. “Disgusting!” What an interesting word to describe this event, I thought. That wasn’t the word that would have immediately popped to my mind. The whole thing intrigued me, even scared and excited me, but it did not seem disgusting.

Almost a month later Nafisa and Vibha were still missing. Their families would place ads in the papers—especially in the local newspapers—saying “Please come home—we’ll work things out . . . we’ll forgive you . . . we won’t be angry and we will not punish you . . . we are worried . . . please, come home daughter.” Every other day in school I would hear updates from peers. “When they ran away they took all their clothes and some money. They hawked some of the clothes—especially their U.S. made jeans in Janpath.” U.S. made jeans and clothes were rare and “hot” commodities in many cities. In school we would excitedly speculate: “I think they were spotted near the docks in Chennai . . . maybe they hid on a ship to Singapore or Hong Kong.” “Where could they be for so long?” “What are they doing?”

Why do you think they did this?" And, then we would think: "How do they manage for money?" "Do they have somewhere to stay?" "Could running away with a girlfriend be fun, freeing, or dangerous?" "Are they alive?"

One day (almost a month later) there was news that Nafisa and Vibha were found. Once again the stories through the grapevine told us—"while they were on the run, they were nearly attacked at Janpath but Nafisa, the more 'tomboyish' one, beat up their attackers!" and "finally the police arrested them at a shopping center in Delhi," or "they contacted a cousin in order to find a place to stay and the cousin notified the parents and the police."

Many of my friends, including myself, were in awe of this whole event. Two schoolgirls, defying parents and schoolteachers, running away together was generally unheard of to many from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds. Also, these two were very popular students, from "good families" (in this case upper-middle-class)—and their rebellious act seemed to add to their popularity among their peers. There also seemed to be an aura of secrecy that hung around—seemingly untouched. No one really talked about it but it almost seemed like we knew something was there, it was almost as if "it" was all right with us in school but it was taboo overtly articulating "it." However, not everyone felt okay about the sexual aura that clung to the "running away" incident. It was obvious to me why Supriya had said that it was "disgusting." My first thought was that she was too *anglicized* or *western* in her attitudes and behavior. At first, I didn't really know why that was what I thought and felt as a fifteen year old student. But on reflecting later, I chalked it up to the fact that both young women and men in India live segregated lives, and often have very passionate relationships. But increasingly, the more "westernized" kids ridiculed that closeness. Also, many of us at school recognized that such close same-sex friendships were prevalent and often quite erotic. Occasionally, some of us openly discussed these relationships with great pride and amusement but with no shame; however sometimes ambivalence and shame came in when we used an English word (like homosexuality) to describe "it." On the other hand some of us also secretly wondered about this new English category: "the homosexual" or "lesbian"—Wasn't that supposed to be abnormal, sick and unfamiliar? These sentiments were hard to recognize in the faces of peers with whom we associated fun and erotic friendships. In the end most of us ignored the so-called scientific diagnosis suggesting all of our collective sickness and abnormalcy.

In Mumbai, I accidentally ran into Nafisa and asked her about her work and thoughts about the media accounts of "lesbian suicides"

and “lesbian marriages.” But the first thing I wanted to ask her about was her account of the “running away” incident.

Nafisa: We were in love and our close friends knew about this. They would always find ways to help us meet and hang out. Vibha’s parents were very strict. One day her father discovered what was going on and barred us from ever seeing each other. There was also talk about him finding mental help for Vibha. We went about not seeing each other (outside of school) and one day on the spur of the moment we decided to run away together. We were sick and tired of running around scared. So we did it. We just ran away. Eventually we got caught and the same rules of not seeing one another were put upon us by Vibha’s parents and my parents. My father was quite tolerant. I don’t think he approved of what we did but he knew about me . . .

Suparna: *Knew what? That you were into girls not boys?*

Nafisa: Well, yes in a way. I knew I was different when I was three or so. I always found women and girls more beautiful—I had crushes on actresses in the movies and girls around me. I also had a relationship with a female cousin. When I was around ten or eleven I wanted to have a sex change operation. I told my father about it. My father and I were very close and I told him everything. I wasn’t close to my mother. He seemed really calm and handled this request very well. He said why don’t you wait till you are twenty one and then let’s think about the operation. But by the time I turned twenty one realized that I could be a woman and love women. I didn’t have to have a man’s body to do that. Although all around me only boys were encouraged to be involved sexually—usually through marriage—with a woman.

Suparna: *You and Vibha were banned from seeing one another?*

Nafisa: Oh yes, but we eventually began meeting in friends’ houses. They were really sweet and would arrange outings and help us spend time with one another.

Suparna: *So where is Vibha now?*

Nafisa: Well, I ended up going to college in the United States. And Vibha, went to college in Bangalore. After college she got married to this guy in Bangalore. Her parents made her go see a psychiatrist—to cure her of this mental disorder. I’m not sure if she really was cured. She ended up doing what her parents and society wants—she got married and got a husband. You know I met her just before she got married. I think we will still have a special place for one another in our hearts. She’s told her fiancé about us and he seems okay about it. It’s somewhat funny when I think about it now but it was really painful and sad for us while we were being separated by one thing or the other.

Suparna: Nafisa, have you heard about these incidents of “lesbian marriages” all over India?

Nafisa: Yes, some of them. I think relationships between women and women are really prevalent in India. After all we are still quite segregated! Although it may be a problem to use the term “lesbian”?

Suparna: Why?

Nafisa: Well I found out about it and saw lesbians in the West! The lesbian movement in the United States is strong compared to here—they face different problems—in the West it’s very difficult for similar genders to be affectionate with one another—there is so much antagonism between women. Especially since they are all fighting to get men’s attention! But with American lesbians, they try so hard not to be straight women that they make what lesbian means very narrow. The term lesbian is so rigid in some ways—not fluid. Here it seems too easy to flirt with women. But here there aren’t appropriate words to describe what is going on—I am often considered the boy or referred to in masculine verbs in a particular relationship. Women talk about jodis [pairs/couples] or marriages because that’s the only available framework for relationships that include something sexual. So we have to work within that framework sometimes.

Suparna: So how would you respond to someone saying that you became a lesbian because you went to the West?

Nafisa: Well, I just find the word not too helpful in the Indian context. I know that other lesbians use it as a political category and I respect it. But women are involved with women everywhere here. This is not to say that I don’t identify as a lesbian—so it’s a matter of finding the language. We need names, words, . . . pretty much language to describe and capture our feelings, desires, and emotions. Women desiring women is an old Indian tradition.

On Nafisa’s suggestion I spoke with another khush activist, Liz, about the higher numbers “lesbian suicide” accounts from the state of Kerala. Liz, who grew up in Kerala says:

In my heart I was always Kamalahassan with a twist of Amitabh Bachchan. I was also the class clown and the troublemaker. My girlfriends all looked like Sri Devi.²² I can see my sneh bandhams to be just like their (Urmilla and Lila) jodas. But in Kerala there are so many schools girls whose family’s pressures make them get their sneh bandhams upstairs. I can see myself in their position—committing suicides together. Not of killing myself—but feeling this love for women. It’s

very prevalent in schools and colleges here. I felt such love, passion, and commitment to my girlfriends, but this is something we can never talk about to our parents or relatives. I had so many girlfriends before I came to Bombay! One day I will return to Kerala and visit them. We all promised each other that we would meet again. We knew we could get married to one another. In Malayalam I think of women, especially lesbians, as *koota kari* or female friend and when you are involved in a committed or maybe not-so-committed relationship with a woman it is a *sneh bandham* or love bond or *sneh sambandham* love relationship or love kinship.

Liz commented on the irony that in Kerala such spaces for women to meet were not terribly extra-ordinary. She pointed out that increased access to education and salaried jobs (such as teaching, nursing, and civil service) has created many women's hostels and living quarters. Once Liz turned eighteen the pressure to marry changed everything for her. "How can Kamalahassan be happy without Sri Devi and have sex with some guy?" she joked. Liz, who is a software designer, contributes some of her time to working at a lesbian and gay help line. Liz divorced her husband of four months and left Kerala for Kolkata. She said,

I tried not to be dependant on a man like a woman, which is why I first moved out of the house and started working when I was 20 or 21 years. But the pressure to marry was so great that I began having doubts about myself. I thought maybe I was being selfish and self-indulgent. I thought how bad can it be? Other people have done it. I could try and defer the sex as much as possible. So I decided on going for the arranged marriage. This way I would not bring pain, sadness and disappointment to my father. This way I would stop fighting with my brother. And my mother would feel secure. I got married in 1989—and 4 months later I got a divorce. As I said, it was arranged—the guy was religious, very insecure and constantly needed his ego boosted, but at the same time he needed the good wife. I avoided having sex with him for the four months—telling him that I was shy and scared and that I was not ready. Although he let me get away with this—I am not sure how much longer I could have pushed it. I'm sure he also liked it in a way—that is he would be my first ever. Even after the divorce he would call me and ask me for my opinion.

I could not live with myself. I tried it out and I could not take it. Besides I was emotionally and physically interested in women. I always had girlfriends in school and eventually they would be forced into marriage by their family. I understand it. I tried myself. But I could not imagine doing this all my life. I was not happy. I told by brother about

this. He said “what do you want to do—kill your mother?” He closed his ears and said “I don’t want to hear about it again.” We don’t talk about this anymore.

You know all those stories you told me about the women in Kerala—committing suicides together—I could really see myself in that position. Not killing myself—but feeling this love for women. It’s very prevalent in schools and colleges here. I felt such love, passion, and commitment to my girlfriend, but this is something we can never talk about to our parents or relatives. One day I will return to Kerala and visit them. We all promised each other that we would meet again. We knew we could get married to one another.

My father died three years ago—before he died he told me that he still loved me—but he wished that I was married—but he said that he wanted me to be happy—that was good to hear from him. He felt that in his life on earth he had to follow certain steps in life. And he could only die in peace once his daughters were settled, that is, married.

Often middle-class and upper-middle-class khush women *may* have opportunities to temporarily or permanently leave their family, town, or country of origin. This may often come in the guise of formal education (such as higher education). Although in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore there are some possibilities of leaving their family of origin within India many have to confront the following: finding housing, jobs “respectable” or otherwise, a living wage, and social and economic networks that don’t ostracize, ridicule, and punish unmarried woman. When a woman does find housing there are still other concerns: If she lives alone or with unrelated women and/or without a male relative is she a prostitute? Where is her family of origin and why is she not with them if she is not married or divorced? Khush activist Maya, commented on a contradictory relationship between respectability and socioeconomic class. Maya says:

I think some khush women who come from poorer families can count more on their family backing them because these women are recognized as important contributors to the family’s economy and don’t have to be respectable middle class ladies. With the upper class and upper middle class khush they can have more support because their families have the money to help them with their separate housing or they can get good jobs due to the connections and educations they have. The middle class khush dyke gets screwed as usual because they don’t have the upper class connections to hide out in their nice houses and jobs, and don’t want to appear unrespectable and lower class, and get punished into being real ladies.

“Lesbian” Double-Suicides

This section examines the lives of more women “in print” which mostly end in death. These are the cases of double suicides from the late 1980s to 2001. A majority of these accounts (about twenty four cases) are translations from Malayalam newspapers by activists from Kerala (T. Murali and Deepa). These translations have subsequently appeared in English in *Bombay Dost*, *Trikone* and on the Khush List serve. Deepa, one of the members of the Sahayatrika Project (2002) has documented twenty-one cases (translated from Malayalam papers) between 1995 and 2001. The remaining three reports are from English language papers and *India Today*. In the next section I explore these accounts with a focus on the translations from Kerala.

A tuition-teacher and her student; two high-school students; two nurses from a small town; two tribal girls under psychiatric counseling; two shrimp-factory workers; a travel agent and volunteer teacher; wage laborers at a rubber-plantation; a tailor and beautician; two girls from peasant families; two police constables; a Dalit and non-Dalit girl; two lower-middle-class girls. These are some of the ways in which the girls and women have been described in the media accounts of *lesbian double-suicides*. The accounts go on to identify some the conditions that “made them do it.” They include inevitable separation; a marriage in store for one or both; hostile relatives, police and/or counselors who are asked to recognize the relationship by the girls but refuse to; the women encounter aggressive interventions and violence at home, in the community or neighborhood, from landlords, and/or work; and finally they realize the impossibility of being together. The modes of their death seem to fascinate the reporter. They are described as drownings in a ferry, hangings from ceiling fans, jumping in front of trains, consuming insecticide and other poisons, with bodies separated but sometimes tied up together in *duppatas*. In addition to finding their bodies, police claimed to have recovered love letters and suicide notes revealing their (the girls’) impossible situation. Some media accounts include interviews with surviving relatives.

Here are some sample translations of media accounts.

Case One: Gita and Kishori

The *India Today* reported that in the town of Meghraj (in the state of Gujarat), Gita Darji and her “spinster friend” Kishori Shah hung themselves from ceiling fans in their hospital quarters. Gita (24 years old)

and Kishori (24 years old) were nurses in a local hospital. Gita was married to Manoj just a few months ago and “abhorred” this relationship. A few month’s ago Manoj had complained to Gita’s brother about Gita and Kishori’s relationship and had convinced him to pressure Gita to apply for a transfer out of Meghraj. This was the third “lesbian suicide” in Gujarat this year. Seven months ago two police constables in Meghraj killed themselves “declaring undying love to one another.” Four months ago, in Vadodara village two school teachers committed double suicide (*India Today*, October 15, 1988).

Case Two: The Daughters of Noorjahan Begum and Salma Begum

The Telegraph (Calcutta, April 16, 1995) reported that two young women (aged 22 and 23 years) in the Narkeldanga police station area (outside of Calcutta) were “physically, mentally and emotionally tortured” for being unavailable single women who also happened to be involved with each other. The abusive situation “drove one woman to suicide in front of train tracks.”

The police who have been more supportive than normal have tried to shield the women from violent acts and threats from neighbors, including local goondas.²³ These neighborly threats included “pouring hot water on the women, flinging bricks and screaming obscenities at them.” The woman who is still alive said, “one of the goondas wanted to marry me. Because I refused, he could not tolerate my being with my friend. He and his friends abused and insulted us whenever they met either of us.” Other “youths” in the area informed the womens’ mothers that someday they would rape their daughters. Neighbors Mohammed Riazuddin and Yasmin Begum, says “they are not ready for this immoral act, this is unnatural we don’t want all our women to follow the example and turn bad.”

Their mothers Noorjahan Begum and Salma Begum finally decided to respect their daughters’ decisions (after initial beatings and starvations—which to their surprise did not seem to work). Noorjehan said that her daughter, “was born healthier than an average girl child. That’s why her father and I decided to bring her up like a son. She used to wear men’s clothes, talk, and walk like a man. Despite being a woman, she is running a business successfully. That’s what’s really bothering the neighborhood.” Salma then added, “if they want to love each other and want to live together and the police say there is nothing illegal in it, I can’t stop her anymore.”

Case Three: Saijamol and Gita²⁴

A student and her teacher who consumed poison together in a *suicide pact*, died in Trichur, Kerala. Gita (22 years old) of “Aroor Chirapurath House” and Saijamol (16 years old) daughter of M.P. Neelambaam of Aleppy were found in “a critical state when discovered inside a state transport bus parked in the bus stand at Trichur and subsequently admitted to the district hospital. They were lying unconscious inside a Ponnani-Ernakulam bus when discovered by the passengers who sensed the strong smell of insecticide emanating from the bus.” By the evening both had “recovered considerably and did even speak to their relatives who had come having received the news from the Town Police.” Their condition suddenly deteriorated on Friday morning. Saija breathed her last at 8:30 a.m. and Gita died by 11 a.m.

Saijamol was a first year pre-degree student at Aquinas College at Edakochi. “Saijamol was a brilliant student and she has passed the SSLC examination last year with very high scores.” Gita was a teacher at a tutorial college at Kuthiyathodu and was Saija’s tuition teacher for over five years. “Their relationship had gone beyond the limits. Police recovered a large number of love letters they had written to each other from the bags they were carrying. According to the police the girls decided to elope as they couldn’t bear separation and finally had to commit suicide.” Their bodies were taken back to their native places after the postmortem.

Case Four: Dhanya and Sandhya²⁵

Dhanya (14 years old) and Sandhya (14 years old) two students studying in 10th standard at a government high school in Mithrumala, Kerala. On the pretext that she (Dhanya) had forgotten her pen at home, Dhanya asked her friend Sandhya to accompany her home in order to get the pen. On reaching home, Dhanya confessed to Sandhya that she was in love with her and that since they couldn’t be together she had decided that they should die together.

Dhanya attempted to kill Sandhya first by tying a noose around her neck-from the ceiling and when this hurt Sandhya, Dhanya decided to cut Sandhya’s wrists with a knife. “Sandhya somehow managed to get out of her clutches and ran outside.” However, outside Dhanya pushed Sandhya into a well in the compound. Once Dhanya was certain of Sandhya’s death, she went indoors and hung herself. Sandhya

managed “a miraculous escape.” She hung on to the wall of the well and cried out for help. Local people managed to get Sandhya out. Sandhya lived, but Dhanya was already dead. Pangod Police have registered the case.

Case Five: Ragini and Manju²⁶

Two Kerala tribal girls, Ragini (15 years old) and Manju (22 years old), who were cousins, “ended their lives because of the trauma of not being allowed to live together.” The account states that the girls had been living together for some time and that they had asked their relatives to get them married. When the relatives objected the girls approached the local station with the same request. The request was denied but apparently the police offered them some counseling and sent them home. The report also mentioned that the two girls had been undergoing psychiatric treatment by a “Dr. Sudarshan at Bishop Vayalin Hospital.” The report additionally described the bodies (“seen side by side on a rock near an irrigation canal near Ragini’s house” and “Manju’s body was in sitting posture while Ragini’s was lying on a rock”). After the postmortem their bodies were returned to relatives.

Case Six: Mini²⁷

The body of Mini, a Dalit postgraduate student in Trichur, Kerala, was found floating in the reservoir of the Mangalam dam near her house, with a suicide note. She had disappeared five days earlier with another girl from her hostel, with whom she’d been accused of having a *lesbian relationship*. They reappeared on November 17 at a friend’s house in Trichur, apparently having returned from Chennai. Both girls were subsequently returned to their family’s houses. With two complaints lodged against her with the police, Mini was supposed to appear at the police station the next day. After Mini’s body was discovered, her girl friend was described as recovering from the trauma. A Dalit student group took up the case, initiated steps to constitute an action committee, demanding a judicial inquiry about the circumstances that lead to Mini’s death. However, the committee sought to refute the accusation that Mini was a lesbian, instead demanding legal action against the student’s college principal for making a baseless accusation against a Dalit girl and eventually forcing her to commit suicide.

T. Murali, an activist and scholar and one of the translators, remarks on the “amused silence” about these accounts in Kerala. Activists like T. Murali and various social scientists have pointed out that Kerala has the highest reported suicide rate of any Indian state. Though it is beyond the scope of this book to address the complex issues of suicide (and in particular to Kerala and/or to “lesbians” in Kerala) I would like to pinpoint some of the underlying themes in the reports concerning suicides (and in particular “lesbian” double-suicides) in Kerala. These assumptions are significant in how the trope of the non-economic inverted man continues constitute the Indian “lesbian” particularly in a state (Kerala) which continues to be a subject of fascination, for many social scientists and policy makers, as “the development miracle.” The conundrum of development, opportunity, and progress in these analyses provide useful insights into female sexuality and economics. For instance, Halliburton, a medical anthropologist, identifies various theories used to explain causes of suicide in India and in particular Kerala.²⁸ According to Halliburton, lay explanations stress reasons of death due to too much modernity in Kerala (such as high degree of urbanization, high literacy levels and stresses of higher education, high employment and slow industrialization, the atheism of communist culture, consumerism, longer lives, alienation and isolation, modern psychiatric illness, rapid social change media, and the replacement of matriliney by the rise of nuclear families). According to Halliburton, the top four All India motivators for suicide, identified by the National Crime Records Bureau, “dreadful diseases,” “quarrel with spouse,” “quarrel with in-laws,” and “bankruptcy and sudden change in economic status,” still doesn’t account for why the suicide rate is three times higher in Kerala. Halliburton identifies two theories pertaining to Kerala. One links suicides to high levels of literacy, that is, high exposure to print media versus television and cable, and the second links high suicide rates due to overall authoritarian and conflict ridden home relationships.

Halliburton, points out that suicides are the paradoxical consequences of health, educational, and social welfare reforms in Kerala. Highly educated Malayalis, despite the Gulf boom and bust, still cannot find employment “commensurate with their education and expectations.” In particular, Halliburton adds, women in Kerala (who are highly educated and seek jobs “commensurate with skills”) have to deal with higher unemployment and, after experiencing relative freedoms are expected to “fall back to gender roles after marriage.” While Halliburton raises important points concerning the political economy of Kerala, the contradictory effects of “development,” and

the “gender pressures”²⁹ of the highly literate, skilled, and educated homemaker he still views this as primarily a problem of the main beneficiaries of “socio-economic development” (and its “accompanying ideologies of secularism, modernization, and development”)—the upper- to middle-classes/castes in formal sectors of the economy.

T. Murali on the other hand probes deeper by pointing to the powerful contradictions of gender expectations. He suggests that young women in Kerala often receive double-messages. On the one hand, certain spaces are very open to women (such as having a relatively greater (daytime) mobility, higher educational expectations, having high girl to boy ratios in schools) but on the other these spaces are very repressively misogynist.³⁰ This contradictory modernist progressiveness coupled with intense misogyny is resolved by what Robin Jefferies has called the “literate homemaker” figure.³¹ Highly educated, literate, assertive, with all the necessary skills to be respectable “skillful” competitive jobs but never forgetting her role as scientific manager of home and child. Her labor power as literate worker and scientific homemaker/child-maker still has a place in the normative hetero-patriarchal economy.

Postscript

The women in “print” and in “flesh and blood” are not meant to speak about or convey an essential khush experience. They/we, do, however, offer important insights into ways in which queer sexuality embodies the stories of development and underdevelopment, modernity and tradition, economic (re)production and nonmaterial degeneration. Furthermore, the women in flesh and blood and print potentially offer creative non-normative modes of kinship. To many khush women in the flesh the women in print represent the possibilities and desires of alternate kinship and economies, possibilities that doubly invert, resist, and accommodate the “invert/pervert” —sexual and economic. To the arrogant eye, the figures of Minx, Urmilla, Liz, or Nafisa represent modernity run amok. The khush in Minx is resolved through her self-hating destruction and homicidal inversions. Others, like Urmilla, are explained away as uneducated inverts. Urban activists, like Liz, Giti, and Nafisa may be read as duped by modern atomic individualism and the pleasures and comforts of rights discourses.

These stories are also part of small fragmented moments in India that have led to the emergence and visibility of lesbian politics. This

has included a growth in activities such as: counseling services, social support to combat isolation, archiving and documentation, media presence, visibility, legal, and advocacy work. The public controversy over Deepa Mehta film, *Fire* in 1999 has allowed for a significant increase in attention in cities to “lesbians” and “rights.”³² A gay activist in the previous chapter commented on visibility and some solidarity between gay men and MSMs coming together over death. Overt forms of violence and visibility have given the unenumerated some form, often over death. Similar challenges to forge solidarities now lie ahead for those in flesh, in print and the emergent culturally appropriate “women who have sex with women.” In other words, pursuit of lesbian rights in India, increasingly like the politics of other sexual minorities has led to the rise of right-based activism. Although it is important to critically assess the limitations of rights-discourses Martha Minow has pointed out that: “I worry about criticizing rights and legal language just when they have become available to people who had previously lacked access them. I worry about telling those who do not, ‘you do not need it, you should not want it’.” Further, Patricia Williams similarly points out that for African-Americans: “Rights feel so new in the mouths of most Black people. It is so deliciously empowering to say. It is a sign for and a gift of selfhood that is very hard to contemplate restructuring . . . at this point in history. It is the magic wand of visibility and invisibility, of inclusion and exclusion, of power and no power.”³³ This difficult selfhood is fundamentally impure. It is not purely subaltern or essentially not Indian.

In this chapter through the practice of leaping between the “archive” and “flesh” I may have narrowly avoided the usual ethnographic practice of “finding our [queer] selves undressed” across history, locality, and class. Like other feminist projects these are the challenges that khush activists/scholars will confront within India and across diasporas. But I also am arguing for a radical invention of tradition by activists/scholars, wherein invented traditions are not inherently unproductive, illegitimate, pristine, and romantic projects of domination. Through radical and impure imaginings of tradition queer postcolonial subjects have the potential to re-make oppressive realities.

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Notes

Chapter One Introduction

1. Khush is a term used by a number of South Asian queers, diasporic and within South Asia, to refer to themselves. Khush literally means happy in Hindi.
2. Desi another Hindi word that means: native or from “desh.” Desh refers to one’s nation, nation of origin, or community.
3. I specifically focus on contemporary feminist anthropology and recognize that the essay as a genre is much used amongst feminists (both non-academic and academic) outside of the discipline of anthropology.
4. In order to increase the “growth rate” the reforms included an increase in foreign investments and incentives for exporters, a 20 percent depreciation of the rupee, reduction in protection to public sector industries, increase in foreign investor equity to 51 percent and rise in price of rice, steel, sugar, and electricity.
5. The cross-conditionality of the IMF and World Bank loans included structural adjustment and stabilization measures involving trade and the economy such as: cutting subsidies, increasing the prices of food and fertilizers, reduction of fiscal deficits, delicensing, increase in foreign investment, and devaluation of the rupee. Shastri, Vanita, “The Politics of Economic Liberalization in India,” *Contemporary South Asia* (1997), 6(1), 27–56.
6. For instance, listserves such as the khush list and LGBT India (and several other local list serves) have been extremely vital in connecting khush activists and scholars (especially between India, United States, United Kingdom, and Canada).
7. Anamika was a group formed in 1985, in the United States, for South Asian lesbians and by the early 1990s was no longer in operation. Trikone was formed in 1986, in the United States, for South Asian queers and is still running strong. Desh Pardesh (literally Nation/Abroad) was an organization, based in Toronto, Canada, that annually organized a conference/festival “Desh Pardesh” for South Asians and diasporic South Asians.
8. Giti Thadani published *Shakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India*, Cassell, 1996; Bina Fernandez compiled and edited *Humjinsi: A Resource Book on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights in India*, India Center for Human Rights and Law, 1999; T. Muraleedharan, Lawrence Cohen and Suparna Bhaskaran had essays in Ruth Vanita’s *Queering India*, Routledge, 2002.

9. *Humjinsi: A Resource Book on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights in India* has a list of South Asia specific publications (academic and non-academic and of various genres) starting from 1990 to 1996. Furthermore work by Ratna Kapur, Shohini Ghose, Rosemary George, and Gayatri Gopinath have variously contributed to the discussions of law, free speech, diasporic identity, and the media.
10. My work does not specifically address the hijra communities, “third gender” communities, or any work done on “transsexual” communities. Furthermore, I use the term genderqueer in a very broad sense to refer to folks who identify as lesbian, khush, or gay and also are non-normative in their gender expression, and in a broad sense trans/gendered.
11. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, 2, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Chapter Two The Evidence of Arrogant Experience: Boomerang Anthropology and Curdled Otherness

1. Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 412.
2. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, ed., *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
3. I am specifically referring to the work of anthropologists (many of whom variously identify as feminist, queer, of color, and/or mixed race/national/cultural) such as Kath Weston, Lila Abu-Lughod, Kirin Narayan, Ruth Behar, Kamala Visweswaran, and Faye Harrison.
4. A term borrowed from Arjun Appadurai.
5. Kirin Narayan, *Saints, Scoundrels and Storytellers: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989. In this ethnography, Narayan researched songs and lives of women living in the Himalayan foothills, a place she visited annually since she was fifteen and where her German-American mother settled down to live.
6. This information is from the SOLGA (Society for Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists) newsletter, under the special feature on “The 1992 AAA Panel From Hell—‘Aids and the Social Imaginary,’ ” February 1993.
7. I want to thank Kath Weston for providing me a historical context regarding the SOLGA T-shirt issue.
8. Kath Weston refers to the epistemological roots of anthropology (and other related and coterminous disciplines such as sexology and psychology) within an existing Anglo-European culture that perpetuated and reproduced “stigmatized categories” of homosexual behaviors, identities, and practices. Weston notes that earlier versions of “expert” knowledge that perceived homosexuality as a “matter of individual pathology” (such as the medical and the psychological models) began being challenged by scholars of “the social constructivist school in the 1970s.” Furthermore,

Weston notes that the few anthropological works on homosexuality in the late 1960s arose within the context of a burgeoning lesbian and gay movement in the United States.

9. Weston explores hegemonic understandings of what kinship/family has meant in mainstream culture, the ongoing exiling of lesbians and gay men from this particular understanding of kinship and how lesbian and gay men create and therefore “choose” their own families and kinship networks. Weston also challenges the standards and theories used in kinship studies in anthropology. Weston’s ethnography covers interconnected topics that include issues such as: how lesbians and gay men form or “choose” their families, “come out” to “blood” relatives/family, parenting in lesbian/gay families, xenophobic policies and attitudes in the United States regarding lesbian and gay men.
10. Asad makes a specific reference to Victor Turner in his *Introduction to Colonialism in Africa 1870–1960*, where Turner says that “Thus yesterday’s ‘socialist’ has become today’s reactionary,” and that “there is no point in special pleading or contentious argument”; there are “objective,” “common sense” and “professional standards” in anthropology.
11. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 408.

Chapter Three Compulsory Individuality and the Trans/national Family of Nations: The Girl-Child, Bollywood Barbie, and Ms. Worldly Universe

1. *Swa* means “own” and *deshi* means “national” or “native.” So *Swadeshi* means self-rule or a nation that was independent and uncolonized, and was capable of being governed by indigenous leaders. *Videshi* meant the opposite: external rule, colonization, and foreign dominance. So, for example, the Indian nationalists advocated *Swadeshi* and the elimination of *Videshi* culture and dominance.
2. India gained its independence from the British empire in 1947. Independence Day is on August 15, marking India’s freedom from British colonialism. On January 26, 1948, India became an independent republic, thus Republic Day.
3. Doordarshan is the state sponsored national TV station. Doordarshan was started in the early 1970s and until recently had a complete monopoly. Star and Zee Channels are private TV stations that started operations in the early 1990s. Star Channel is owned by the media baron Rupert Murdoch, the owner of the Fox Channel in the United States and several TV stations in Asia, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Zee Channel is owned by Indian entrepreneurs based in Mumbai.
4. The film industry was based in Bombay (now Mumbai). This film industry produces three times more films than Hollywood.
5. Raj Kapoor was an established Bollywood director and producer (and during his early career a huge star) of numerous films that produced

- movies that problematically raised issues such as: family honor, duty, virginity, and Indian-ness.
6. *Filmi* is the result of cross pollination of Hindi and English, or Hinglish, and is a slang term for Bollywood representations.
 7. Malayalam is the language spoken by Malayalis who are the ethno-linguistic communities from the state of Kerala.
 8. Literally meaning wealth that belongs to others. The term implies that daughters will always marry out of her birth family and become the wealth (as reproducer and caretaker) of her husband's family. Thus as an investment the daughter produces better returns for her husband and his family and is a guaranteed bad investment for her family of origin.
 9. The Nairs are considered to be one of the upper caste Malayalis (the warrior caste just below the Namboodiri priestly caste) and are considered to have a matrilineal kinship system. Although some work has been done on the history of Nairs in Kerala, the anti-caste movements in twentieth-century Kerala, and the colonial effects on land and lineage systems of the matrilineal Nairs, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into these issues.
 10. Socially Useful and Productive Work was a compulsory class at our all-girls school where students were taught to do volunteer work—such as assist doctors at clinics and visit the elderly in “old age homes.”
 11. “Call for entries for the most wanted woman's title,” *Femina*, September 15, 2002.
 12. Prasad Bidapa, “The Fashion Myth,” *The Business Standard*, Calcutta, July 22, 1995.
 13. “Beauty and the East,” *The Business Standard*, Calcutta, July 22, 1995, p. 59.
 14. Vimla Patil, editor of *Femina* (a popular woman's magazine), which is one of the chief sponsors of the national Femina Miss India, contest that selects winners for international beauty contests.
 15. Jyoti Basu was the Chief Minister of West Bengal. The ruling party, in the state of West Bengal, that he heads is the Communist Party of India (Marxists) or CPI(M). The CPI(M) under Jyoti Basu has been continuously in power since 1977.
 16. Businesses involved at the national level also include Proctor & Gamble, Ford, L'oreal, Revlon, Yardley, Benckiser, Pepsi Foods Limited, Coke, Kawasaki, Godrej, Cinthol, Garden, Kelvinator, Colgate-Palmolive, Prestige, and various airline companies.
 17. “Bold, Brainy and Beautiful,” *Rashtriya Sahara*, June 10, 1994.
 18. In *The Bombay Times*, November 22, 1996 and “A Model Pageant?” Gautaman Bhaskaran, *The Hindu*, Nov 1996.
 19. In fact, India struck a “triple whammy” in 2000, because an Indian contestant, Diya Mirza Handrich, won Miss Asia Pacific. But not much attention got paid to this fact or to the winner. In 1998, 1995, 1993, and 1973 Indian women have come in as first-runners-up. And, in 1970, film star Zeenat Aman won the title. It is particularly interesting to note that

- many of the Indian contestants who participated in this contest came from Anglo-Indian and/or Parsee families.
20. Vaishali Honawar, "The New Queens," *The Telegraph Magazine*, January 1995.
 21. From the 1995 India Day Parade in N.Y.C.
 22. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 107, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
 23. Sushmita Sen's answer to the question asked during the final round of the Miss Universe Contest. The question was: What does it mean to be a contemporary Indian woman?
 24. *Dravidians* and *Adivasis* are usually equated with the indigenous and tribal peoples of India. It is assumed by many that Dravidians and Adivasis are much darker than the "average" Indian.
 25. Jamshed Boman Homi Wadia (1901–1986) was a Hindi film director, active member of Parsee Theater, and founder of the Radical Democratic Party of India (1937). His fascination with U.S. westerns and the stunt genre led him to form the Wadia Movie Tone Company in 1933. He is best known for the Fearless Nadia films such as *Hunterwali* (1935), *Miss Frontier Mail* (1936), *Diamond Queen* (1940), *Carnival Queen* (1955), and *Hatimtai* (1956). He ended up marrying Fearless Nadia in 1961. Recently, Fearless Nadia's relative, Riyad Wadia, has made his own film, *Hunterwali*, to include the left out queer story of Fearless Nadia.
 26. Parma Roy, "Figuring Mother India: The Case of Nargis," 157, in *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
 27. Both the book and the 1957 movie have been extensively discussed by Mrinalini Sinha and Parma Roy, respectively.
 28. Other parallel contests in which Indian women participated in since the 1960s were: Miss International, Mrs. World, and Miss Teen. Mrs. World, which was an erratic contest started in 1984 and a subsidiary of Miss World Inc., had an Indian winner in 2000. Mr. World, started in 1996, by Miss World, had frequent Indian contestants, but the most successful attempt was reaching the semifinals in 1996. And then there is Manhunt International, which has produced many Indian actors (such as Bollywood's Dino Morea) and models and a winner from India in 2001. Miss Intercontinental (previously known as Miss Teen Princess Intercontinental), and which began in 1973, has a long Indian line up since 1975. The first Indian winner was Tina Munim in 1975 (Bollywood actress and Ambani corporate wife), a 1997 winner and many have made it to the semifinals. And, then there is Miss World Worldwide a diasporic contest of sorts. Begun in 1990 it has winners from the global Indian diaspora.
 29. Another case of Asian foreign/beauty policy occurred in 1956. Miss Pakistan-Universe was allowed to participate, despite objections from the Brotherhood of Mullahs over the swimsuit segment, when the more "emancipated" and "westward-looking" members of the Pakistani Pageant Association "... promised that when Miss Pakistan reached

- California, she would be in a good position to say a few words in favor of Pakistan's claim to Kashmir." *Time*, June 25, 1956.
30. *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, November 8, 1996.
 31. *Screen*, Calcutta, November 8, 1996.
 32. "RAF Commandos to guard Miss World contestants," *Asian Age*, October 8, 1996 and *Outlook*, November 20, 1996.
 33. Najundaswamy and the State Farmer's Association had also been involved in "direct action" against MNC food chains, such as KFC and Pizza Hut, and those operating in the food sector.
 34. Protestors included The BJP, which is the main opposition party to ruling Janata Dal and Chief Minister J.H. Patel in Karnataka; it mobilized its elected representatives from the state and members of local bodies. Other protestors included the following: Hindu Nationalists (BJP, Kannada Chaluvalli, VHP), Marxist groups such as the CPI(M), Center of Indian Trade Unions (who protested the entry of MNCs through beauty contests); Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarti Parishad, Youth Congress(I), a variety of women's groups (e.g., Mahila Morcha of the BJP, Mahila Dakshata Dal, Karnataka Mahila Dal, Mahila Jagran Samiti); Tamilnadu Pennurimal Kazagan, the All India Women's Progressive Association, Working Women's Front, Tamilnadu Integrated Women's Front, Women's Legal Cell, Women's Education Center, Dravidar Kazhagam, CPI(ML), Freedom Panthers, Tamil National Communist Party, Worker's Liberation Movement, Tamilnadu Paraiyar Peravai, Progressive Youth Federation, Revolutionary Youth League, Dalit Friends Association and Scientific Literary Center, All India Democratic Women's Association (Brinda Karat and Subhasini Ali); Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha—same as State Farmer's Association (KRRS), Girls Islamic Organization (GLO), and the women's wing of the Jamat-e-Islami. Protests were also held in nearby cities such as Hyderabad, Chennai, and Tuticorin.
 35. A joint petition was filed by the Mahila Jagran and Pramila Nesargi of the BJP to the Karnataka High Court, opposing the hosting of the pageant anywhere in India, stating the following reasons: That it was against "Bharatiya Samskruti" (Indian Culture) and a violation of 292 of the IPC (indecent representation of women), particularly the assisting of the pageant by the Karnataka Government; the unauthorized use of the stadium; the serving of alcohol as violation of the Excise Act; the abuse of city and state resources such as water, electricity, and security forces; and the use of loudspeakers after 10pm (a violation of the Police Act). The Karnataka High Court then ruled on Nov 19. It did not ban the pageant, but imposed certain conditions on ABCL. The court ruled the following: No liquor, no indecent exposure, nudity or obscene gestures that would injure the dignity of women (so a designated member of the police and high court would monitor the event), no paramilitary forces; Army or Border Security Forces would be used, no defense premises or property to be used by the show—since these would be public funds, and ABCL was to provide payment for extra security; ("ABCL Plea Hearing Today," *The Telegraph*, November 22, 1996; "Supreme Court Clears Catwalk for

Beauties,” *The Telegraph*, November 23, 1996). This ruling was taken up by ABCL to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court then said that liquor was selectively permissible for a discriminating few in certain enclosures (dignitaries, organizers etc). It would be used as a welcome and ending toast. No liquor was to be served to the “general audience and participants.” However, the swimsuit portion of the contest was held in the island of Seychelles on the Indian Ocean.

36. *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, November 14, 1996.
37. Other sponsors included Godrej, Citibank, Air India, Motorola, Sahara Airlines, Yatrik, and Europcar.
38. “Why I brought Miss World to India: Amitabh Bachchan on the controversy and more,” *Sunday Magazine*, November 17–23, 1996.
39. Dipti Dave, “College girls rally behind pageants,” *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, November 7, 1996.
40. Partha Chatterjee, “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question,” in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, ed., New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989 and *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History, Princeton University Press, 1993.
41. Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste and Class in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986.
42. Lata Mani, “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India,” 113, In *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, ed., New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989.
43. Polygamy practiced by Brahmins in West Bengal.
44. Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 90, London: Zed Books, 1986.
45. For example, Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) started the Mahila Samaj (women’s groups) to address these issues. However, her critique of Hinduism and Hindu scriptures did not make her too popular with the nationalists.
46. In 1928, the name was changed to All India Women’s Conference. Other national women’s groups included the Women’s India Association (1917) and the Ladies Congress (1908).
47. Jeet Thayil, “Are you Ready for the New Indian Women?” *Gentleman* December 1995.
48. These areas thus include investment rules, license-raj deregulations, investment taxes, stock market regulations/disputes, customs duties on imported cars, and exchange rate reforms. If anything Varshney points out that these reforms may negatively impact indigenous industrialists who have received heavy protection. Resistance to these kinds of internal liberalization was expressed initially by the Hindu nationalist government as well as by some in Congress.
49. Pankaj Ghemawat and Murali Patibandala, “India’s Exports since the Reforms Three Analytic Industry Studies,” 192, in *Indian In the Era of Economic Reforms*, Jeffrey Sachs, Ashutosh Varshney and Nirupam Bajpai, eds., Oxford University Press, 1999.

50. *Ibid.*, the authors point out that this monopoly is restricted to this specialty based on the constraints placed by the diamond industries supplier and international diamond cartel, De Beers.
51. I draw from U. Kalpagam's work on economically marginalized women in the rural and urban unorganized sector who are self-employed, and wage workers in both the manufacturing and service activities. Kalpagam points out some of the challenges and tensions of survival in the midst of developmental policies of self-help or "agency discourses," patriarchal ideologies that facilitate economic marginalization, and the male-led organized labor movement.
52. Rupal Oza, "Showcasing India: Gender, Geography & Globalizaion," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, 26(1), pp. 1067–1096, Summer 2001.
53. Anne Cronin, "Consumerism and Compulsory Individuality: Women, Will and Potential," 285, in Sara Ahmed, Kilby Jane, Celia Lury, Maureen McNeil, and Beverly Skeggs, eds., *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism*, London: Routledge, 2000.
54. *Ibid.*
55. The Femina Little Princess Foundation, *Femina*, October 2002.
56. Inderpal Grewal, "Traveling Barbie: Indian Transnationality and New Consumer Subjects," *Positions*, 7(3), 1999.
57. Mary F. Rogers, *Barbie Culture*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999.
58. Liisa Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees," *Cultural Anthropology*, 7(1), 1996 and Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Woman in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*, 199, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
59. Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse:Feminism and Science*, New York: Routledge, 1997.
60. Pointed out by host Daisy Fuentes.
61. W.W. Rostow, *The Economy of Take-Off into Sustained Growth*, Proceedings of a conference held by the International Economic Association, St. Martin's Press, 1963.
62. Mrinalini Sinha, "The Lineage of the 'Indian' Modern: Rhetoric, Agency and the Sarda Act in Late Colonial India," in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*, Antionette Burton, ed., London; New York: Rutledge.

Chapter Four Taxonomic Desires, the Sutram of Kama, and the World Bank: "Sexual Minorities" and Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code

1. Knowledge, magic, tricks (sutram) of Kama (god of lust/love).
2. Silk Smitha was a Andhra-born Tamilian actress. She died in Chennai. She was found hanging from a ceiling fan in her bedroom. She left behind a

- note in Telugu. She acted in Malayalam, Tamil and Telegu films. K.P. Sunil, www.rediff.com/entertai/apr04silk.htm.
3. A Washington, D.C. organization, Zero Population Growth, visited my campus in 2000 to alert students about the global pressure from China and India, who are said to jointly contribute a disproportionate 2 billion people to the global 6 billion population.
 4. Quoted in "AIDS: Approaching Danger," by Simran Bhargava and David Devadas, July 31, *India Today*, 1988.
 5. Sanjam Ahluwalia has pointed to India's colonial history of "population control" and birth control debates between 1877–1947. She has argued that Malthusian, eugenic, cultural nationalist, and sexological theories have dominated and marked the varied responses from nationalists, Indian and international feminists, biomedical experts and the colonial government. She argues that the concern by sexologists and economists over the madly out of control "copulating masses," who lacked any sense of sexual pleasure, lead to early theories of economic development and poverty alleviation. Most feminists adopted a "maternal politics" wherein the concern was for maternal mortality/morality/health of fit/strong mothers, and thus infant and national mortality/morality. Most importantly she argues that the Census Report (which was implemented in 1871) of 1931 provided crucial statistical evidence for a pre-existing concern over "population control." Sanjam Ahluwalia, "Controlling Births, Policing Sexualities: A History of Birth Control in Colonial India, 1877–1947," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2000. Some of this has also been pointed out by Barbara Ramusack, "Embattled Advocates: The Debate Over Birth Control in India, 1920–40," *Journal of Women's History*, 1: 2 (Fall) 1989.
 6. The National AIDS Committee was first set up in 1986 by the Ministry of Health and Family Services, which then launched the National AIDS Control Program. In 1989 the World Health Organization funded the organization with \$10 million. But it was in 1992 that NACO gained significant momentum when it received World Bank support. NACO was established to manage HIV/AIDS prevention programs nationwide. NACO also oversees and manages AIDS/HIV NGOs, collaborates with international agencies/funders (such as WHO, World Bank, UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNDP, DFI, and CIDA) and private businesses (like Indian industry and condom industries). The first World Bank financed project (Phase I: 1992–1999) was followed by the second World Bank financed project (Phase II: 1999–2004). The first phase included \$84 million from the World Bank, \$14.1 million from the World Health Organization and \$1.5 million from the Government of India. The second phase received \$191 million from the World Bank, \$38.8 from the Indian Government, Rs. 1,660 million from USAID and Rs. 1,040 million from DFID-UK.
 7. M. Anand, "Condom Battles: Battered by subsidized brands, condoms makers are going in for premium products," *Businessworld*, August 9, 1999 and "Hard Copy," *Savvy*, December, 1996.

8. Ahluwalia, "Controlling Births," 59–67. Ahluwalia points to sexological-economics of authors such as: *Population Problem* (1934), by Wattal; *Sex Problems* (1934), by Pillay, and *Eugenics for India* (1934), by Phadke.
9. Marika Vicziany, "HIV and AIDS in India: Love, Disease and Technology Transfer to the Kamasutra condom," *Contemporary South Asia*, 10(1), 2001, London; New York: Verso, 1991.
10. Vicziany sees this blindness as a major obstacle in regards to HIV/AIDS prevention in India and refers to the study done by Jeremy Seabrook, *Love In a Different Climate: Men Who Have Sex With Men*, 1999 but she ignores the vast activist NGO literature on "MSMs" predating Seabrook's book.
11. J.K. Chemicals first successfully launched Kama Sutra in India in 1991. The Aurangabad factory is a 1996 joint venture between Ansell, a subsidiary of the Australian company Pacific Dunlop and a Mumbai based upscale textile and men's clothing company, Raymonds. In addition to supplying to the Indian government and NGOs, Ansell-Raymond now supplies Kama Sutra to 20 countries including the United States.
12. These issues have been explored variously by many authors and is beyond the scope of this book. For example, Cindy Patton, *The Invention of AIDS*, New York: Routledge 1990 and Cindy Patten, *Globalizing AIDS*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002 and Paula Triefler, *How To Have a Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicle of AIDS*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
13. Lawrence Cohen, "Postcolonial Indian and the Enormity of AIDS," *Naz Ki Pukaar*, 17, April, 1995.
14. Conversation with A. Gupta and the 1996 report prepared by her for the United Nations International Human Rights Tribunal in NYC.
15. Joseph Alter, "Seminal Truth: A Modern Science of Male Celibacy in North India," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 11(3): 275–298, 1997; and Alain Bottero, "Consumption by Semen Loss in India and Elsewhere," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 15:303:320, 1991.
16. Similar incidents of abuse and violence directed at HIV/AIDS outreach workers (often peer educators) for NGOs working with women in prostitution (SANGRAM in Maharashtra, VAMP and Samraksha in Karnataka, CHES in Tamil Nadu) and MSMs (Sangama in Karnataka, Sahodaran in Tamil Nadu, Naz Foundation-India in Delhi), male sex workers (Samabhavana in Maharashtra have been reported and documented. "India: Epidemic of Abuse: Police Harassment of HIV/AIDS Outreach Workers in India," *Human Rights Watch*, 14(5), July 2002.
17. The World Health Organization (WHO) removed "homosexuality" from its list of disorders in 1992.
18. Shaleen Rakesh, Naz Foundation-India Press Release, December 7, 2001. Respondents to the petition included: NACO, Ministry of Home, Health and Social Welfare, Commissioner of Police, and Delhi State AIDS Control Society.

19. "State-Sponsored Oppression and Persecution of Sexual Minorities in India," Statement by Mr. Aditya Bondhopadhyay, NGO briefing, United Nations Commission on Human Rights, April 8, 2002.
20. Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*, 116, London: Manchester University Press, 1990.
21. *Ibid.*, 123.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and Their Critics*, 91, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980.
24. *Ibid.*, 101.
25. Report on Native Newspapers, *India Gazette File*, 1893. I am grateful to D. Dasgupta for pointing this out to me.
26. The Contagious Diseases Act was promoted to curtail middle-class men's access to women (especially working class women) outside of marriage. Intended to curtail prostitution, it was directed toward the "protection of women and girls."
27. Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Towards a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities*, 174, New York: Routledge, 1993. For the history of British law on homosexuality, see also Stephen Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons*, London: Routledge, 1991.
28. Thomas Cromwell (1485–1540) was the King's chief advisor and minister. He presided over Henry's divorce to Catherine of Aragon in 1533. Henry's break with the Roman Catholic Church, assumption of headship of the Church of England, and a series of administrative measures strengthened the power of the Crown.
29. Cohen, *Talk on the Wild Side*, 175.
30. Zamindari rights were conferred on landowners by the Mughal administration; they included collecting revenues and maintaining civil and criminal law and order.
31. Areas of India remapped by the British into zones of political control were referred to as Presidencies.
32. S.K. Puri, *Indian Legal and Constitutional History*, 160, Allahabad Law Agency, 1992.
33. A Divan was a fiscal or revenue officer under the Mughal administration. Rights of revenue collection were acquired by the Company from local rulers and were often rearranged to suit Company needs.
34. Puri, *Indian Legal and Constitutional History*, 91.
35. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*, 113, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
36. From conversations with ex-Chief Justice, Padma Khastagir, in Calcutta.
37. Substantive law creates, defines, and regulates the rights and duties of parties.
38. Adjective law prescribes practice, procedure or legal machinery by which substantive law is enforced. V.D. Kulshreshtha's *Landmarks in Indian*

- Legal and Constitutional History*, 52, Lucknow: Eastern Book Company, 1992.
39. William Jones quoted in "The Command of Language and the Language of Command," B.S. Cohn, in *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, 295, edited by Ranajit Guha, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. The analogy of the British conquerors in India to the Classical Romans, conquerors of the Greeks, notes Cohn, was also expressed via "visual reminders" in the Victoria Memorial, Calcutta, where there are statues of Jones and Hastings in the garb of Roman senators.
 40. Cohn, "The Command of Language," 1985: 295.
 41. Robert Reekspear, 1832, Mood, 342, Ranchhoddas in Ratanlal and Dirajlar Keshawlal Thakoree, *The Indian Penal Code*, 27th ed., Nagpur: Wadhwa, 1992.
 42. *Criminal Law Journal*, 1992:1357.
 43. A Prior Section 377 case. AIR 1968 Gujarat 252: (1968 Cri LJ 1277) Lohana Vasanthlal Devchand and The State of Gujarat.
 44. *All India Reporter*, 1968:1277.
 45. Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, vol. II: Sexual Inversion* [1897], 210, 3rd edn, 1915. Cited in *Sexology uncensored: the documents of sexual science*, edited by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
 46. A similar case involving a Section 377 conviction and oral rape of a child is *Khanu vs Emperor*, 26 Cri LJ, 1925.
 47. 1969 Cri LJ 818 (State of Kerala vs K. Govindan).
 48. *Ganpat vs Emperor*. AIR 1918 Lahore 322 (2); *Sardar Ahmed vs Emperor*. AIR 1914 Lahore 565; *Devi Das vs Emperor*. 1928 Cri LJ 31; *Sain Dass vs Emperor*. 1926 Cri LJ 27; *Mahomed Yousif vs Emperor*. 1932 Cri. LJ 34; *Kaku Mashghul vs Emperor*. 45 Cri. LJ 1944; *Fazal Rab Choudhary vs State of Bihar*. 1983 Cri. LJ 632; *Bal Mukundo Singh vs Emperor*. 1937 Cri. LJ 38; *Mirro vs Emperor*. 1947 Cri. LJ 48; *Khanu vs Emperor*. 26 Cri. LJ 1925; *Brother John Anthony vs The State*. 1992 Cri. LJ 1352; *K. Govindan vs State of Kerala*. 1969 Cr. LJ 75; and *Lohana Vasanthal Devchand vs The State*. 1968 Cri. LJ 74.
 49. *Brown* (1899) 24 QBD 357 and *Khandu* AIR 1934 Lah 261: (1934) 35 Cri. LJ 1096 (Lah).
 50. *Esop* (1836) 7 C7P 456; *Charanjit Singh* 1986 Cri LJ 173 (HP); *Ratan Mia* 1988 Cri. LJ 980;
 51. *Mirro vs Emperor*. AIR 1947 All. 79. 48 Cri. LJ 376.
 52. *Khandu vs Emperor*. AIR 1934 Lah 261.
 53. *The Penal Law of India*, Vol.IV, 3261, Allahabad: Law Publishers, 1990.
 54. *Charanjit Singh*, 1986 Cri LJ 173 (HP).
 55. *Ratan Mia vs State of Assam*, 1988 Cr LJ 98D (981) (Gau): (1988)1 Crimes 404.
 56. *Mrinalini Sinha, Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century*, 19, London: Manchester University Press, 1995.

57. *The Penal Law of India, Vol.IV*, 3260, Allahabad: Law Publishers, 1990.
58. Esop (1832) 7 C & P 456.
59. Arthur N. Gilbert, "Buggery and the British Navy, 1700–1861," *Journal of Social History*, 1992: 72–158.
60. Grace Jayamani, Petitioner, vs E.P. Peters, Respondent. AIR 1982 Karnataka 46.
61. Chitaranjan Dass vs State of U.P. 1975 Cri. LJ 30.
62. Hijras are persons often described as "institutionalized third-gendered" peoples or "eunuch-transvestites." S. Vyas and D. Shingala, *The Lifestyle of the Eunuchs*, New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1987; and S. Nanda, *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India*, New York: Wadsworth Press, 1990.
63. Though there are definite variations in their individual works this position influences some of their arguments. Sweet and Zwilling, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, and Giti Thadani.
64. Gayatri Reddy, "Crossing 'lines' of Subjectivity: The Negotiation of Sexual Identity in Hyderabad, India," *Pukaar*, #36, January 2002. In her ethnographic work on the kothi community in Hyderabad, Reddy argues that kothis' like gay identified persons, are heterogeneous and include hijra (including sexual and asexual) communities.
65. Shivananda Khan, "Males who have sex with males in South Asia: a kothi framework," *Pukaar*, 12–13, #31, October 2000.
66. Shaffiq Essajee, "Rocking The Boat: Anjali Gopalan's Work with Men Who Have Sex with Men," *Trikone*, October 7, 1996.
67. Jeremy Seabrook, *Naz Ki Pukaar*, pp.16–17, January 20, 1998.
68. Martin Manalansan, "Under The Shadow Of Stonewall," Duke University Press.
69. Many activists have pointed out the multiple meaning systems amongst kothis, including those of hijras.
70. This is something that Shivananda Khan has also alluded to.
71. Conversation with gay activist, Manohar, in Calcutta.
72. *India Today*, April 15, 1990.
73. Section 376 and case law has been explored by Veena Das, "Sexual Violence, Discursive Formations and the State," *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXI, (35, 36 and 37), September 1996.
74. Dilip is referring to (a) legislation passed so that hijras have the right to vote (1936), and run for political office (1977) and the recent right to vote as women in national elections (1994). He is also referring to (b) what authors such as Serena Nanda and Kira Hall have extensively written on, political and cultural practices of verbal abuse, hand-clapping and exposure of genitals as potential strategies of shaming/embarrassing hostile or disrespectful non-hijras.
75. Although this is not an exhaustive list I shall mention some of the most visible organizations, resource guides, and public petitions made by organizations. A more comprehensive list can be found in newsletters such as *Trikone*. Organizations in India include: Humsafar Center,

Humrahi, Good As You, Bombay Dost, Sakhi, Sangini, Stree Sangam, Counsel Club, Praajak, Saathi, Friends India, ABVA, and Naz Foundation India Trust; in the US: Trikone, SALGA, Masala, Khuli Zaban, Khush-DC, Shamakami; in Canada: Shamakami, Sathi, Khush, Desh Pardesh and Atish; in the United Kingdom: Naz Project London, Shakti, and Naz Foundation.

Following the ABVA Report, *Less Than Gay* (1991), one of the first resource guides that addressed Section 377 and described some of the cases (and instances of harassment by the police), an updated resource guide, *Humjinsi*, edited Bina Fernandez, was published by The India Center for Human Rights (Mumbai) in 1999.

Public forums, statements, and petitions following ABVA's formal petition to the Indian government to repeal Section 377 include: a national seminar at the National Law School in Bangalore; a 1996 report by Anuja Gupta to the U.N. International Human Rights Tribunal in New York City; and a statement in 1999 and 2000 by the Campaign for Lesbian Rights, New Delhi.

Chapter Five Inverting Economic Man: Pleasure, Violence, and “Lesbian Pacts” in Postcolonial India

1. Penguin Books published Shobha De's novel, *Strange Obsession*, in 1992. Shobha De was born in India, educated in psychology at St. Xavier's College in Bombay. Since 1988, she has written the following novels: *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights and Sisters*. She also is the founder, editor and contributor to several women's magazines in India, including *Femina*. De is a winner of one of the Miss Femina contests and often serves as a judge to Femina Miss India contests.
2. A term used by many South Asians to refer to queer, lesbian, gay, transgendered, and/or bisexual identified.
3. Giti Thadani in *Sakhiani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India*, Cassell, 1996, has pointed out passages from texts such as The Laws of Manu (a document translated into English in 1794 from various 5th century B.C. Brahmanical sources) concerning explicit punishments directed at female same-sex erotic/sexual encounters. They have included fines as well as the cutting off of fingers. She has also referred to early Ayurvedic texts (Charak Samhita and Sushrat Samhita) that have references to the female homosexual figure as a product of inversion. The female homosexual (*nari shandi*) was born this way due to inverted intercourse where the woman was active and embryonic damage, and desires like a man (the invert).
4. Mills & Boon are Harlequin like romance novels.
5. Irrigary is quoted in Teresa De Lauretis, “The Essence of the Triangle or Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously; Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S. and Britain” in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 1:2 (1989): 19–53.

6. Thadani also discusses these letters in Sakhiyani. Thadani points out that she was struck by the overwhelming theme of isolation and the need for contact with other lesbians. Women used “lesbian” to describe their experiences even if English was not their first language. Many women talked about the sacrifices they had made to fulfill their duty as daughters, the loss of contact with lovers, the experience of being married and in lesbian relationships, had questions about “homo-sex” and “lesbo-sex,” they also spoke of suicide, and hoped to meet other lesbians (including their hope that Sakhi would be something like a dating service).
7. Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 107, Crossing Press, 1983.
8. Feminist literature on this is extensive and include authors such as—Aihwa Ong, Cynthia Enloe and Grace Chang.
9. Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare-Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 3(4), 1997.
10. J. Devika and Praveena Kodoth, “Sexual Violence and Predicament of Feminist Politics in Kerala,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 18, 2001.
11. This is based on a few reports posted on the khush-list (August 30, 2001). The Sahayatrika Project is an advocacy and support group for lesbian, bisexual, and “women-loving women.”
12. Trouble and commotion.
13. They are now a couple.
14. The Inspector General of Police, in charge of the Madhya Pradesh Special Armed Forces under which comes the 23rd battalion.
15. Exchange garlands at the temple.
16. Commandant of the 23rd battalion.
17. Director General of Police in Madhya Pradesh.
18. A local neighborhood.
19. Singing songs at local festivals.
20. Village function.
21. The word *filmi* is an Indian English term that describes something or someone as from the world of movies, or the way identities get stereotyped in films.
22. Kamalahassan is a South Indian film star who also made it big in Bollywood. Amitabh Bachchan and Sri Devi are Bollywood stars.
23. Another word for *dadas* or gang members.
24. Translated from the Malayalam Daily, *Mathrubhoomi*, by T. Murali, January 14, 1995. This appeared in *Bombay Dost* and *Trikone*.
25. Translated from the *Mathrubhoomi Daily*, August 8, 1992 by T. Murali. Published as “Love Unto Death,” in the *Bombay Dost*, January–June, 1993.
26. “Girls Who Longed to Live Together, End their Lives,” *Mathrubhoomi Daily*, August 26, 2001 and Kerala Kaumadhy, August 26, 2001.
27. November 18, 1999 in Sameeksha (translated from Malayalam by Deepa).

28. Murphy Halliburton, "Suicide: A Paradox of Development in Kerala," September 5–12, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1998.
29. Halliburton has pointed to some studies that suggest that 69 percent of females in Kerala are more suicide-prone (in accordance with national literature that suggests that suicide is more of an "acceptable" feminine behavior trait) and another study that points out that "successful suicide attempts" in Kerala tend to be 72 percent males. *Ibid.*, 2342.
30. The complex and historical significance of matriliney across caste and religious communities in Kerala also embodies the tension of the double message. A subject beyond the scope of this chapter.
31. Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well Being: How Kerala Became 'a Model'*, The Macmillan Press, 1992.
32. Organizations such as the Campaign for Lesbian Rights (a collective working for lesbian and bisexual women's rights in Delhi), Sangini (a support group for lesbian and bisexual women and part of Naz Foundation-India, Delhi), Aanchal (a help line for lesbian and bisexual women, Mumbai); Stree Sangam (a lesbian and bisexual collective, Mumbai), Sappho (a support group for lesbians and bisexual women, Calcutta), Prerana (a support group for lesbian and bisexual women, Bangalore), Organized Lesbian Alliance for Visibility and Acceptance—OLAVA (a "space for women who love women" in Pune) and finally the most recent NGO—the Sahayatrika Project in Thiruvanthapuram, Kerala (2002). The reactions in relation to Fire and CALERI have been discussed by Geeta Patel and Mona Bachman in *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*, edited by Ruth Vanita, New York: Routledge, 2001; Mary E. John and Tejaswini Niranjana, "Mirror Politics: 'Fire,' Hinduvta, and Indian Culture," *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 6–13, 1999; and Ratna Kapur, "Cultural Politics of Fire," *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 22, 1999.
33. Both quoted in, Hillary Charlesworth, "What are 'Women's International Human Rights?'," *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives*, edited by Rebecca J. Cook, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.

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Law Journals

All India Reporter
Criminal Law Journal

Newspapers and Magazines

Anamika
The Asian Age
Bombay Dost
The Business Standard
Femina
Femina Girl
Frontline
Gentleman
The Illustrated Weekly of India

India Today
The Indian Express
Naz Ki Pukaar
Mathrubhumi
Outlook
Pravartak
The Hindu
The Telegraph
The Statesman
The Times of India
Trikone
Sunday
Women's Era
Eve's Weekly
Gladrags
Society
Savvy
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Shakthikaban

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