

Pink Nights

The Queer (Male) Discotheques of Delhi

and Music as the Site of Performance

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What is birth? When are we really born? Is birth a realization, a sensation, a decision? It is hard to say when this project was conceived... it is hard to say whether it still is born; it is hard to say if it ever will. There is something, however, that a long process of experience, thinking and believing has expressed, and that is what you hold in your hands right now.

One of the most difficult relationships that I share in this world is with my parents—of deep love and intense ideological difference. It is a situation that is impossible to transcend. It is impossible to let go of either. The struggles that my parents have gone through have also affected my life, I am what I am because of all that has happened with them; but that's not everything that I am, my struggles are with my own time... and their time. I can just take an individualist stance and run away in search of happiness(?), but what about my love for them? I know their lives revolve around me, but also a 'romanticized' me, the me they'd want me to be, not the me that I am. It is a constant struggle, but it is this struggle which has given me the strength to be myself and face everything. Their love for me has always been an inspiration, and also taught me how to stay balanced between love and reason, and not let one eat up the other. Their belief in me has made me believe in myself. Even now when they still don't know what 'exactly' I'm studying, they support me unquestioningly. It takes deep love to have that kind of conviction. My brother and sister in law, whose patience, sense of responsibility, love and care keep me engaged with a process of constantly re-working on my ideas of pure individualism.

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“What happens when we listen, what does it mean to say we are subjects of this symphony or opera or a musical piece? How do we position ourselves to relate to the singer of a song cycle? What's the gender of the performer, of the lyric persona, of the audience? If you have a male-authored song with a male persona sung by a woman listened to by a woman, that's interesting. How do you identify with that, and what kind of different meanings might that bring up?”

The Dusk-

an Introduction

"Queerness is *now* global. Whether in advertising, film, performing arts, the Internet or the political discourses of human rights in emerging democracies, images of Queer sexualities and cultures *now* circulate around the globe".¹ While there is no reason to deny that Queerness *is* indeed global, the phrase "now" in the above sentence indicates that it was not global earlier. Understood this way, one can logically ask, if Queerness has *now* gone global, which brand of it has been globalized?

In recent years, India has witnessed a growing activism of various NGOs and civil society institutions toward mainstreaming sexual minority groups. Such efforts toward mainstreaming consist of advocating the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups (henceforth LGBTs), campaigning against laws that discriminate their rights, seeking public petition for the withdrawal of such laws, and efforts to normalize the recognition and acceptance of LGBT identity categories in India. Contrary to this activism, a large section of Indian society believes that such efforts of mainstreaming pose a threat to the social and cultural integrity as well as the moral fabric of the Indian nation. Believers of this ideology include both left and right, Marxist thinkers as well as right wing radical

¹ Cruz-Malave A, Manalansan Martin F: *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. New York and London, New York University Press; 2002:1., Emphasis mine

Hindu nationalist groups, and a major part of the functioning Indian bureaucracy, including a huge segment of its 700 million rural population. One of my primary aims is to capture the debate around mobilization of Queer communities for their civil and political rights and analyze the emerging politics of sexual identity in relation to globalization in the Indian subcontinent. What I pick as my case study here is the Party 'scene' in Delhi and its music. These parties are a very rich performance space, where different kinds of acts come together and several transformations happen. The space is both camouflaging and absorbing. This 'double-ness' is what intrigues me about the space of these parties, and more specifically the music that is played here. This work is an attempt to understand the 'Queer' culture through its 'performativity'. However, this task cannot be achieved, and its objectives thoroughly understood, without first placing my work in the socio-political situation that has enabled me, and many others like me to actually 'come out' and work on these issues.

In every culture and society, throughout history, people have attempted or practiced every anatomically possible form of sexual stimulation and gratification. Hardly any of these practices have ever become the question of sexual identity politics. The differences in patterns of sexual expression among societies derive from their history, culture, present circumstances and power relations that determine whether their actual patterns of sexual behavior remain open or hidden. The best person to theorize this is Michael Foucault who noted that "the homosexual" became a "species" circa 1870 in an epoch of Western society that relied upon an urge to confess sexual practice as a means to uncover a "truth" in "human nature".² Thus not confessing one's sexual practice and the discursive rubric of

² Foucault Michael: *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality 1*. London, Penguin; 1998:33-37.

taboo and repression prevented access to personal "truth." Though homosexuality as a practice has been in existence in traditional societies since time immemorial, sexual identity has never become an agenda of political struggle in any of these societies until recently. For example, many individuals in India or other traditional societies may practice same-sex sexual relations but do not identify themselves as "gay" or "lesbian." For many men in India, having same-sex sexual relations is equal to *masti* or having fun, and they refuse to be identified as "gay"³.

Thus, though homosexual behavior (the act of sodomy), not identities (such as gay or lesbian), remains a "criminal offence" under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), historically, Indian society acknowledges and tolerates certain degree of homosexual behavior between consenting adults in private. Even the Government of India acknowledges through an affidavit submitted to the Delhi High Court in response to a public petition challenging the constitutional validity of IPC 377 that, "the state will turn a blind eye if homosexuality is practiced between two consenting adults in private"⁴. The issue has become sensitive in a sexually conservative society like India with sexual minority groups challenging the public/private boundary and the authority of the State to make laws

³ Joseph Sherry: *Social Work Practice and Men Who Have Sex with Men*. New Delhi, Sage, especially Chapter 5; 2005:130-59.

Seabrook Jeremy: *Love in a Different Climate: Men Who Have Sex With Men in India*. London, Verso; 1999:v.

Pradeep K: Interventions Among Men who Have Sex With Men. In *Living with the AIDS Virus: The Epidemic and the Response in India*. Edited by Panda Samiran, Anindya Chatterjee, Abu Abdul-Qader. New Delhi, Sage; 2002:112-29.

⁴ Homosexuality okay if practiced in private

[<http://sify.com/news/othernews/fullstory.php?id=13250892>] *website*
Sify News (India) Accessed June 6, 2007. September 14, 2003

that discriminate their rights. While some researchers⁵ contend that with economic globalization in the developing world, a Western, hegemonic notion of LGBT identity has been exported to traditional societies thereby destroying indigenous sexual cultures and diversities, other scholars⁶ do not consider globalization as a significant factor for global Queer mobilization and sexual identity politics. Yet, a cursory look at the present cartography of the globe reveals that countries where LGBT identities are now emerging broadly correspond with the global-South that have recently opened up their economies to neoliberal capital by the adopting IMF-sponsored structural adjustment program wherein homosexuality still remains "illegal"⁷. How then does one conceptualize the North-South/East-West divide and explain emerging politics of sexual identity in newly globalizing economies?

Central to the above question is the notion of a "discourse" around human sexuality and the "truth" and "power" that were produced through such discourses in postmodern, postindustrial, capitalistic societies of the West. Sexual and gender plurality, sexual preference, sexual identity and "coming out" thus became an important indicator of a so called "developed" society. Traditional societies that could not capture these modern notions of sexual identity categories were considered "inferior," "sexually repressed" and

⁵ Altman Dennis: Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identity. *Social Text* 48 1996, 14(3):77-94.

Altman Dennis: *Global Sex*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press; 2001.

Woodcock Shannon: Globalization of LGBT Identities: Containment Masquerading as Salvation or Why Lesbians Have Less Fun. In *Gender and the (Post) 'East'/'West' Divide*. Edited by Frunza Michaela, Theodora-Eliza Vacarescu. Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest, Limes; 2004.

Tellis Ashley: Ways of Becoming. [<http://www.india-seminar.com/2003/524/524%20ashley%20tellis.htm>] *webcite Seminar*, No. 524 2003.

⁶ Binnie Jon: *The Globalization of Sexuality*. London/Thousand Oaks, Sage; 2004.

⁷ Sodomy Laws Around the World [<http://www.sodomylaws.org/index.htm>] *webcite* Accessed June 6, 2007.

hence need to be "developed" and "freed" thereby necessitating an intervention from outside. Any resistance to these efforts of liberation was considered as "homophobia" and all traditional, non-modern societies thus came to be known as "homophobic" societies in which sexual minorities require liberation. Under the present world economic and social order, such intervention of liberating sexually repressed communities in traditional homophobic societies takes place through Western institutions of international development, aid agencies, donor organizations and international NGOs. With reference to international development, Escobar (1984, 1995) noted that the "Third World" was actually invented by the West through discourses of (under)development, and this discovery created a field of intervention through which developed countries and their associated institutions exercised tremendous "power" over the Third World⁸. It is interesting to examine what happens when Western donor discourses help the East uncover their "repressed" sexualities primarily through local subjects and NGOs working on sexuality and HIV/AIDS prevention. Following Shannon Woodcock (2004), I contend that India has a diverse, complex and elaborate spectrum of same-sex sexual cultures in which sexual minorities have always performed their identities in a variety of ways, in a variety of social spaces and *without* the political rhetoric of the West. The Western project of liberating the "sexually repressed" communities of the East attempts to contain this dynamic and diverse sexual culture by baptizing traditional sexual minorities to evolve into a globalized, universal, and totalizing LGBT identity category.

⁸ Escobar Arturo: Discourse and Power in Development: Michael Foucault and the Relevance of His Work to the Third World. *Alternatives* 1984, 10(3):377-400.

Escobar Arturo: *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press; 1995.

I use the term LGBTs only to refer to the modern/postmodern context of emerging sexual identity categories, and not to denote any traditional sexual minority groups/identities that predated its existence. By this conceptualization, *bijras*, *kothis*, *kinnars*, *panthis*, *jogtas*, *dangas*, *alis*, *double-deckers*, *chbakkas*, *dburanis* and any other indigenous communities who identify and relate themselves by sexual practices would not be considered as LGBTs, though they are commonly referred to as such in most HIV/AIDS and sexuality discourses in India. To avoid this complexity, "Queer" is preferred over other terms (though not commonly used in India) by many activists and individuals since it does not confine sexual identities in fixed LGBT categories and allow for much space and ambiguities for diverse sexualities to be included. Queer encompasses a multiplicity of desires and diverse sexualities outside the homo/heterosexual matrix in which *identity* is seen as performative, something that we do and act out rather than possessing, and something that we assemble from existing discursive practices⁹. Historically used as a derogatory term to refer to homosexual people in the West, Queer was later reclaimed by theorists and activists to refer to a multitude of subject positions that question the naturalness, rightness and inevitability of heterosexuality. "Queer/ness," thus, by its very nature of inclusiveness, can be viewed as another concept that by way of encompassing every possible sexual diversity in one single fold, attempts to obscure spatial and temporal differences in multiple sexual subject positions. However, I also use this term in a very preliminary way, before I indulge in a much more detailed discussion about language and terminology in the first chapter.

Among various other factors contributing to Queer mobilization in India, such as capitalist modernization, discourses of universal human rights, new social movements, resistance to

⁹ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, Routledge; 1990. Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky: *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, University of California Press; 1990.

dominant power structures, and evolving democracy and minority rights¹⁰, I also examine how the discotheque space has emerged in the metropolitan city of Delhi, and how these spaces have been mediated through globalization to influence the LGBT/Queer identity politics in India. While doing so, I duly acknowledge that there are several individual efforts, informal support groups, collectives and "agency" of indigenous Queer communities that operate outside what I shall call a mainstream Queer scene (the alternate Queer, as I identify myself to be). However, these efforts, though commendable, are not entirely a part of my discussion.

Tracing the history of LGBT identity politics

The phenomenon of confessing one's sexual identity as a means to uncover personal "truth" is relatively recent in India and the "out" LGBTs were not visible in the country until the 1990s. Though writings of romantic same-sex love stories, Urdu poetry and *ghazals* could be traced back to pre-independent India, writers of such novels or stories hardly ever confessed their sexual identity publicly. For example, India's celebrated poet Firaq Gorakhpuri (1896–1982) who was known to be homosexual through his writings never identified himself as such. Pandey Bechan Sharma's *Chocolate* (1927), and Ismat Chughtai's *Libaaf* (The Quilt 1942), though based on homoerotic love stories and drawing

¹⁰ Narain Arvind: *Queer: Despised Sexuality, Law and Social Change*. Bangalore, Books for Change; 2004.(p.66-68)

widespread public attention and protest including lawsuit, the authors never claimed homosexuality as their identity¹¹.

Colonialism and nationalism curiously worked to achieve the same effect: erasure of the homoerotic traditions in the Indian culture. While the colonial rulers, steeped in Victorian sexual morality rooted in Puritanism, found homosexuality offensive and even evil, quoting Giti Thadani, Garcia-Arroyo says that the Indian nationalists wanted to construct an Indian identity, based on the glorious 'Aryan heritage' which privileged the patriarchal Vedic, brahmanic and kshatriya traditions and provided the 'Hindu' civilization with racial superiority and a return to a 'heroic warrior manhood'. It also provided for a form of cultural nationalism that affirmed the masculine identity of the 'Hindu man'. Garcia-Arroyo appropriately sums up the disjuncture in the homoerotic traditions in the words: 'The heterosexualization of the *ghazal*, the suppression of *Rekhti* poetry and the introduction of Indian Penal Code with sections 292 and 377 against obscenity and sodomy, transform the Indian cultural panorama into a powerful heteropatriarchal system dominated by colonial nationalist representations of homophobia and gender differentiation'. It may seem ironic that on the point of homosexuality, the colonizer and the colonized concurred—though their political agendas were opposite and inimical to each-other.

In later years, such as in Rajkamal Chaudhury's Hindi novel *Machhli Mari Hui* (Dead Fish 1965), same sex relationship between men and women has been represented as something imported from the West (US) and a symptom of capitalism and neo-colonialism.¹² Kamala Das, who wrote an autobiographical account *My Story* (1976) depicting her extramarital

¹¹ Vanita Ruth: *Queering India: Same Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*. London, NY, Routledge; 2002.

¹² Vanita Ruth, Kidwai Salim: *Same Sex Love in India: Readings from Indian History and Literature*. New York, St. Martin's Press; 2000:204

affair, her adolescent crush on a female teacher, and a brief lesbian encounter with an elder student, is still not considered as a lesbian writer. More recently Shobha De's *Strange Obsession* (1993), considered as soft-porn in the literary circles, deals with a lesbian affair where the heroine is rescued by marriage. De, the mother of six children and married to a very wealthy Mumbai businessman, is not considered a lesbian writer. The first academic book on Indian homosexuals appeared in 1977 (*The World of Homosexuals*) written by Shakuntala Devi, the mathematical whizkid who was internationally known as the *human computer*. This book treated homosexuality in a positive light and reviewed the socio-cultural and legal situation of homosexuality in India and contrasted it with the then ongoing gay liberation movement in USA.¹³

Quite a contrary trend is observed in late 1980s-India or more specifically in the late 1990s, when authors dealing with the subject of homosexuality "came out" with their sexual identity through their writing. A large part of this "confession" took place in the preface, introduction or acknowledgement section of their books. This revolution started with authors and film makers of Indian origin who were born and brought up in the West and had successfully established themselves in the western academic and professional world. Most important among them were the works of Suniti Namjoshi (*The Conversations of Cow*, 1985; *Because of India*, 1989); Pratibha Parmar (*Kbush*, 1991; *Queer Looks*, 1993); Rakesh Ratti (*A Lotus of Another Color*, 1993) from India and Shyam Selvadurai (*Funny Boy*, 1994; *Cinnamon Gardens*, 1999) from Sri Lanka.

¹³ Devi Shakuntala: *The World of Homosexuals*. New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House; 1977.

Summers (1995) points out that the relative openness of this small group of writers was perhaps largely due to their diasporic locations. They live in either the United States or Britain, countries that have well-established gay and lesbian communities with a tradition of organized resistance and therefore have greater sexual and artistic freedom and wider publishing opportunities.¹⁴ Further, their physical separation from family and community probably gives them relative privacy and greater freedom from culturally imposed constraints.

Since the mid-1980s, hundreds of young gay and lesbian South Asians living in the metropolitan centers of Europe and North America have begun to assert their presence by forming support groups, begun partly in response to the racism they encounter in predominantly white Queer communities of the West (Summers 1995). Many of the groups regularly publish newsletters, such as *Shakti Khabar* (London), *Trikone* (San Jose), *Shamakami* (San Francisco), and *Khush Khayal* (Toronto), which have subscribers in many countries of South Asia. These publications seek to link South Asian gay and lesbian individuals as well as communities scattered around the world and to help forge a global South Asian Queer identity.

The 'confessional' tradition set by South Asian Queer diasporic communities influenced writers from India. Some of the important recent authors include Giti Thadani (*Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India, 1996*); Ashwini Sukthanker (*Facing the Mirror, 1999*); Hoshang Merchant (*Yaraana: Gay writing from India 1999*); and later Salim Kidwai and Ruth Vanita (*Same Sex Love, 2000*, and *Love's Rite, 2005*). After globalization, trade

¹⁴ Summers, Claude J: *Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage: A Reader's Companion to the Writers and Their Works from Antiquity to the Present*. London, Routledge; 2001:667.

liberalization, and the opening of the Indian economy to foreign direct investment in 1991, the process of 'confession' has become more overt from writing to political action and assertion of one's own identity and demand for a Queer-space. The pace at which such a development took place, can indeed be called a revolution.

Mainstreaming sexual minorities: Initial years

Some unorganized initial efforts to bring forth the issues of sexual minorities in India could be traced back to 1990. In 1990, India's first exclusive gay magazine, *Bombay Dost* (Bombay Friends) was published by an 'out' gay journalist Ashok Row Kavi, who later in 1994 established his own NGO, Humsafar Trust to work with LGBT groups in Mumbai. *Bombay Dost* was a small newsletter of gay men initially published intermittently in Hindi till 1994 through which they tried to establish local networks of gay groups and provide information to men who have sex with men (henceforth MSMs). Since late 1994, *Bombay Dost* has become an exclusively English language magazine serving upper class, educated elites within urban India. It would seem that enough number of Hindi readers were probably not available. The pricing structure of the magazine also reflected the class-bias. A single copy in 1994 used to cost Rs. 40, which was equivalent to the total earnings of a daily wage laborer. It may also be due to the low economy of scale that the price of an individual copy went up. In either case, *Bombay Dost* did not serve the marginalized, lower class sexual minorities in India. Moreover, a review of the magazine over the last decade reveals that much attention was paid to featuring international gay news and issues that would possibly have little relevance to Indian gays.

In 1991, a human rights activist group, *AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan* (Anti-AIDS Discrimination Movement) known as ABVA published its first report *Less than Gay: A Citizens' Report on the Status of Homosexuality in India*. Through this report, the ABVA advocated for civil rights of LGBTs to include same-sex marriage, parenting, decriminalization of homosexuality and repeal of IPC 377, amendments in Special Marriage Act and AIDS Prevention Bill of 1989, and providing a positive homosexuality education in school.¹⁵ In 1994, ABVA reported that there is incidence of rampant homosexuality in the Tihar jail of New Delhi and recommended to the jail authorities that condoms be made available to prison inmates for preventing HIV transmission. The Inspector General of Prisons (the then Magsaysay Award winner, Kiran Bedi) refused to agree with the plea on the ground that distributing condoms would mean that government is promoting homosexuality in prison by violating law of the land, Section 377 IPC (Unnatural Offences). The law 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*"¹⁶. Though this law, enacted by the British in 1861, does not differentiate between a homosexual act and identity, a person cannot be sentenced under this law who claims his sexual identity as gay, but whose act/behavior is not proved. In 1994, ABVA first challenged the constitutional validity of Section 377 IPC in Delhi High Court. Through its petition, ABVA argued for supplying of condoms to jail inmates and instructing the authorities to refrain from segregating prisoners with homosexual orientation or those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

¹⁵ AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan – ABVA: *Less Than Gay: A Citizens' Report on the Status of Homosexuality in India*. ABVA, New Delhi; 1991.

¹⁶ *Voices Against 377: Rights for All: Ending Discrimination Against Queer Desire Under Section 377*. New Delhi, Voices Against 377; 2004.

The petition argued that Section 377 should be repealed because it violates the right to privacy and discriminates against people with a particular sexual orientation.

The emergence of a looming AIDS epidemic in the Indian subcontinent and the economic globalization of the early 1990s influenced Queer mobilization and Queer movement in some fundamental ways. From the earlier sporadic and individual efforts of early 1990s, the struggle against the law and the process of Queer mobilization shifted toward a more donor driven and AIDS-induced agenda (though simultaneously, individual- and collective-level efforts have multiplied during the same period). A large part of Queer mobilization took place in response to the HIV epidemic and due to the vulnerability of some Queer people resulting from their behavioral aspect. NGOs working with sexual minority groups have largely mobilized a diverse spectrum of indigenous Queer sexualities under a fixed banner of "LGBT identities," though the Queers continue to identify themselves as *hijras* or *kothis*. The following section examines this process in a historical context of globalization and AIDS epidemic in India.

Globalization and a decade of LGBT activism

Is it a mere coincidence that the emergence of LGBT activism broadly corresponds with two important landmarks of the economic and social history of India? I refer to these two landmarks as: first, the opening up of the Indian economy in 1991 and adopting the IMF-sponsored structural adjustment program of promoting free trade and free market regime; and second, the looming presence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Indian subcontinent and thereby accepting the World Bank loan for prevention and control of AIDS in India.

The 'homophobic' State and its reaction

Now I turn to my argument that Queer mobilization as mediated by globalization and the AIDS epidemic has simultaneously strengthened "homophobic" discourses of heterosexist nationalism in India. "Homophobia" as conceptualized by George Weinberg in 1971 and popularized through his book *Society and the Healthy Homosexuals* has received much criticism from opponents. Antigay critics—for example, former US Congressman William Dannemeyer—complained that homophobia shifts the terms of debate away from the idea "that homosexuals are disturbed people by saying that it is those who disapprove of them who are mentally unbalanced, that *they* are in the grips of a *phobia*".¹⁷ Gregory Herek thus considers *homophobia* as a word bearing a negative connotation and says there is a need to advance a new vocabulary and scholarship in this area. Herek notes that homophobia has served as a model for conceptualizing a variety of negative attitudes based on sexuality and gender, and derivative terms such as *lesbophobia*, *biphobia*, *transphobia* etc. have emerged as labels for hostility towards sexual minorities. Though society has negative attitudes towards homosexuals, the minimal data available do not support the claim that most antigay attitudes represent a true *phobia*. Thus, a more nuanced vocabulary is needed to understand the psychological, social, and cultural processes that underlie the oppression. Herek prefers using words such as *sexual stigma*, *heterosexism*, and *sexual prejudice* instead of *homophobia*.

The first AIDS case in India was detected in Chennai in 1986. Considering it immediately as a 'foreign disease,' the government adopted a repressive AIDS Control Policy (1989)

¹⁷ Herek Gregory M: Beyond Homophobia: Thinking about Sexual Prejudice and Stigma in the Twenty-First Century. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 2004, **1**(2):6-24.original emphasis added.

through which it outlined ‘contact tracing,’ testing of sex workers, injecting drug users, and other high-risk groups and adoption of a *quarantine* approach if found HIV-positive to protect larger population at risk. Consequently, sex workers, drug users and MSMs were forcibly tested and jailed for several months in Chennai, Mumbai and Goa. For example, in 1989, Dominic de Souza, a World Wildlife Fund employee and a gay on whose life Bollywood film *My Brother Nikhil* (2005) was produced, was kept in solitary confinement for over a month by Goa government. Similarly, the Tamil Nadu government forcibly tested several hundred sex workers in 1990 and then locked up 800 infected women for several months¹⁸. Such a social control approach seems to have worked in small populations with strict centralized ruling and strong Soviet-style policing as in Cuba; but India had nothing in common with Cuba's universal literacy, excellent health care delivery and a frank sex education campaign in schools to adopt this policy (*ibid.*). Due to the sustained activism of indigenous human rights groups and pressure from the World Bank, India withdrew its National AIDS Control Policy of 1989 as a ‘condition of loan’ for implementing its National AIDS Control Program and adopted a liberal, rights-based perspective for the prevention and control of AIDS.¹⁹ For developing this new rights-based policy, technical support was imported from abroad and organizations like WHO helped India in developing such a policy. Thus though sex work, drug use and homosexuality remained criminalized, ‘targeted interventions’ were launched among ‘high-risk groups’ across many cities. The government adopted a double-standard of morally and legally disapproving despised sexualities, but simultaneously funding collectives of sex workers and MSMs for implementing national HIV/AIDS prevention programs.

¹⁸ Dube Siddharth: *Sex, Lies and AIDS*. New Delhi, Harper Collins; 2000:4.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.86

Mehra Sunil, Kole , Subir K: *Positive Voices: Exploring Vulnerabilities and Understanding AIDS*. MAMTA Health Institute for Mother and Child, New Delhi; 2003:52.

On July 7, 2001, police in the city of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, raided a park that was frequented by Gays and MSMs. The raid was based on a complaint filed by a person who alleged that he had been sexually assaulted while providing massage services in the park. Taking this cue, the police raided the offices of Bharosa Trust and Naz Foundation International, two NGOs working with MSMs under the charges of running a ‘gay-club’ and a ‘call-boy racket’ in the city with the pretext of imparting HIV/AIDS awareness programs. The Project Manager of Bharosa and the Director of Naz along with four outreach workers were arrested on charges of propagating and indulging in ‘unnatural sex’ under Section 377; Section 292 (sale of obscene books); Section 120b (criminal conspiracy); Section 109 (abetment) of the IPC; Section 60 of the Copyright Act; and Section 3 and 4 of the Indecent Representation of Women Act. The basis for such a charge by police was that during the raid in NGO-premises, they found condoms and lubricants (for aiding in ‘unnatural sex’); communication materials (termed as ‘pornography’); dildo used for condom demonstration (termed as ‘sex toy’); and video cassettes and photographs (termed as ‘obscene literature’)²⁰. The offices of Naz Foundation and Bharosa Trust were sealed. During the raid, police ignored all other reports and documents shown to them to establish that the organizations were working under the purview of NACO-policy. Instead, they went on justifying the arrest and spread misinformation in popular media claiming that they wanted to stop the ‘vice of homosexuality.’ The NACO and Uttar Pradesh State AIDS Control Society chose a policy of silence: where a public statement saying that these two organizations were working under the purview of their policy could have saved the

²⁰ Bandopadhyay Aditya: Where Saving Lives is a Crime: The Lucknow Story. In *Humjinsi: A Resource Book on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights in India*. Edited by Fernandez Bina. India Center for Human Rights and Law; 2002:104-08

sufferings of the four arrested, they silently watched the four ending up in jail for 47 days (*ibid.*).

A few days after the Lucknow incident, NGOs working in the field of HIV/AIDS came together in New Delhi to form an alliance of organizations whose primary purpose was to defeat and repeal the very section of IPC 377 under which two NGOs were arrested. Two prominent members of this alliance were Naz Foundation India Trust and Lawyer's Collective. The alliance took over the case of challenging the constitutional validity of Section 377 of IPC through public petition (once filed by ABVA in 1994). Towards late 2001, Naz Foundation on behalf of the petitioner filed a public interest litigation (PIL) in Delhi High Court.²¹ The foundation argued that the penal code provision not only violates right to life and liberty as outlined in the Indian Constitution but also impedes effective control of AIDS. In its petition, the group asserts that Section 377 is discriminatory because it criminalizes predominantly homosexual acts and imposes traditional gender stereotypes of *natural* sexual roles for men and women upon sexual minorities. In effect, Section 377 provides moral and legal sanction for the continued social discrimination of sexual minorities (*ibid.*).

Towards early January 2003, the Delhi High Court ordered the Indian government to respond within a month and clarify its stand on the PIL filed by NAZ Foundation seeking an end to the law that makes homosexual relations a crime.²² The government (Ministry of

²¹ In the High Court of Delhi: Extraordinary Original Writ Jurisdiction, Civil Writ Petition No. 7455 of 2001. In *In the matter of Naz Foundation Vs. Govt. of NCT of Delhi and five others*. Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit, New Delhi

²² India Court: Govt. Must Clarify Stand on Gay Relations
[\[http://www.sodomylaws.org/world/india/innews17.htm\]](http://www.sodomylaws.org/world/india/innews17.htm) *webcite*

Home Affairs) in its affidavit submitted to the Delhi High Court responded that, "the basic thrust in the argument of pro-gay activists is the perceived violation of fundamental liberty guaranteed in Article 19 of the Constitution of India. However, there is no violation of fundamental liberty as long as any act of homosexuality/lesbianism is practiced between two consenting adults in privacy as in the case of heterosexuality".²³ The Affidavit said that in India, Section 377 has been basically used to punish sexual abuse to children and to complement lacunae in rape laws. It has rarely been used to punish homosexual behavior. For example, in the entire history of statute from 1860 to 2002, there were only 30 reported cases under Section 377 that came before various High Courts and the Supreme Court since 1830. The large majority of prosecutions were due to non-consensual acts of sodomy, with only 4 cases where consensual acts of sodomy have been brought to court, 3 of which are prior to 1940 (pre-independence India). In addition, 50 percent of total cases consist of sexual assaults committed on minors, whereas only 5 out of 30 being on adults.²⁴ Such facts indeed pose a question on the practicality and need to have such a law that has rarely been used. The affidavit also mentioned that the provision becomes operable "only when there was a report to the police for either sodomizing or bugging." Such an explanation barely justifies the government's stand for retaining Section 377, as lacunae in rape laws could always be filled-in by including child sexual abuse or non-consensual sodomizing as suggested by the Law Commission of India in its 172nd Report.

Associated Press, Accessed June 6, 2007. January 16, 2003

²³ In the High Court of Delhi: Counter Affidavit on Behalf of Respondent No. 5, Civil Writ Petition No. 7455 of 2001. Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit, New Delhi; September 4, 2003

²⁴ Khanna Shamona: Gay Rights. In *Humjinsi: A Resource Book on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights in India*. Edited by Fernandez Bina. India Center for Human Rights and Law; 2002:58. People's Union For Civil Liberties-Karnataka: Human Rights Violations Against Sexual Minorities in India: A PUCL-K Fact Finding Report About Bangalore. [\[http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Gender/2003/sexual-minorities.pdf\]](http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Gender/2003/sexual-minorities.pdf) *webcite* 2001.

The Home Ministry affidavit also said that there was no tolerance of such a practice in Indian society. The legal conception of homosexuality is not independent of society. "Public tolerance of different activities changes over time and the legal categories get influenced by those changes... Acts, which have been glorified in the past, like dowry, child marriage, domestic violence, widow re-marriage etc. have now been brought under the preview of criminal justice. Therefore, changes in public tolerance of activities *lead to campaigns* to either criminalize some behavior or decriminalize others... While the Government cannot police morality, in a civil society, criminal law has to express and reflect *public morality* and concerns about *harm to the society* at large..." (*ibid.*, emphasis mine).

The government thus believes that public morality is upheld and maintained by penalizing 'unnatural' sexual acts '*with any man or woman*' through Section 377. The interesting point is how the government could certify public morality on 'unnatural sex' when various national-level surveys indicate the opposite. For example, successive surveys conducted by India Today-AC Nielson and ORG-MARG in 2003 (covering 2,305 unmarried, married and separated women between 19–50 years across 10 cities); 2004 (covering 2,499 married and unmarried men between 18–55 years across 11 cities); 2005 (covering 2,035 single women between 18–30 across 11 cities); and 2006 (covering 2,559 men of 16–25 years across 11 cities) reveal that 37 percent of single young men have had a homosexual experience in 2006 compared to 31 percent in 2004 (*India Today*, November 13, p. 37); whereas 3–5 percent women reported having lesbian experience in 2005 (*India Today*, September 26, p. 47). Similarly in 2005, 28 percent single women have tried anal sex while another 8 percent have tried bisexual sex (*India Today*, September 26, p. 46). Women

reported experiencing anal sex in 2005 is significantly higher than 2003 level, which was 13 percent (*India Today*, September 15, p. 46); whereas men reported having tried heterosexual anal sex is as high as 32 percent and bisexual sex as 11 percent in 2006 (*India Today*, November 13, p. 60). Though this is not a nationwide survey with representative sampling and there could be sample bias, these figures only go on to tell that the ‘public morality’ the government is concerned about has little practical ground as people are already having ‘unnatural sex’ criminalized under Section 377. The government also fails to recognize that the current PIL is indeed part of a broader ‘campaign’ for decriminalizing consensual adult sexual act. Instead, it goes on arguing, "even assuming that acts done in private with consent do not in themselves constitute a serious evil, there is a *risk* involved in repealing legislation which has been in force for a long time..." (*ibid.*). Again, no reference to the perceived ‘risk’ is provided in the affidavit, other than adamantly arguing that a colonial legacy needs to be maintained since it's been here with us for a long time!

Yet based on these misleading statements by government, the Delhi High Court in its ruling on September 2, 2004 dismissed the petition on the ground that the petitioner has no *locus standi*, meaning there was no ‘cause of action’ in the petition since no prosecution is pending against the petitioner. "Just for the sake of testing the legislation, a petition cannot be filed... the court does not express opinion when nobody is really aggrieved by the action which is impugned and does not examine merely academically the impugned action of the legislature or the executive. In view of the above, we feel that an academic challenge to the

constitutionality of a legislative provision cannot be entertained. Hence, the petition dismissed"²⁵.

The Naz Foundation then filed a Review Petition against the Court order, which was also dismissed in a ruling on November 3, 2004. A Special Leave Petition was then filed with the Supreme Court of India on the limited question of whether the Court could dismiss the petition on the ground that it was purely "academic" and there was no "cause of action." The Supreme Court in its ruling on February 3, 2006 referred the case back to Delhi High Court contending that the Court had erred in rejecting the original petition that Naz Foundation had no *locus standi*.²⁶ One of the respondents, the Union of India, submitted that the petition against Section 377 was of public importance and merited examination. The Supreme Court also allowed the petitioner to seek an expeditious hearing as the matter has been pending for a considerably long time. Even NACO on behalf of the respondents agrees in its Affidavit dated July 17, 2007 that "enforcement of section 377 can adversely contribute to pushing the infection underground, make risky sexual practices go unnoticed and unaddressed. The fear of harassment by law enforcement agencies leads to sex being hurried, leaving partners without the option to consider or negotiate safer sex practices".²⁷ NACO Chief, Sujatha Rao has agreed in public speeches that this law is "hateful, not

²⁵ Chief Justice Badar Durrez Ahmed, In the High Court of Delhi: *Civil Writ Petition No. 7455 of September 2, 2004*. Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit, New Delhi; 2001.

²⁶ Update on Legal Challenge to Section 377 IPC
[\[http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/AIDS-INDIA/message/5408\]](http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/AIDS-INDIA/message/5408) *webcite*
AIDS-India e-Forum Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit, New Delhi; Accessed June 6, 2007.

²⁷ In the High Court of Delhi: Reply Affidavit on Behalf of Respondents 4 and 5, Civil Writ Petition No. 7455 of 2001. Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit, New Delhi; July 17, 2006

acceptable, anachronistic, and scrapping the law is fundamental" to the fight against AIDS.²⁸

'Homophobia' and the language of resistance

The Humsafar Trust, immediately after its establishment in 1994 proposed to hold the First South Asian Gay Conference in Mumbai. Objecting to this move, the Vice President of National Federation of Indian Women, a women's organization affiliated to the Communist Party of India, through a widely endorsed letter appealed to the Prime Minister to cancel permission to host the Gay Conference.²⁹ Describing it as an "invasion of India by decadent western cultures and a direct fall-out of our signing the GATT agreement," it urged the Prime Minister "not to follow Bill Clinton's immoral approach to sexual perversions in the US" and to immediately cancel the permission to hold the Conference.³⁰ However, the Conference indeed took place with about 70 participants and received positive media attention.

In 1998, Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* got nationwide release. The story of *Fire* revolves around lesbian relationship of two unhappily married women of the same family (named after Hindu goddesses Sita and Radha worshipped all over the subcontinent). On its opening

²⁸ "Hateful" Anti-gay Law Must Go: Indian Govt. Agency
[<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/AIDS-INDIA/message/6322>] *webcite*
AIDS-India e-Forum Accessed June 6, 2007.

²⁹ John Mary E, Nair Janaki: Sexuality in Modern India: Critical Concerns.
Voices for Change: A Journal on Communication for Development 1999, 3(1):4-8.

³⁰ Khaitan Tarunabha: Violence Against Lesbians in India.
[<http://www.altlawforum.org/Resources/lexlib/document.2004-12-21.9555696555>] *webcite*
Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore Accessed June 5, 2007.

day in India, Right-wing Hindu nationalist groups destroyed movie theatres in protest against its lesbian storyline. Theatre halls in many cities such as Mumbai, Surat, Lucknow, New Delhi and Kanpur were stormed, destroyed or burnt.³¹ The movie was immediately banned in India and referred to the Censor Board for a review while it was off for showing in Pakistan. The banning of the film raised a series of controversies in popular media both in India and abroad³². Madhu Kishwar, one of the noted Indian feminists published a comprehensive review of the film *Fire* in women's magazine *Manushi*, arguing how the West views and interprets culture and tradition of the East primarily through a Eurocentric lens. Branding the film as a crude caricature of Indian culture and tradition, Kishwar, in her review argued that:

"...by crudely pushing the Radha-Sita relationship into the lesbian mould, Ms Mehta has done a big disservice to the cause of women... In most Indian families, even when sexual overtones develop in the relationship of two women situated as are Radha and Sita, no one generally gets upset about it provided people don't go around flaunting their sexual engagement with each other... Given that in a gender segregated society like ours, women spend a lot more time with each other than they do with men, such close bonding is fairly routine. Indians, by and large, are not horrified at witnessing physical affection between two people of the same gender. Two women friends or female relatives sleeping together in the same bed, hugging, massaging each other's hair or bodies is seen as a normal occurrence and even encouraged in preference to similar signs of physical affection between men and women. Such physical affection between women is not ordinarily

³¹ Activists Slam Attacks on Lesbian Film, Hindus Vow to Widen Protest [<http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/news/fire.html#2>] *webcite* AFP – *Agence France-Presse*, Accessed June 5, 2007. December 3, 1998

³² A Lesbian Film Idyll, and the Movie Theatres Surrender, *New York Times*, December 24, 1998.

interpreted as a sure sign or proof of lesbian love... [However after being] exposed to this controversy, women will learn to view all such signs of affection through the prism of homosexuality. As a consequence many will feel inhibited in expressing physical fondness for other women for fear of being permanently branded as lesbians."³³

Kishwar's basic argument in her article was that India offers a favorable social climate for LGBTs by approving of many 'homosocial' relations until people 'come out' and 'flaunt' their sexuality in public, which she thinks is derivative of a country's history, culture and tradition. I think Kishwar had a broader point – the political rhetoric of confession and 'coming out' may not have the same effect and acceptance in transitional societies as India or other South Asian countries. Kishwar's argument is strikingly similar to what has been argued elsewhere in other Asian societies. For example, a press release in 1998 Chinese *Tongzhi* Conference in Hong Kong declared that "the lesbi-gay movement in many Western societies is largely built upon the notion of individualism, confrontational politics, and the discourse of individual rights. Certain characteristics of confrontational politics, such as coming out and mass protests and parades, may not be the best way of achieving *tongzhi* liberation in the family centered, community-oriented Chinese societies... In formulating the *tongzhi* movement strategy, we should take specific socio-economic and cultural environment of each society into consideration".³⁴

³³ Kishwar Madhu: Naïve Outpourings of a Self-Hating Indian: Deepa Mehta's Fire. *Manushi*, No. 109, *India Together* 1998, 3-14.

³⁴ Jolly Susie: Queering Development: Exploring the Link Between Same-Sex Sexualities, Gender and Development. *Gender and Development* 2000, 8(1):78-88.

In 2004, when the first Bollywood lesbian film *Girlfriend* was released, Hindu Right activists forcibly stopped the screening of the film, hurled stones breaking the glass-panes of the cinema halls, shouting slogans and staging protest demonstrations across various Indian cities including Mumbai, Varanasi, Indore, Bhopal and Nagpur.³⁵ The ruling Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) demanded a review of the film by the Censor Board and deletion of scenes which were "objectionable and against Indian culture." The BJP spokesman, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said, "the film should be reviewed and shots which are objectionable and against Indian culture should be removed. The film does not mirror the realities of Indian society (*ibid.*)." Homosexuality is thus seen by Hindu nationalists as "*un-Indian, alien, imported* from the West and a *vice* of British colonialism." Based on several internal publications of BJP, RSS and Shiv Sena, Paola Baccheta (1999) has argued that one of the pillars of Hindu nationalism rests on "Queerphobia" in which Queer gender and sexualities are constructed outside the Hindu nation (and hence must be exiled!) through a misogynist conception of gender and heterosexist notion of sexual normatively³⁶. Naqvi's statements clearly corroborate Baccheta's claim.

Even within the Left camp, sexual politics is received with strong disapproval. For example, in 1996 when *Economic and Political Weekly* (February 3) carried an article on *Gay Rights in India* by Vimal Balasubrahmanyam, there was strong opposition from a Marxist thinker, H. Srikanth. Terming sexual identity politics as "backward and reactionary" just

³⁵ Protest Against Screening of Girlfriend Continues
[\[http://www.hindu.com/2004/06/16/stories/2004061603051200.htm\]](http://www.hindu.com/2004/06/16/stories/2004061603051200.htm) *webcite*
The Hindu, Accessed June 6, 2007. June 16, 2004

³⁶ Bacchetta Paola: When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers. *Social Text* 61 1999, 17(4):141-66.

like Sati, polygamy and the caste system, Srikanth goes on to argue that gay liberation movement is imported from the Western decadent bourgeoisie. He states that:

"...the justification of homosexuality as a normal behavior is based on the assumption that anything based on mutual consent and not aimed at harming others is acceptable and permissible. This assumption is based on liberal bourgeois notion that a person is free to do anything as long as he does not touch another's nose. To interpret what is normal for individual is also normal for the society is to fall into the trap of bourgeois individualism which reduces society to a sum total of separated and unconnected individuals. If coming out of compulsory heterosexuality is possible, I don't see any reason why an individual cannot come out of homosexual relations that too in a system where monogamous relations cease to be discriminatory and oppressive"³⁷.

Srikanth thus argues that heterosexuality is not only *natural* but also *compulsory* and coming out of homosexuality is both possible and desirable. He also fails to conceptualize that once a person comes out of homosexuality, what remains is a compulsory heterosexuality thus ignoring the 'power' that operates through heteronormativity, and resistance offered by 'coming out.' Contrary to Srikanth's self-proclaimed 'official' Marxist position on homosexuality, Brinda Karat, General Secretary of the Communist Party affiliated All India Democratic Women's Association, wrote in a strongly worded letter to the Law Minister Arun Jaitley, that "the government does not have a *locus standi* to interfere in private sexual activity of two consenting adults and hence Section 377 of IPC must be scrapped".³⁸

³⁷ Srikanth H: Marxism, Radical Feminism and Homosexuality. *Economic and Political Weekly* 1997, 2900-04. November 8

³⁸ Narain Siddharth: A Battle for Sexual Rights. *Frontline* 2005., 22(10):

It is through this kind of a background, where a work like this emerges. I look at some elements of popular culture – Literature, Cinema, Internet and Music, and try to trace an alternate history, a Queer performativity, and place it within the context of other socio-political situations—trying to understand the links and associations, frictions and conflicts. The ‘performance’ of the Queer is an important aspect, as in identity politics the body becomes an archive of pain, a symbol of oppression, a site of resistance. How is this resistance performed, in everyday spaces, through bodies in the parties? Through words? Images? Sounds? Virtual identities? It is a question that needs to be addressed to be able to problematize the mainstream Queer scene and also understand its power, its potential. That is exactly what I intend to do through this work.

Implications for programs

After broadly reviewing the social and political circumstance under which LGBT identity politics operates in India, let me now clarify what is the implication of a donor-induced LGBT identity politics within the context of HIV/AIDS. Many LGBT-rights activists (including academics) have contended that marriage and family as institutions come in the way of people's ‘coming out’ process, and the familial pressure for marriage in India does not allow individuals to ‘come out’ as gays/lesbians³⁹. Thus due to familial pressure, they lead a ‘double life’ as bisexual (*ibid.*) with ‘repressed’ sexualities. Such an explanation seems to be oversimplistic, as it does not consider all the social and political implications of ‘coming out’ in a transitional ‘homophobic’ society. While ‘coming out’ may be a politically empowering option, it remains unclear how the ‘homophobia’ inherent within the family

³⁹ Op cit. Seabrook, Thadani Giti: Sakhiani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India. London, Cassell; 1996.

could be dealt with or whether it would be a desirable alternative to take a 'Queer' out of the family to declare himself as 'gay.' It captures much less that if people are living as bisexuals within marriage, whether promoting divorce would be a desirable program strategy for donors to let people develop their sexual identity independent of the familial control! 'Confession,' in the same political rhetoric of the West, may create a more deepening social and political problem of 'homophobia,' cultural nationalism, and fascist resistance in Eastern societies, including loss of psycho-social and economic support structures for 'out' gays. However, one may always argue the other way that 'coming out' in a globalizing world may actually enhance economic opportunities if one happens to belong to the privileged lot of the urban, educated elite.

Second, a donor-induced LGBT identity politics also leads to the globalization of categories. As Shannon Woodcock pointed out, 'freeing' the pre-existing categories of sexual identities from repressed social positions could be read as a 'movement of containment.' Through defining traditional sexual practices as politicized LGBT identities, 'the existing multiplicities of sexual practice and ways of performing them in society are formalized in new western categories with their specific place in an international political trajectory. In order to form these new communal identities, individuals are urged to participate in the self-perpetuating western culture of *confessing*⁴⁰ that creates a new set of organizing sexual identities damaging the existing, more subtle ones. What is being globalized, thus, is an American version of confrontational Queerness without recognizing the social and political structure of Eastern societies. In India, barring a few NGOs,

⁴⁰ Woodcock Shannon: Globalization of LGBT Identities: Containment Masquerading as Salvation or Why Lesbians Have Less Fun. In *Gender and the (Post) 'East'/'West' Divide*. Edited by Frunza Michaela, Theodora-Eliza Vacarescu. Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest, Limes; 2004.

existing multiplicities of Queer sexualities such as *bijras*, *kothis*, *kinnars*, *panthis*, *jogtas*, *dangas*, *alis*, *double-deckers*, *chbakkas*, and *dhuranis* are commonly clubbed together by HIV/AIDS activists as LGBTs thus redefining existing sexual identities/practices.

A short note on Queer Musicology

Queer musicology came out of the closet in 1977 when British-born Berkeley professor Philip Brett presented a paper on "Benjamin Britten's music in terms of gay identity" at the North American Musicology conference. In 1994, Brett put out the book 'Queering the Pitch: the new gay and lesbian musicology'. It was a "big flag-waving thing, very exciting," according to Whitesell, "the first big manifesto."⁴¹ Sensitive historical research calls for a different kind of interpretation and evidence, "because of the censorship and the social stigma." You can engage in "closer readings of operas or certain works looking for gay or lesbian themes. How private concerns of an author can be expressed in a coded way." Other than getting the historical facts straight, so to speak, the Queer meanings of music should be available to all. The Queer meaning is interesting for those who want to know about it, but what do other listeners do with that knowledge? That is why I'm coming at it from a different perspective, saying, well, the music itself is inviting you. It's not specifically forcing anything, but it's forcing you in a different way of thinking. So that's for all listeners in a way.

What happens when we listen, what does it mean to say that we are subjects of this symphony or opera or a musical piece? How do we position ourselves to relate to the

⁴¹ Lloyd Whitesell, *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, a compilation of essays on gender, sexuality and music from 1870-1950, co-editor- Sophie Fuller, University of Illinois Press, 2010

singer of a song cycle? What's the gender of the performer, of the lyric persona, of the audience? If you have a male-authored song with a male persona sung by a woman listened to by a woman, that's interesting. How do you identify with that, and what kind of different meanings might that bring up?

We also talk about Sylvester James, the 'Queen' of Disco, and also about Maurice Ravel, whom a lot of people suspect of being gay, but there's really no evidence, no smoking gun. He's very private to the point of being closeted, you could say, but we don't know closeted of what. It is also very interesting, that however serious they were about discotheques, most researchers kept quiet about it for a long time. Then a glorious decade gave birth to two pools of disco studies. One describes injuries, illnesses and other ills that should or could be blamed on discos and disco music. The other tells about a world of exciting disco-inspired and disco-enabled – in short, disco-fuelled – investigations. Dr MS Swani of Birmingham is an example of the first.

Margaret Doyle Pappalardo wrote her doctoral thesis, at Boston University, on *The Effects of Discotheque Dancing on Selected Physiological and Psychological Parameters of College Students*.

And a graduate student at the University of Bergen sought not the side-effects of disco, but its heart. Bruce Taylor's monograph called *Shake, Slow, and Selection: An Aspect of the Tradition Process Reflected by Discotheque Dances in Bergen, Norway*, appeared in the journal *Ethnomusicology*. He interviewed patrons near the dance floor.

"According to them," Taylor wrote, "the most important principle is to follow the rhythm and the beat, but variation is also necessary, and a good dancer is interested in the dance as

well as in his partner ... Conversations between strangers are begun, personal contact is achieved, and many of the guests who arrived alone are actively interested in leaving for home with a new acquaintance."

However powerful these claims may sound, that disco started as a heterosexual concern, is a consistently contested phenomenon. One important work to be quoted here is *"I Want to See All My Friends At Once": Arthur Russell and the Queering of Gay Disco* by Tim Lawrence, who looks at the disco culture through a Queer lens in order to explore not just the mixed composition of early dance crowds, which he takes to be historically given, but, more importantly, the way in which both the dance floor experience and disco's musical aesthetics could be said to be Queer (rather than gay). He also examines how disco producers, responding to the mainstreaming of disco culture from the mid-1970s onwards, took the genre in fresh and unsettling directions. These questions are explored through the decidedly odd figure of Arthur Russell, whose disco releases stand as an allegory of the unexplored relationship between gay and Queer disco.

If I remember correctly, Carl Bean's "I Was Born This Way" was the first disco record to address gay sexuality as a public issue, wasn't it? I wonder if Gaga's 'Born this way' is what encourages me to think that way? Yet the record did not get played outside of gay clubs and Bean did not develop his theme.⁴² I also criticize The Village People & Sylvester who was significantly less shy than the Village People when it came to declaring his sexuality,

⁴² Lawrence, Tim, *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture (1970–79)*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2004a, 326-7

but his route into disco was accidental and initially reluctant, and he wrote only one song, “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real),” that explicitly addressed “gay disco”⁴³

In India, there is an almost negligible amount of work done on Queer musicology, certainly none so far to deal with Queer clubs and discotheques and this being one of the pioneer works, hence lays grounds for further research.

A short note by the Author

This work is an attempt to understand my life, my identity.

It was a night like this—a cold winter night, at around 11:30 p.m., drunk on red wine, cozy in the arms of my then partner—Z; I went for the first Queer party of my life. That was the first time I found myself in a social situation filled with Queer men (apart from my casual strolls in a Queer park a couple of times), and young as I was, I just couldn’t handle all the attention I received. We broke up that night. It was a big blow to me; it made me reconsider so much about myself—about what I want in life. That set me into this journey, where I came across many, many Queer people, hung out with remarkably different Queer circles, participated in discussions and arguments—basically, just kept looking for myself. What does it mean to be Queer? What are my struggles, my questions, my associations, my disagreements with this community? In this work, I try to tell some of the stories which I

⁴³ Diebold, David. *Tribal Rites: San Francisco’s Dance Music Phenomenon 1977–1988*. Northridge, CA: Time Warp Publishing, 1988. 28-31

have lived, and through them open up a wider discourse, where we can introspect and look at identities, not in isolation but as matrices. How does my Identity as an Indian, Hindu, upper caste, urban, upper middle class male Queer set me aside from other Queer identities? How are they all related and confronted? The discotheque space remains my subject of fascination, of disgust, of lust, of angst, of pleasure, and pain. It is still the largest physical gathering of Queer men in Delhi, apart from their virtual presence on Planetromeo (henceforth, PR) and hence in this work I look at them side by side, like parallel worlds. My objective is both simple and not so simple. On the one hand I try to look at some simple, basic questions. Some of them, because I'm genuinely interested in them, and some of them, because due to a lack of enough serious work in India, a lot of these seemingly basic questions have not got enough attention, and without that, we really cannot move forward. I don't promise to come up with any answers yet, but do try to present different perspectives and clarify my set of choices. I start with a kind of a linguistic work, and try to understand language and its connection with identity in the first chapter. It is a problematic terrain; the colonial/post-colonial discourse opens up an understanding of language which is not free from the idioms of such politics. I problematize our usage of the terms and also bring in the class issue. I challenge time further in the second chapter, and clubbing it with the Internet, complicate the matrix, where virtual identities start floating. Music starts emerging as a 'new language' here, a mode of connection both on the 'virtual' as well as 'real' world. By placing a discussion on the 'ghazals' and 'item numbers' side by side, I push the idea of this Identity performance. Then, eventually in the third chapter, I ask a question that intrigues me the most, "*Is music really a language then? A 'new language' that communicates with people? What does it say?*" by establishing the relationship between people, their virtual identities and then their participation in these parties, I bring back my critique

of the Internet as a place which divides spaces more than unifying it, it breaks it into smaller spaces (from websites to pages to chat rooms to chat boxes) and simultaneously look at the discotheques and more specifically, the music as a site of performance where that ‘segregation’ is constantly challenged and simultaneously practiced. I look at ‘trance’ and ‘dance’ to understand this body and soul (not body ‘or’ soul) phenomenon.

Like inverted commas, I begin and end this work with two extremely personal narratives. The blog entry communication between me and Z that marked my first active piece of writing around Queerness, also marks the opening of this work, and the first autobiographical piece written by my partner, my love, my inspiration—Nishant, opens it up further, at what seems to be the end of this work, for many more stories and experiences, and work on Queer-ness. They are the two moments which have inspired me to be able to do this work. My association with Nishant and later discussions with Steven, have helped me look at issues at hand in a way that I would’ve never imagined to. As unrelated as both these pieces may seem, they are actually two significant moments in the journey that this work tries to trace.

A major question is, how do I write it? What language should I use to tell the story of the ones marginalized by language itself? I flirt with language thus, say things and use words sometimes, that I’m forbidden to, maybe, but then, if I were to take everything that is forbidden so seriously, I wouldn’t be writing this, right?

There’s also a question of time. I believe linearity of time is a dominantly patriarchal—and by virtue of it—a hetero-normative notion. This is the time in which the stories of women

and Queer people have been buried, like stones under imperial architecture. To talk of an alternative history, I must first create an alternative time. I break the linearity of time throughout this work, and as a result, there are places where elements may seem unconnected or incomplete... but I assure the reader that by the end, they will all come together like a Van Dycke painting, where the chandelier, the medals, the dog, the slippers, the window, the cherry flowers, the ring—the reflection, all come together to create an abstract meaning. I don't assure any complete-ness though, that's not what I seek either.

Ankush Gupta

PROLOGUE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2008

on 'Z'

Sometimes a small casual meeting can have so many side-effects... and long-lasting ones. Like the prime motif of Beethoven's 'Für Elise', that's playing on my soundbox right now... the simple little touch and its equally soft responses that this piece so beautifully incarnates... my mind takes me back to that moment... when we shared some whispers, floating in the atmosphere and covering us from all the side, as if hiding us from the world for those intimate moments, those soft little whispers, and their responses... those gazes, touches... smiles. Our body is so full of music, only one should know how to play it.

The obvious query comes up to me, kisses me and says "Hail Rabbi" when I know all it wants is my crucifixion on the frozen wall of time. Is it love?⁴⁴ Do I really need to answer? The impotence of words in explaining and defining the innermost feelings is an issue I keep on complaining about all the time. Then why not this time? Somebody asked me, what do I want to come out of it? I said, 'Nothing.' Do I really need anything else to come out, except the pure bliss, the nectar of which has filled me all over... and I'm brimful. I know it's all very romantic, one can argue about the reality side of it... what is the future? And is it really feasible. I know, an open relationship seems like a mirage to most of us, and we-- two commitment scared souls have found a unique manifestation in this relationship... even if this is a mirage (which, by the way, I guess every relationship is) then this one is a beautiful one.

My hand has always been full of pearls, of distinct shine, texture and colour. There have been times when a pearl or two has rolled down from my lousy hands... and their shadows have rolled down from my eyes at those moments... watery shadows. Every such shadow has written a testimony for my emotional attachment, and more, for the regular and most natural of all human habits- to hold on. Somewhere, interestingly enough, we all are also scared of this habit- of holding on... of being possessed, being owned... being caged! But at the same time, human beings have got so accustomed to acquiring everything through power that they are

⁴⁴ Like Judas kissed Jesus and said 'Hail Rabbi' to point him out to the soldiers and hence, betrayed him.

also always insecure about these things being snatched away in the same way... and this is where words like relationship, commitment and marriage come in. So the result is a society where an emotion becomes inept to be defined unless it falls into any one of these conventional norms.

When I was born, I had no name... a piece of soft flesh... with a hue of the beauty of the world, a drop of innocence and a little ignorant soul was all I had (sometimes, really, ignorance is bliss) with only one relationship with the physical world... of breath... of hollowness (exhaling) and fulfillment (inhaling)... 23 years later, I share the same relationship with the world (though now I share a name too, the water is all contaminated, and the soul has turned into an arrogant one.), of hollowness and fulfillment. Interestingly, one leads to the other. The only refuge is... if you believe me, the moment of a kiss. That is the only moment, when the hollowness and fulfillment get interspersed with each other, losing any distinct character which can separate them in any possible manner. Perhaps it becomes possible, because at that moment... you share yourself with someone else... and stand as one. So you share someone else's hollowness and vice versa. For me... all beauty of life lies in that one moment... the moment of sharing... the moment of unification... the moment of pure bliss...with nothing behind... nothing forward...

Whenever people ask me, what Z is for me? I say... Z is that moment of pure bliss for me...that moment of sharing... that moment of togetherness!

When was the last time you did something without a reason? When something deep inside you compelled you to look at the surrounding things... and smile... without getting any physical gain from it? When was the last time... after getting completely tired after a hectic day, you've waited to meet someone... and stayed awake all night? If life was a human, she would've lived in all those moments... those precious moments.

And then there are people who make every moment equally precious and cherishable. Yes, we are remarkably different people, with different opinions, different points of view and different aspirations about just anything under the sun... but when we are together... we share them... even the differences... and that's the beautiful part. I have seen the darker sides of that 'carved' body and Z has seen that my 'kissable' lips have venom too... so it's 'all said and done'. Yes, life is a series of discoveries... and tomorrow is uncertain. I won't claim that this is what I've always been looking for... and all that shit... actually I've never known what I've been looking for... but yes, some right button is pressed... and some beautiful thing is initiated...don't know what destiny keeps for me... but until this discovery is on... I have things to look forward to... and I'm keeping my fingers crossed....

Posted by [ankush gupta](#) at 9:52 AM

1 comments:



z said...

Here i am at long last with my long overdue reaction to your breathtaking, not to mention mind-boggling outpourings. What can i say, nothing i am capable of thinking can come anywhere close to your infinitely beautiful expressions.

I am overwhelmed to say the least. All that passion, all that intensity, all that eloquence, all that sincerity - leaves me awe struck.

Yes it is awe - never in my wildest dreams did i imagine for even a moment that somebody could speak such volumes and so remarkably too, of such an unremarkable creature as myself.

The nagging thought is that is all of this justified? What have i done to deserve such tender dedication, such sweet devotion?

You swept into my life like a gust of pure unadulterated air and filled up my senses and lifted me to another level of existence altogether. You make me laugh, you make me cry, you make me jealous (yes there u have it), you make me exasperated, you make me happy, you make me sad, you make me complete, you make me feel so special, you make me afraid, you make me proud ... and i could go on and on into he endless abyss of cyber space.

So mismatched, yet so perfectly in harmony, so different yet so alike. I can't even begin to appreciate some of your greatest passions in life. You don't have an inkling of some of mine. And

yet we don't even fit the traditional definition of being exact opposites.

Where do we go from here, what lies in store for us, is there a future, do we share a destiny? All questions we dare not analyse. But is there really a need to do that? For what we have going in the here and now is so special that i feel blessed enough that i am able to experience something like this. Even if it were to end at this instant, it would remain with me for the rest of my existence. So let it flow, tomorrow doesn't matter as long as we have today in our hands.

[November 21, 2008 9:44 AM](#)

First Night

Rohan

“Hey Ankush, Rohan here. The reaction may be delayed but is still intense. I leave for home (London) tomorrow and wont be able to access email or PR until quite late in the evening. However, here is my email address, write to me. Woo me. Spoil me.” SMS , 9 April 2011, 10:43:42

It is difficult to say whether it is the fog or the smoke. My autorickshaw is flying over the almost deserted road, somewhere near Rajouri Garden. Geographically challenged that I am, I wouldn't have identified the area had I not seen the metro station. My phone starts ringing; I can barely hear him in all the noise that the vehicle is making. He sounds nervous – ‘very nervous’. I assure him I'll reach soon and can almost imagine him making a sad face. He is also worried that he's wearing shorts and may not be allowed inside the party. I tell him how the organizer is my friend and when I had asked him to confirm the same, he had mischievously suggested ‘you can come *naked* if you want’. He doesn't sound convinced, but gives up. I hurriedly look at my watch—it's hardly 10:30. I should've taken some more time.

Since the parties have started in these parts of Delhi, so much has changed; a completely new party culture has emerged. Delhi as a city is interestingly divided into these zones. The zones have marked the class-culture divide that this otherwise cosmopolitan city inhabits. So if you are in North Delhi, you are sure to find crowded streets, herds of students living in these majorly

overpopulated and overpriced hostels which are run by Punjabis, all through Hudson Lane. These hostels have strict timings and high prices. The places in south Delhi are very different, where young settlers from other cities live. They all look remarkably the same—Katwaria Sarai, Ber Sarai, Jia Sarai⁴⁵, Munirka. The congested streets and the buildings; so close to each other that sometimes it seems as if one is growing out of the other, or an architectural intercourse. Usually these houses have no view at all—just a nude wall, standing shamelessly right in front of your window... or sometimes a balcony, dangerously close to yours, making you trespass into your neighbor's life and witness his life, like your personal soap opera. My sense memory brings back the smell of the damp clothes hanging on such balconies, the faces of all those unsuspecting neighbors, the sounds coming from their televisions, the light entering through the partially open windows of otherwise darkened rooms, the blue silhouettes of human forms, moving, like the waves; embracing me, every time they approach, and filling my mouth with a taste, that I savor at the tip of my tongue. Covering my body, with a thin sheet of water... resting themselves, sometimes on my waist, sometimes on my chest, sometimes on my lips...

Earlier these parties would happen in south Delhi, the timings are flexible and the money flow is easier, but now as the clientele is increasing, and the number of parties every week is going up with sometimes as many as three parties on the same night. The party circle has got spread all across the city, although there are still a lot of discussions about how Polka has a cheap crowd and how Pepperz is still the most popular club, even though it hosts a party on an unlikely Tuesday night. The Pink Friday has also started and they keep

⁴⁵ Sarai is an urdu word that means an 'Inn', hinting at the impermanent status of the residents in these areas. Thank You Prof. Soumyabrata Chowdhary for pointing it out to me.

changing their venue every week to be able to reach a wider clientele. So here I am, on my way to the party, and on my second date with Rohan D'souza.

I can see the only familiar road now, indicating that I'm quite close to the venue. I start looking for him. He is standing at the other side of the road—waiting for me. I get down, and before I can even take my wallet out to pay the autowallah, I see him struggling through the heartless traffic and running towards me. He hugs me very, very tightly. I can smell the perfume on his neck. I grip his waist with my palms, and run them over his back, reaching for his hair, and pulling him back a little, I kiss his dry, nervous lips. The autowallah honks impatiently to remind me of the unfinished transaction. As I turn to pay him, I can see a line of smile on his lips... his eyes have a glitter which was not there before. I choose to ignore it. Too engrossed in my lover whose hand is gripping my waist by now, and whose lips are rubbing against my shoulder. "I was so scared" he says pleadingly. "Why?" I ask, trying to sound innocent. "Oh! I don't know. That auto-guy dropped me at the other side of the road. And then all of a sudden, I saw all these effeminate men surrounding me, in DRAG! Waiting for their 'customers'. A couple of men on bikes came and stopped near me... I was so scared you know, I felt so unsafe! I thought to myself, why did this boy invite me here?" We are walking by now, through quiet, narrow lanes. We cross a small park, and there—right in front of us is the only Friday night gay party venue in Delhi. The security guard at the gate (not a bouncer, I assure you) stops us, but as soon as I tell him that I know the organizer and name him a couple of times, the gates are opened for us. His shorts are not even given any notice. He doesn't know that the people whom he just encountered on the 'other side of the road' were supposed to be here, inside this building. But the invite clearly states that the entry

would be ‘on profile only and NOT for Drags! (fig.1)’. We all know what it means. This is a posh club of the capital of India, and as it ‘celebrates’ identity tonight—calling itself an LGBT party... it very neatly cuts out a slice—the ‘upper layer’ (or shall we call it the ‘creamy’ one? Pun intended) of the society and leaves the rest of it out of the pan. Yes it is a party that celebrates sexuality, but a sexuality which can afford itself. It is a ‘Queer’ (?) party, not one for ‘kothis’⁴⁶.

I also wonder about how money plays a funny role in all this... is it a party about gender, about class, gender with class? One of the most important contributions of postmodernism has been its defense of an aesthetic of the ‘consumer’, rather than, as in the case of romanticism and modernism, an aesthetic of the producer, in turn linked to an individualist and phallogocentric ego ideal. Here, in this Queer (male) discotheque, this aesthetic acquires multiple levels. Mary Russo’s notion of ‘making a spectacle of oneself’ comes alive, but shall we also read the ‘spectacle’ here, given the notions of consumerism involved, in the way Debord reads it, ‘the accumulation of capital to a point that it becomes an image’, and if so, then the whole point of ‘inclusiveness’ about Queer politics gets jeopardized—how can a movement about inclusion be exclusive in nature? If we read it in a reverse way—the way, say, we would read drag as a ‘masquerade’ that Case refers to, or as an ‘emulation’ that Peggy Phelan talks about—then there’s a constant negation, a marginalization of this (the identity of the transgenders) in these clubs, turning it into the ‘masculine’ customers, and the feminine ‘drag/queen prostitutes’. In both the cases, the money, the status quo is the decisive factor. What is the point of intersection between these then? If there is a ‘Queer’ in the ‘Queer’ sense, then who is the ‘non-Queer’? The obsession with labels has been

⁴⁶ The effeminate male who is penetrated, For more on the history and use of the term ‘kothi’, see Cohen: 2005; khanna: 2010; Reddy: 2005. I use this term also as a class signifier and work on it in a little more detail later.

constantly criticized by the Third World scholarship. Patricia Hill Collins, in a recent discussion⁴⁷ pointed out that she is aware of communities in Ghana where homosexuality was accepted as a general behavior, but with the coming of identity politics, and the terminology, there was suddenly a rise in people thinking of it as a 'western intervention' resulting in extreme homophobia, and corrective rapes. Vinay Lal⁴⁸ also discusses 'homophobia' as a phenomenon which should be brought under scrutiny for several reasons including, looking at it as a colonial intervention. But what I get more concerned with is the 'phobia' within the community, the 'straight acting, non-feminine only' approach, and norms of 'decency' and 'tolerable behavior' solely defined by heterosexual semiotics.

Is there a Language of the Queer? –

...there is no word in our language that can describe what we are or how we feel for each other...

- Sita, while convincing her lesbian-lover (sister-in-law) to break away from her marital relationship and run away with her, Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1998)

The discotheque is very crowded, and as we push our way towards the bar, caressing many transcendent (?) (More on this in chapter 3) bodies, he keeps passing fond smiles at me. On our way, we hear a long trail of words coming from all walks of life. As he unknowingly bumps into a certain urban middle class looking man, he snaps back 'देख के चल रंडी' (walk with your eyes open, slut!), I can see him feeling sad and hurt. Finally, after emerging triumphant from the bar, we sit at the patio, sipping the white wine. We continue the discussion that we had left the previous afternoon, "It is difficult to find a really Queer

⁴⁷ Personal discussion, Colonial Legacies, Postcolonial Contestations: Decolonizing the Social Sciences and the Humanities. International Graduate Conference - Frankfurt am Main 06/11

⁴⁸ "Masculinity and Femininity in *The Chess Players*: Sexual Moves, Colonial Manoeuvres, and an Indian Game", in *Manushi: A Journal of Women and Society*, nos. 92-93 (Jan.-April 1996):41-50.

facebook.com https://www.facebook.com/events/293802350698590/

facebook Search

- No Drag.
- No Hanky Panky.
- No Helmets.
- Did we miss.....STRICTLY.

What you should do?


- Dress to kill.....best party wear in your wardrobe.
- Get your best dancing shoes out.
- Maintain the decor of the party and venue.
- Smoke only in the smoking zone area.
- Smile...smile...smile
- Dance.... dance... dance
- Drink...Drink..Drink(Till you do not fall)

Note :

- Co-operate with the organizers and venue staff.
- We are here to welcome.... and we just wish to do that... so please do not mis-behave.
- Your classy and peppy behavior should open our doors to new ventures and more artists for our community.
- Rights of admission reserved.
- No Discount or membership cards applicable on that day at the venue.
- Credit cards accepted.
- Club Rules Apply.
- Carry an identity proof.....this is to ensure no minors are allowed.
- Anyone found using or carrying any drug / illegal substance will not be allowed to our event and if found inside the venue will be escorted out of the venue and will be banned from any of our events in future.
- You may be allowed to be frisked for security reasons.

Write Post Add Photo / Video Ask Question

Write something...

 **Ankush Gupta**

I feel sad/outraged/disgusted by the fact that even though you call it a party also for Transgenders, you say Strictly NO to DRAGS? I don't understand whether you even know what LGBT stands for? I wouldn't come ofr a party that discriminates even within the LGBT community and I wonder how are you any different from the patriarchal heteronormative people that LGBT movement aims at fighting against. SHAME!

Fig.1

way to communicate, in a language which is so heteronormative and patriarchal, so you shouldn't feel sad about it." I press his hand as I say this. A question that has bewildered me forever and continues to do so is how do we find a truly Queer language? The language we use is filled with terminology that re-inforces hierarchies and stereotypes, normativizes gender roles and sexualities. The problem, I think, is that language has acquired the status of the absolute in its own right. It has been assumed in popular spaces that language, instead of being a reference to what you 'could' be, has acquired the status of determining what you 'should' be. From being a part of you, it has transformed into this entity which

seems to be attempting to encapsulate you. This is where any kind of terminology becomes problematic. ‘Queer’, for example, is not only a fairly new term, its utility in the Indian context needs to be severely interrogated. If I take the argument forward from what Vinay Lal argues in his text, I would say that it is important to understand how ‘language’ is an important aspect of the politics of Gender and Sexuality. Originally coming from the German word ‘quer’, meaning “*across, at right angle, diagonally or transverse*”, Queer was usually used to denote ‘strange or unusual’. However, around the beginning of the 20th century it had already acquired sexual connotation and was used for sexually deviant men⁴⁹. In March 1990, the word was reclaimed by an organization called ‘Queer Nation’. The word still connotes a certain kind of politics, and ‘accessibility’. In Delhi for example, the word Queer doesn’t only belong to a ‘sexual’ community, but also to a certain political understanding—a lifestyle. Often in personal/public spaces I encounter people criticizing somebody with ‘he’s not Queer, he’s just Gay.’ Which makes me wonder whether, after all its claims, Queer can really be used as an umbrella term. In the introduction of the book ‘Because I have a Voice - Queer politics in India’ its editors Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan say,

“The term ‘Queer’ is...both a deeply personal identity and a defiant political perspective; it embodies within itself a rejection of the primacy of the heterosexual, patriarchal family as the cornerstone of our society... Queer politics speaks of larger understandings of gender and sexuality in our society that affect us all, regardless of our sexual orientation.”

As much as it is important to understand ‘Queer’ as a way of living (or lifestyle?) which questions patriarchy and heteronormativity, an obvious question is, But then, *whose* way of living? As said earlier, ‘If there *is* a Queer, then who is the non-Queer?’ Does it unconsciously fall into the trap of a homo-normative behavior? Adding to this is the layer

⁴⁹ An early recorded usage of the word in this sense was in a letter by John Sholto Douglas, 9th Marquess of Queensberry to his son Lord Alfred Douglas.

of ‘class’, the ‘accessibility’ that I referred to earlier. Is ‘Queer’ a class-based word in Indian scenario?

The Case of ‘Queer Campus’ and Language as Performance

Queer campus is a group which lays its objective as follows:

“Queer Campus is an independent Queer student and youth collective active since 2010. We use the term Queer to refer not just to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people, but to any identity or outlook which questions stereotypes. We provide a comfortable space to meet new people, discuss everything and anything – from coming out to breaking-up, the latest Queer film to plans of changing the World – or offer a shoulder to cry on and friends to celebrate with! QC organizes events which are free and open to all.”⁵⁰

The Delhi Queer Campus group on Facebook has around thousand (and still counting) members, and is one of the most active groups. Most of the participants in it, however, belong to the upper middle-class strata of society, and the posts range from the political to the personal, to sexual jokes and favorite songs, simultaneously also brimming with racism, sexism, regionalism and sometimes extreme misogyny (it is noticeable that there are only a handful of female members, and just five or six transgenders in this group.) However, there is an interesting point to notice here – how a certain kind of language ‘normativizes’ the accessibility of this space, and hence how identity is performed through a certain kind of use of it. Although, there are constant claims about how language is *not* a criterion to be able to participate in the discussions that happen in the space, a certain kind of bias towards it can be easily seen. Like every group, this group is also majorly controlled by some very active members who keep posting and “liking” things. It is noticeable how certain kinds of posts get more participation as opposed to certain other kinds. I’ll give some examples:

⁵⁰ Queer campus, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/199099973473882/>

XYZ- “The only good thing about this sultry weather is the wet, sweaty sex you can have in it. There is something absolutely erotic about making out in a dimly lit room, on a bed with a white sheet, while Bryan Adams plays 'Lets Make a Night'. As the session gets increasingly passionate you suddenly get a waft of the heady scent of sweat mixed with his cologne and your itr...a scent that beats poppers any day...As you change positions, you notice the sheet has taken on a darker shade and turned almost translucent...you look back, up at him, and this naughty drop of sweat trickles down, to form a red pearl against the dark silhouette of his sharp nose, just before it drips onto your neck..Body sliding against body, teeth against soft, moist skin, claws against taut, muscled back... a glorious sensory fest, drowned in sharp breaths, deep moans, and the final guttural climax....your skin carries his scent hours after you awaken the next morning and feel oh so reluctant to shower.”

A post like the above one has the maximum chances of getting a lot of people commenting on it. Its graphic description on the one hand underlines an interesting display of sexual politics, and on the other also determines its ‘audience’. Actually, it’s not just about the audience; if you notice it has all the elements of a performance—text, body, space and the audience. This audience is also determined by meticulously choosing elements of ‘common understanding’ and anyway, what *is* language, but a system of shared signs? In the above post, what holds my interest is the selection of the Bryan Adams song and through it, the creation of a target audience, even though on the surface, the discussion may ‘seem’ to be on the common grounds of a sexual fantasy.

.....

Interviewing people about their choices of songs, during ‘lovemaking’, I came across an interesting set of possibilities. What is it that one ‘really’ looks for when they are choosing music for ‘lovemaking’? In the above post for example, Bryan Adams’ ‘let’s make a night’⁵¹ is the song that is chosen. The song has lyrics that go as follows:

*“I love the way ya look tonight
With your hair hangin' down on your shoulders*

⁵¹ (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJZTxIAB_ew)

*N' I love the way ya dance your slow sweet tango
 The way ya wanna do everything but talk
 And how ya stare at me with those undress me eyes
 Your breath on my body makes me warm inside*

*Let's make out - let's do something amazing
 Let's do something that's all the way
 Cuz I've never touched somebody like the way I touch
 your body
 Now I never want to let your body go...*

Let's make a night - to remember"

It is very interesting, how the above quoted ‘Americanized’⁵² English (with uses of ya, hangin’, N’I, wanna, cuz etc.) is exactly the language that is mostly used in the posts on this forum. Any deviance from this norm is constantly criticized, sometime in subtle, sometimes in *not so* subtle ways. A lot of times, people post messages that they get on PR (Planet Romeo, a gay dating website, more on it later) and criticize them for their ‘bad English’, here’s an example:

[ABC]- Ok so i died laughing after reading this message from some random guy on PR

From: [ABCDEFGH]

When: 26. Jun. 2012 - 18:03

Hi dear,

I m here

and u r there

but dont care

far or near,

we can share

happiness and tear

come here

thora or near

sit on chair

⁵² I understand that this language is not specific to America anymore, and that popular culture has made it more widespread and culturally complex.

listen with care
I MISS U dEAR.

#PRjokes..

Like · · Follow Post · [13 minutes ago](#)

[WER]- Hababababa sit on chair

[ABC]- and listen with caaree :p

[WER]- Omg so I just searched that profile on pr and I died laughing... after seeing his second picture of the profile... omfg habababababa

[KG]- Oooo he is Just turnings me on!! :D

[ABC]- He is a dick decorater i believe :p

[KG]- hababa dick decorater.... hababa tell bim smoking is injurious to health...

The language obsession has reached a level where the term ‘grammar Nazi’ (somebody who might kill anyone with bad grammar) is widely used on this forum now, and even during serious discussions, people come in with ‘spell-checks’. (For a significant example, see fig. 2)

The first comment, with an etymological reference is a clear example of how language plays an important role in the premise of interaction in QC. In order to interact on this forum, thus, it is ‘not’ just your sexual identity, but also your linguistic capacity—as a signifier of your status (as there’s no other way you can claim your ‘superiority’ over the others in a virtual space) plays an important role. Language here, is majorly a performance of class⁵³.

⁵³ I understand that class is also complicated here, and would try to discuss it when I deal with PR.

Rohan takes another sip from his drink, looks at me with appreciation. “I didn’t know you’ve been following QC so religiously (wink), is it because of that famous post with your picture which has crossed more than 300 comments?” “And none by me” I smile back. He looks out of the window, at the crazily dancing bodies; suddenly a thought comes to his mind, “So you mean to say language here doesn’t address the Queer identity at all?” I respond almost immediately, “Of course it does, but still in a very class-based way. Words like ‘Fabulous’ in a stretched fashion (faaaabulous) become markers of sexual identity, but this sexual identity is still not bereft of class. The linguistic concept of ‘focus’ is significant here, how different devices can be used to ‘focus’ on something in a sentence, and how the choice of the device is just one of the many available options⁵⁴. In the case of Queer campus, following what is generally coming up as a Queer ‘lingo’, there is an assumption of the use of a common device to show focus. That device is ‘stress’. By laying certain kind of stress to the words used, a kind of a common performativity of identity is attained. In the above example, the constant stretching of words is a part of the same game.”

“Hmm... makes sense,” he says, still lost in his thoughts, “but then coming back to the music part, how do you think it operates?”

“As in?” I ask.

“Let me tell you something,” he bends down to talk to me, “You know when I went to London, the first thing that I wanted to do was to sing. So I went to learn music, and my teacher asked me to sing, and in my bid to impress him, I sang a male soprano piece. He said, well, it is fine, but that’s not you, and handed me the sheets of the countertenor piece

⁵⁴ I thank my friends Hima and Janani for introducing me to this concept.

from ‘The Threepenny Opera’ and as I sang the first verse, I knew, this was me. I knew I could associate with this sound. ‘Association’, yes, that’s the word.”

What are the factors that determine the choice of this song? Anurag* , a law graduate I interviewed, suggests—“Lyrics, I think the words, the poetry, the way it would express my emotions for my loved one would be the most important thing.” He likes ‘Nights In White Satin’ a 1967 single, by The Moody Blues, the most. He quotes from it

*Nights in white satin, never reaching the end,
Letters I've written, never meaning to send.
Beauty I'd always missed with these eyes before.
Just what the truth is, I can't say anymore.*

*'Cos I love you, yes I love you, oh how I love you.*⁵⁵

In the case of Amit Malhotra, a 21 year old graphic designer, however, it would be Ghulam Ali’s ghazals⁵⁶, “They help me relax and feel romantic about my partner, I can’t have sex without an element of romance in it.” For Uday* however, old Hindi film songs are the perfect mood-maker; for Taksh* it is Spanish party music, he says—“I like the moans to drown into the loud thumping beats, also they give me a kind of a power boost, which as a ‘top’ I think is very helpful.”⁵⁷

There are some significant points that emerge from the above discussion—how there is a wide variety in the same ‘class’ (all the participants belong, loosely to the upper middle class) when it comes to the selection of music. Of course, what kind of music we like

⁵⁵ (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbY8FW3df2Y>) webcite

⁵⁶ (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrJzyd2Wbw4>) webcite

⁵⁷ (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux1LVyhs6Pg&fb_source=message) webcite

depends upon a lot of factors. Even the way we relate with it can be drastically different, owing to how we have been ‘cultured’ to understand music. In the above discussion, for example, anything from the lyrics, to the voice to the rhythm can formulate the basis for the selection of some kind of music. Is there, then, any commonality? Maybe in the exclusion of contemporary Hindi film music by this group. It is surprising, that out of the fifteen people that I asked this question, not even one showed his liking towards that music, although in response to another question, this genre came up as inarguably the most popular one. Was there anything wrong with the ‘kind’ of people I was asking the question to? Should I make my interviewees ‘more’ diverse? How? I contemplated upon these questions, the high-brow sense of poetry, anglophilia, a ‘Western’ understanding/lifestyle? What really determines the selection of this music?



There also is a larger question, what defines the ‘Queer’ in Queer Campus then? Is it just somebody with same-sex desires, or someone who can afford to have them? In the light of this understanding, can we really use the term ‘Queer’ here at all? Is there another term, maybe, more local, that can be used instead?

What about the rest of the people who live in small towns and villages and have no access to either education or English or Internet? Their life is more hellish than ours. We must try and extend our co-operation to them, to the remotest of the remote. My meetings with LGBT people esp from the underprivileged, backward places were eye opening. When I first came to Delhi 6 years ago, I thought life will become heaven. Parties, booze, cute guys all around (ready to eat the ass anytime), shopping, friends working in fashion magazines and what not.

When I woke up, I realised I belong only to the elite 1% of the community. The lives of many a boys and gals are still extremely pitiable. Is it ethical to condemn them, mock at them for whatever lack they have? Our country still has millions of people who are homeless and do not get two square meals a day and still shitting in open grounds. Amongst them, say, 10% , also belong to the LGBT community. They also have dream like us. They also want to be with their soulmate one day.

I may be accused of whining here. And I know, I dont work much like other active members of QC and the big names. But I do have a heart and my heart bleeds when I see many forms of discrimination here. This is highly objectionable irrespective of your sexuality.

Having said that, I thoroughly enjoyed the initial few months at QC and attended 2 meetings so far last year. But, things have turned topsy turvy now. I dont have personal grudge against anyone. In fact, I have found some beautiful friends here and have also introduced a few others to this group. I will always support QC in spirit. Love you all.

By this time, we are already on the dance floor, swaying to and fro in each other's arms.

He has got some pretty cute moves, and as he tries to 'seduce' me with them, I hug him and kiss the dimple on his cheek. He smiles and gives me a little peck on my lips.

Dropping him back home, I think of asking him to come over, but then realize that he has an early morning flight to Jaipur; also, that after this we won't meet each other for a long, long time maybe. As I kiss him goodbye, I feel his fingers clutching my shoulders, as if he just doesn't want to leave. His eyes, innocent and beautiful, follow me till I'm far gone. My cell phone rings, it's his message. I anxiously wait as it opens for me to read—

"I could've danced all night, and still have begged for more. I could've spread my wings, and done a thousand things, I've never done before. I'll never know, what made it so exciting, why all at once my heart took flight... I only know when he, began to dance with me, I could've danced (and kissed) all night!"

I smile, and think of him; and of all the conversation we had that night as the auto drives me away...

Looking for a Parallel Term in another Language

“what defines the ‘Queer’ in Queer Campus then? Is it just somebody with same sex desires, or someone who can afford to have them? In the light of this understanding, can we really use the term ‘Queer’ here at all? Is there another term, maybe, more local, that can be used instead?”

I take up Hindi as a case study, and try to see if there is a word which has been popularly used before, say, a term like ‘gay’ came into popular practice. I start with introspecting an interesting popular term ‘gaybaazi’ and then trace it to ‘laundebaazi’, establishing the various cultural and social meanings that are embedded into the creation and use of such words, and hence underlining the reason why and how I use the term ‘Queer (male)’ as a self critical term here and not as a liberal ‘umbrella’ category.

a) Gaybaazi-

‘Gay’ is where the desire for the same sex has come to be historically framed as a matter of deep political and personal identity, where what you love has come to mean something central for what you are, something to be proud of. In the neologism, these deep identitarian strands mix with and get clumsily placed in ideas of habit and play of *baazi*. ‘Gaybaazi’ – the habit for gay things, playing about with being gay, doing gay sex – offsets the strong autobiographical and group element in the concept of ‘gay’, where it tries, always haphazardly, to mark the self and *those of the same kind*. Instead it injects ‘gay’ into another long, messy history of a non-medicalized addiction, of social habits that retain if only the

signature of the feudal, of taking an excessive interest in things, of experiencing the self in play. If there is a growing consensus that the colony was always a ‘laboratory of modernity’, not a simple site of exploitation, then we need to know what went into that lab experiment.⁵⁸

Here, I focus on the experiments around same-sex desire. I focus on *one* of the major constituents of that experiment – *laundebaaṛi* (habit for boys, inclination to play with them). If the ‘homosexual’ had more or less appeared by the 1920s on the colonial scene, residing in its university libraries and in specialized discussions among its metropolitan elite, then what were the other ways of framing same-sex desire that were interacting with it?⁵⁹ What were the back-stories of this experiment? The idea of the ‘homosexual’ brought with it connotations of being a medical circumstance, a condition, even a species of sorts, and

⁵⁸ For more on the colony as a ‘laboratory of modernity’, see Ann Laura Stoler ‘Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* and the Colonial Order of Things’ (London; Duke University Press: 1995) and Paul Rabinow’s ‘French Modern’ (Berkeley; University of California Press: 1989).

⁵⁹ Girindrasekhar Bose (1887-1953), the first president of the Indian Psychoanalytic Society (IPA), who corresponded with Freud for over twenty years, led a group of intellectuals, doctors, college professors, psychologists and enthusiasts in 1920s-50s Calcutta among whom discussions of ‘homosexuality’, ‘masturbation’, ‘repression’, ‘oedipus complex’ or ‘female hysteria’ were commonplace. In 1927, the annual bulletin of the 10th annual conference of the International Psychoanalytic Association at Innsbruck in Austria, reported the activities of its sub-branch, the 6 year old IPA that used to run its meetings in 14 Parsibagan Lane in Calcutta, the house of its president. It said that on ‘February 5, 1926. The President [Girindrasekhar Bose] read a paper on the ‘Genesis of Homosexuality’ at a meeting of the association in his house (*Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytic Association*: 1927). It goes on to add that ‘many distinguished visitors and medical men attended the meeting and took part in the discussion’ (*ibid.*). This, it says, was apart from the ‘the usual Saturday evening discussions on various psycho-analytic topics’ that were held at his residence (*ibid.*). Additionally, we should note that Calcutta University had already opened its Department of Psychology in 1915. For an excellent study of Freud in early twentieth century India, and on the history of the IPA under Girindrasekhar Bose, see Ashish Nandy’s ‘The Savage Freud: The First Psychoanalyst and the Politics of Secret Selves in Colonial India’ (1995: 81-144).

came into being in the genres of sexological self-reports (after Havelock Ellis) and case-studies (after Freud). *Laundebaaʒi* was working in other ways. It was a social register that placed same-sex desire within the idea of habit, within a language of excess, not different in kind from opposite-sex desire but in degree, and in a continuum with other kinds of excesses like music, prostitutes, cards or alcohol. It's not surprising then that the experiment between 'homosexuality' and *laundebaaʒi* works with a measure of solubility.

In this section, I first establish the general north-Indian idiom of *baaʒi* as bringing together social frames of habit and a familiar sort of excess. I then elaborate on *laundebaaʒi* not as a particular case within *baaʒi* (*laundebaaʒi* makes remarkable sense in the *not yet* of particularization) but as being possible within its pool. I also work out *laundebaaʒi* as a reigning political metaphor in crisis between the 'feudal' and the 'democratic' moments in twentieth century India.

Near the end of the first chapter of her autobiography *Kagaʒi Hai Pairhan*, Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai (1915-91) writes about her habit for conversations. Ashish Sahni, the Hindi editor of Chughtai's transliterated text footnotes 'मुबाहिसा' (*mubahisa*) with a word that straddles both Hindi and Urdu and is a sign of the immense contiguity of these languages: 'बहसबाज़ी' (*bahasbaaʒi*), that is, the fervent habit for debate (*bahas*), for indulging in argumentative conversations, for the sport of talking. This occasion of translation brings together many of the meanings that are always implicit in the idiom of *baaʒi*. Sahni's use of *baaʒi* renders not only the specific Urdu word used by Chughtai but her entire familial scene of conversations with all its key features of leisure, amusement, everydayness, game,

excessive habit and pleasure. Within a few lines, Chughtai brings to work this idiom of *baazi* herself. Later in her life when Chughtai started living in Bombay, like many other Urdu/Hindi literary immigrants of her time who found in mid-twentieth century Bombay new lives, money and jobs of writing film-scripts, dialogues, screenplays and song-lyrics, she found particular delight in the conversations she shared with this circuit of friends. With these immigrant literati, this very idiom of *baazi*, pervasive in the entire northern Hindi/Urdu belt and the north-western subcontinent, appeared with an unusual force in the creative and production networks of early Bombay cinema and indeed on that contemporaneous celluloid. She writes about her habitual conversations with the writer Soofia Jaanisar, sister of the Aligarh Urdu poet Majaz (1909-55) and the mother of the lyricist Javed Akhtar (b. 1945), with her close friend and Urdu short-story and film writer Sadat Hasan Manto (1912-55) and his wife Soofia, and with the Urdu poet Ali Sardar Jafri (1913-2000)⁶⁰

जुम्लाबाज़ी ('jumlabazi') is an indulgence with phrases ('जुम्ला,' *jumla* is Urdu for 'phrase,' or 'sentence'), playing with them, throwing them about, competing in arguments with a clever use of words and ideas. It is a form of conversation that is a heightened, fiercer

⁶⁰ 'सूफिया जानिसार से तो उसकी मुख्तसर सी ज़िन्दगी में इतनी बातें हुई की औरों से बरसों मिलकर भी न हो पायीं। मंटो से बातें करके एहसासात पर धार आ जाती थी। छः-छः, सात-सात घंटे मिनटों में गुज़र जाते थे। उसकी बीवी सूफिया भी बड़ी बातूनी औरत है। सरदार जाफ़री से कज-बहसी और **जुम्लाबाज़ी** ['jumlabaaazi'] में मज़ा आता है। जिन लोगों ने सरदार से बात की है उन्हें अंदाजा होगा की जितनी तल्खी, तुश्री और काट उस शख्स की ज़बान में है, उतनी ही नरमी और मिठास भी...जब से बीमार हुए हैं, महफिलें कुछ बुझी-बुझी, मोहतात सी हो गयी हैं,' ('I talked so much with Soofia Jaanisar in her brief life as I have not been able to with others despite being with them for ages. Talking with Manto always used to give such a keen edge to your feelings. Six-six, seven-seven hours use to pass by in minutes. His wife Soofia is also a very talkative woman. I have fun debating and phrase-playing ['jumlabaaazi'] with Sardar Jafri. Those who have talked with Sardar have an idea that as much bitterness, piquancy and sharpness that man's tongue might have, it has equal amounts of gentleness and sweetness...ever since he has gotten ill, these gatherings have become so dull, so lackluster.' (*ibid.* 18-9, italics mine)

version of the form, being full of witty repartees, clever reversals, literary citations and dazzling ideas. The suffix *baazi* always brings this element of play, performance and of a familiar excess to that to which it is joined.

Baazi is an expressive idiom of heightening the usual, of cherishing a sociable overindulgence, of playing a game. It connotes feverishness and an extraordinary, possessive love for the prefixed object. It is a complex of habits formed by the admixture of extreme skill and a passionate attachment to this object, of poets with their couplets, for instance. In any condition, the presence of *baazi* in a particular situation or persona, divorces it from any immediate claims of moderation or of sobriety.

Baazi qualifies as an idiom because it is capable of a cluster of associations. It is a mode of expression that sets off specific relations between people and the objects in the world around them. Chughtai's autobiography repeats this idiom incessantly to frame an assortment of characters, situations and substances that were a part of her world. *Jumlabazi* makes another appearance as something which Chughtai kept up with her *dilchasp* ('interesting') friend Prithvi Singh in Bareilly where she was a school teacher (Chughtai: 193). They pulled each other's legs in such conversations, Chughtai recalls. *Baitbaazi* is referred when Chughtai talks of the singing contests that she used to participate in with her school and college friends (198).

Later, in recounting her B.A. days in Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow, there is a mention of *kalabaazi*, 'acrobatics,' which Chughtai's mind performs when she fails to reconcile her classroom discussions of Darwin's theory of evolution and the

Koranic/Biblical story of the genesis. *Kala* actually means ‘art,’ or even ‘skill’. Its use to signify mental somersaults in ‘kalabaazi’ here is an expressive form in which *baazi*, itself implying ‘game’ or ‘bet,’ has become a dead metaphor. ‘दिमाग कलाबाज़ियाँ खाने लगा,’ (‘my mind started performing acrobatics’) (256). The dead metaphor reappears in *chaalbaazi*, the trickster or the cunning one (‘chaal’ means a ‘ploy,’ or ‘a move in the game’), used by Chughtai’s relative, Ala Bi, to refer to the washer-man who she suspects of replacing her new clothes with old ones. ‘बड़ा चालबाज़ है, पकड़ा नहीं जाता,’ (‘he’s a big dodger, you can’t catch him’) (143). Similarly *jaanbaazi*, which in its root sense, refers to someone ready to sacrifice her life (‘jaan’), ready to play with it, but which generally implies bravery or gallantry, is used by Chughtai to describe her own pluck in one of the more severe quarrels with her mother (112).

The most active function, however, of the idiom of *baazi* is where it indicates a habit for something, a habit that could also be in surplus. It is where the habit intensely saturates some of the living worlds of the person, poised at the limits of the usual. *Baazi* as a form of habit is always elastic. It can index the more regular, prized habits, such as that of exercise (*kasratbaazi*), of mugging before exams (*rattabaazi*), or of little excesses in betel chewing (*paanbaazi*) or arguments (*bahasbaazi*). It can also index a range of what are as ordinary but proverbially more value laden, the ‘bad habits,’ that can involve alcohol (*darubaazi*), laziness (*sustibaazi*), or devious politicking and groupism (*naarebaazi*, *partybaazi*).

This idiom makes sense of the person, the *baazi*, in a mis-en-scene with a ready potential for self-indulgence and excess that could be either fascinating or revolting or both. It plies on

the category of *shauk*, Urdu word for personal inclinations, sociable cultural habits, or one's own hobbies, till it teases out of the bounds of what is deemed as mere duty. It moves beyond the mundane range of self-possession, either by extreme talent or by exceptional surrender or both. It is set off when one becomes, for that moment, zealously attached to one's own interests, either accomplishing them or giving in to them.

It should be understood that this element of excess by itself is not unusual or surprising. As an expressive form in the early-mid twentieth century, one or another form of *baazi* attaches itself very *ordinarily* to specific groups like poets, artists, prostitutes, landlords, bureaucrats, politicians and the *goondas*, effectively marking the distinctive scenes of their lives and work. It is of a piece with their everydayness. Chughtai's cousin Hashmat Jahan, daughter of an estranged aunt, tells her a family story about their uncle Mirza Nayeem Beg Chughtai, once the governor of Gwalior:

हाँ, वह रंगीन-मिज़ाज थे. बस शराब-कबाब और रंडीबाज़ी [‘randibaazi’]. एक दिन जलसा जमा हुआ था बारहदरी में. चरांगा से बाग जगमगा रहा था और रंडियों के तायफे महला को गुलज़ार बनाये हुए थे...अय्याशी और नशाबाज़ी [‘nashabaazi’] ने उन्हें बिलकुल मस्त कर दिया था ’ (‘yes, he had a colourful temperament. Only wine and kebabs and always with whores. One day, the gathering of friends had met in Barahdari. The whole garden was shining with lamps and the entire palace was itself like a small garden with all the harlots...debauchery and his habit of drinking always used to keep him intoxicated’) (*ibid.* 72)

Randi is more informal than ‘prostitute’ and cruder than ‘slut.’ *Nasha* is ‘intoxication’ by alcohol or narcotics or both. *Baazi*, as we see here, never simply resides in a person, the

baaz, but always makes sense in an entire setting, in a dense ambiance. In other words, *baazi* works with *personas*. The gathering of male friends in the graceful halls, the entire garden shining with lamps and the dancing-girls strewn like flowers in palaces build up the full mis-en-scene. This is the place of *baazi*. It necessarily concatenates one form of indulgence with another and makes up a dense tapestry of dissipation, a cluster of ways of savouring ‘bad’ habits, of intensifying one’s experience to one’s ceremonial liking or to the threshold of one’s artistic vocation.

The scene of *baazi* involves a mixture of innocuous habits, of self-indulgent practices and of more treacherous addictions. Its persona, the *baaz*, in the early-mid twentieth century feeds off the contradictions between cultural practices of leisure and medical concepts of addiction, between civil parliamentary politics and extremist nationalism, between ideas of genius and failure, between ‘useful’ ‘progressive’ art and ‘decadent’ ‘backward’ scribblings and between reformist ideals of self-possession and poetic values of surrender.

The figure of the *baaz* could simultaneously be fêted for his genius and undermined for his ‘weaknesses’. He could have fruitful arguments about politics and poetry and also slouch half conscious in his own vomit. The performance of his habits could be readily devoured and his moments of power could be viewed in awe, even as his morals could be berated and his failures framed as general warnings. It is this fleshy idiom of *baazi* – working in an elaborate mis-en-scene, capable of copious associations, both innocuous and fatal,

triggering a set of contradictory responses in its audience – whose cast includes that figure of the *laundebaaṣ*, he who has a habit for boys (*launde*).⁶¹

b) *Laundebaazi*

In June, 1928, the third edition of the Hindi writer Pandey Bechan Sharma ‘Ugra’⁶¹’s novel *Dilli ka Dalal* (‘The Pimp of Delhi’) was published and printed under the aegis of his friend and mentor Mahadevprasad Seth. This third edition, printed at Seth’s Baalkrishna Press in Calcutta and published by his Beesvee Sadi Pustakalay (‘Twentieth Century Bookhouse’) in Mirzapur City carried advertisements and critics’ recommendations for other works by Ugra. First among these was a full page blurb for his controversial collection of short-stories *Chaklet*, compiled and published the year before in 1927:

⁶¹ C.M. Naim translates the *laundebaaṣ* generally as a ‘pederast,’ but literally as a ‘boy-player’ (2004: 35). Moreover, in her book ‘Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards’ (2005), while studying the ‘gender and sexual anxieties’ of turn of the nineteenth century ‘Iranian modernity’, Afsaneh Najmabadi re-membered the history of the figure of the *amrad*, that is not very different from the *launda* of *laundebaaṣ* in my discussion. Talking of early Qajar paintings and poetry in Iran, she notes that they were ‘populated by the hur and more commonly by the ghilman (also referred to as *amrads*...beautiful young beardless men) who often double as wine-servers...Today,’ she writes, and I find her discussion partially relevant to my own about *laundebaaṣi*, ‘these figures are often translated as “boys,” and *amradparasti* [or *amradbaaṣi*] (loving *amrads*) rendered as “boy-love.” I refuse,’ Najmabadi continues, ‘to use this naming because of the close affiliation of ‘boy’ with contemporary implication of pedophilia and our identification of “boy” as child. In pre-modern and early modern Persian male homoerotic culture, an *amrad* was more often a young male, in contemporary usage an adolescent, although he could be even in his early twenties, so long as he did not have a fully visible beard. In fact, an adolescent with the first trace of a mustache (*navkhat*) and before the full growth of facial hair (a process that could take a number of years) was considered the most beautiful. At the same time, that hint of a mustache (khatt) heralded the beginning of the end of his status as object of desire for adult men and his own movement into adult manhood. It signaled the beginning,’ as is rigorously transcribed in much Persian and Urdu verse, ‘of his lover’s loss’ (2005: 15). Although I often use the word ‘boy’ in translating *launda*, I want the reader to keep Najmabadi’s definitional variations in mind.

इसमें उग्रजीकी उन कहानियोंका संग्रह है जिन्हें पढ़ कर आप कलेजा थाम कर रह जायेंगे। समाजके अनुदिन बढ़ते हुए पाप 'लौंडे-बाज़ी' ['launde-baazi'] के भयानक परिणामका मर्मभेदी दिग्दर्शन करानेवाली इस पुस्तकमें सफेदपोश नरराक्षसोंके घिणित हथकण्डोंका ऐसा जीता-जागता चित्रण है की इसे पढ़ लेने के बाद अबोधसे अबोध बालक भी इन नारकिय जीवोंको देखते ही पहचान जायेगा और इनके प्रलोभनों से स्वयं बचकर इन पापियों के दुर्व्यसनोंके कारण सर्व नाशकी ओर अग्रसर होते हुए देशको भी बचानेमें समर्थ हो सकेगा। इस पुस्तक की उपादेयता और आवश्यकताका सबसे बड़ा प्रमाण इसके प्रथम संस्करण का दो महीनेके अल्पकालमें ही समाप्त हो जाना है। बढ़िया मोटे एंटिक कागज़पर छपी २१६ पृष्ठोंकी पुस्तकका मूल्य केवल प्रचार की दृष्टि से १) रखा गया है,' ('This is a collection of those short stories by Ugra ji that will make you hold your hearts while reading them. This book, which gives a stinging portrayal of the horrible consequences of the ever increasing misdeed of our society 'launde-baazi', has such an animated description of the devious strategies of the deceptive male demons, that after reading this, even the most innocent of boys of our society will be able to recognize these hellish creatures as soon as he sees them, and not only will he be able to save himself from their seductions but also save the nation that, due to the addictions of such rascals, is heading towards destruction. The biggest proof of the utility and the necessity of this book is the fact that its first edition was sold out in the brief period of two months. The price of this 216 page book, which is printed on excellent, thick antique paper, has been kept at 1) only from the perspective of the dissemination of its message') (Ugra; 1928)

Another candidly provocative advertisement for *Chaklet* appeared in the third edition of Ugra's epistolary novel *Chand Haseenon ke Khutoot* ('Letters of Some Beautiful Ones') published in December later that year. Writing the preface to this short story collection 'चाकलेट' ('Chaklet'), Pandey Bechan Sharma whose nom de plume 'Ugra' implies 'fiery' or

‘forceful,’ had filed ‘launde-baazi’ within a catalogue of allied bad habits, targeting not only an isolated transgression but an entire scene of social misdeeds:

यदि परस्त्री गमन, वैश्यागमन, शराबखोरी [‘sharaabkhorī’], जुआ खेलना आदि सामाजिक पाप हैं , तो यह अप्राकृतिक-कर्म या चाकलेट-पंथी [‘chaklet-panthī’] महापाप है. यदि उन पापों के विरुद्ध समाज प्रचार भी करता है और खुलेआम आलोचना-प्रत्यालोचना भी , तो इस पापके विरुद्ध भी प्रचार और आलोचनाएं होनी चाहियें. (‘If adultery, going to prostitutes, alcoholism [‘sharab’ is ‘liquor,’ ‘khorī,’ implying consumption, is a device similar to ‘baazi’], gambling etc. are social evils, then this unnatural deed or chaklet-panthī [‘chaklet,’ Hindi transliteration of ‘Chocolate,’ was Ugra’s peculiar reference for young, beautiful boys, ‘panthī,’ implying habit, is a device similar to ‘baazi’ or ‘khorī’] is a major evil. As this society voices itself against those evils and openly debates and denounces them, similarly, it should also have public voices and criticism against this evil.’ (Ugra; 1927 (1953): prefatory page)

Launde-baazi, or *chaklet-panthī*, is cast in the same mould as other allied forms of indulgences that are to be targeted by what is here, at any rate, formally, even if bluntly, articulated as a social-reformist literary aim. *Launde-baazi*, for Ugra, is part of a constellation of the misdeeds of demonic, hellish men and becomes recognizable precisely *as part of this constellation*, precisely as of a piece with its mis-en-scene of debauchery. It is positioned as yet another, albeit in this example a more intense, form of dissipation, compared to alcoholism or gambling along with which it is listed.

However, I must point out that a potential *extractability* of such figurations of male-male desire, such as *launde-baazi*, from their supersets of bad habits, always looms around in early-mid 20th century colonial India. An extractability from the constellation of habits precisely *as* a particularized evil as against just an indiscriminate habit. As a cognizably separate

‘unnatural deed,’ or even as a taxonomic ‘svajaatiya-vyabhichaar-vriti,’ literally ‘licentiousness-inclination-with-same-kind’, translated as ‘[h]omosexual [t]endency’ in the preface to Ugra’s stories (Suman; 1927: 41). Such a form of extractability never fully comes about but it implies a potential independence of male-male desire from the generalized mis-en-scene of excesses in which it is set – understood as *something unique in some kinds of people*. This extractability is evident in Chughtai’s confusions over what to call the subject of *Libaf* and in the early phase discussions of the Indian Psychoanalytic Society cited earlier. For now, however, it would be our task to elaborate on how the constellation of bad habits is organized, and more precisely, how does laundebaazi relate to the other forms in the family of connected weaknesses.

On the first of July in 1927 Ramnath Lal ‘Suman,’ a Hindi critic and poet, finished and signed off his almost 50 page essay that was to be published that same year as a major prefatory piece to Ugra’s eight short-stories in *Chaklet*. This essay ‘अप्राकृतिक व्यभिचार का वैज्ञानिक विवेचन’ (‘A Scientific Investigation of Unnatural Licentiousness’), Suman says, was written on the special request of Ugra, his ‘close brother,’ (*ibid.* 59), and its modest aim in fulfilling this duty is to simply work as a ‘scientific commentary’ on ‘this hellish subject’ (21-2). The ‘Hellish’ imagery here is interesting. It reminds me of the Pasolini film ‘The Canterbury Tales’ where the image of demons coming out from the arse is a part of the Bakhtinian imagination of the hell -- a celebratory orgiastic image -- Is that the kind of image that is invoked through the use of this word here? Though claiming only an introductory knowledge to the topic, Suman goes on to write extensive, sometimes didactically framed but mostly speculative sections on the origins of such habits; the inner

animal elements in all human-beings; the role of human-beings as social creatures; the etiology of all human desire as such; the excess as reason of attraction to the same kind; the ideals of calm desires; among many other subtopics.

When he is about to conclude, he credits his ‘scientific investigations’ to the official social reformist project of Ugra’s stories. He does this by tagging on some means that could be ‘generally’ employed to reduce the incidence of ‘chaklet-panthi’ (57). These solutions are a key to understand the composition of the place that *laundebaaazi* occupies in the imagination of the early-twentieth century Hindi literati.⁶²

The involvement of boys in *laundebaaazi* happens in an environment where one form of indulgence triggers another. This involvement is not conceptualized as a preset personal

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- ⁶² (1. The boarding system in schools should be banned by law.
 2. The classrooms should be long and wide, open on each side, and every boy’s ‘seat’ should be at a minimum distance of two yards from other seats. ‘Bench system’ (the system whereby many boys sit on the same bench) should be removed.
 3. Exercise and games that boost manliness should be made mandatory.
 4. A study of ethics should be set up (not a study of religions). There should also be a little physical education.
 5. Those masters and students, whose characters are a least bit suspect, should be removed. The local inspector should have the right to remove teachers and the principal should have the right to remove students. For their help, a committee of serious men, of wholesome character, could also be set up.
 6. The consumption of betel and of cigarettes should be stopped in schools. Even at home, there should be an effort that boys should remain away from these and other intoxicating substances.
 7. Boys of 20 years or less should watch only those films and plays that are based on bravery and patriotism for the nation.
 8. Obscene and provocative books like Savaayaar Katumedh’s ‘Do-do Batein,’ ‘Raat mein Saat,’ ‘Tota-Maina’ should be ceased. Those who sell nude and disgusting pictures openly in the market should be punished.
 9. Walking with your hands over the shoulders of boys who are 16 years or less should be declared to be a crime.
 10. Parents should stop the tendency towards luxury in their kids. They should not be made very dependent on the servants and the boys should be trained to become self-made.
 11. These sort of complains against the teachers should be filed in a permanent register that the local inspector should inspect from time to time.
 12. Parents should stop their boys from taking part in singing and dancing. Efforts should be made that prostitutes and others of the ilk should not be called for communal and cultural programmes.) (ibid. 57-9)

state of being but instead as a gradual corrosion. It becomes meaningless without its atmosphere of obscene books and pictures, betel-nuts and cigarettes, laziness and luxury, corrupting films and plays and singing and dancing. ‘...smoke and chew betels, / no, no, *all intoxicants are alike*’ (Habib; 1995: 327; emphasis mine). The means to remedy this particular habit among boys is not proposed as a diagnosis for a localized, individual condition but instead as a larger, necessarily continuous road-map towards an ideal social manhood.

This road-map involves an dominance of softness in favor of a robust and brave personal character, which was frequently articulated in early 20th century Hindi nationalist publications like *Aaj* (“Today”) (estbd. 1920, Varanasi) and *Swadesh* (“One’s Own Nation”) (estbd. 1921, Varanasi), and imagined by Suman and his contemporaries as necessary to the fight for political self-determination. In the throes of the Gandhi-led non-cooperation movement (1920-22), the twenty-one year old Ugra had articulated his feverish *kaamna* (“aspiration”) for an independent nation, an aspiration which was framed as a poetic manifesto for vigour and force, and a castigation of the whole aesthetic of political pliability and of a spongy, feminine civility. His poem *Kaamna* had appeared in Shiv Prasad Gupta’s newspaper *Aaj*:

‘भयंकर ज्वालायें

जाग उठें, सब ओर आग की ही हो जाए भरमार!

मधुर रागिनी नहीं चाहते --

और न स्वर सुकुमार!

वज्र-नाद-सा बोल उठे हम सबके उर का तार!...’

(‘Fierce Flames

Should rise, in every corner should this fire reign!

We do not desire a soft song –

and no tender voice!

May our heart-strings strike like thunderbolts!') (quoted in Ugra's autobiography *Apni Khabar*, 1960: 111)

Apt for such a fierce nationalist *kaamna* voiced by his friend, Suman's solution is not offered as a simple conversion from one predetermined state to another but instead as a permanent path of self-improvement, flagged, for instance, with routines of exercise and robust, manly games, a study of ethics and independence from servants. The *laundebaaz* has no easy antonym or obverse, like the 'homosexual' finds in 'heterosexual,' it is instead conceptualized on an awkward sliding-scale of self-fashioning, where one's path, an ideally unremitting path, towards social usefulness and ideal communal roles has been partially undermined.

Suman suggests a series of solutions, some more impractical than others, to reinstitute the *baaz* back into the process of realizing his ideal social and political functions. The figure of the *baaz* is, even when socially disapproved, always conceived of as morally and socially reclaimable. Theoretically, there is never an unbridgeable gap or a separate ontology that keeps him away from a possible repatriation⁶³.

⁶³ In fact the underlying idea in much of Ugra's writings, if we sieve through his social-reformist zeal, is that having some bad habits (especially if one is a man) is what makes one ordinary, what makes one human, similar to most others. It is in fact 'extraordinary' or 'unusual' to have no bad habits at all. In his memoir *Apni Khabar* published in 1960, Ugra, talking of one of his 'respectable friends' who had deep interest (*shauk*) for poetry and for exercise, and who had lost his heart, when young, to a male hockey player with a well-formed body, and later, after getting married and having children, to a prostitute, he writes, 'I must say that I really like such willful men, despite their defects [*aib*, weaknesses]. Who is without weaknesses? Only God' (1960:

In the short-story that was first published in May, 1924 in the Calcutta based paper *Matwala* and later appeared as the title-story in the collection *Chaklet*, Ugra weaves in an elaborate scene of *baazji*. The opening sequence does not introduce a character alone but an entire demeanor:

“बेकरारी क्यों न हो ताज़ा शिकारे इश्क हूँ,

चोट वह खाई है दिलपर जो कभी खायी ना थी

उपर्युक्त शेरको ज़रा स्वर - करुण-स्वर - से कहकर हमारे मित्र बाबु दिनकर प्रसाद बी. ऐ., मतवालेकी तरह कुर्सी पर एक और लुड़क गए। मैंने मनमें विचार किया, माजरा क्या है? आज यह इतने सुस्त क्यों हैं? फिर पुछा-

"खैरियत तो है? आज तो हुज़ूर कुछ मजनून बने बैठे हैं।"

दिनकर बाबूने फिर एक लम्बी सांस खींचकर कहा...‘

(“Why should I not be restless, love has made me its prey,

Today my heart carries a wound like never before.’

Reciting the verses above in a soft voice – a piteous voice – our friend Babu Dinkar Prasad B.A. tumbled onto the chair like a sot. I thought, what is the matter? Why is he so languid today? Then I asked –

“Is everything all right? Sir seems to have become a Majnun today.

After a long sigh, Dinkar Babu said...’) (Ugra; *ibid.* 97)

The sequence is replete with soft voices and long sighs, with gushy recitations of lovelorn Urdu couplets and languid tumbings onto chairs. The opening shots feature Babu Dinkar

124-7). For more on the ‘fall’ into same-sex desire as a ‘fall’ into ordinariness, into the quotidian, see Amarkant, (1959) 2004, *Sukha Patta*, New Delhi: Rajkamal Paperbacks, pg. 34-6.

Prasad not simply as an individual person but more crucially as a persona, fitted with the generalizable traits of the *baaq̣*. He is a sot, under the influence of wine and love, and is mythified by being likened to the legendary lover, Majnun, of the classical Perso-Arabic story of star-crossed lovers.

Gopal, the over-ingenuous narrator is surprised by Dinkar's spontaneous 'कविता पाठ सम्मलेन' (poetry reading event) (98) and his general stupor. Soon, as Dinkar leaves by being called upon the door by the object of his love, Gopal is told by another friend, Manohar, the reason for Dinkar's peculiar manner. He has fallen, Manohar says, for a boy, his 'chaklet,' his 'pocket-book,' a '13-14 year old beautiful lad' (99-100). True to the contagious world of 'bad influence,' the persona of the younger loved object is cast in the protracted shadow of the decadence of its lover. In a letter that Manohar writes to Gopal, to share his thoughts on 'this subject' (*ibid.* 102), he says that:

देश के नवयुवक ज़नाने हुए जा रहे हैं । एक बालक जब यह देखता है की उसके दुसरे साथी पर अधिक लोग आकर्षित हैं, तब वह भी अपने साथी का अनुकरण करने की चेष्टा करने लगता है । 'वेनोलिया' के बाद 'व्हाइट-रोज़' और 'व्हाइट-रोज़' के बाद 'पियर्स-सोप' की सहायतासे चाकलेट बनने की चेष्टा आरम्भ होती है । लड़कों की पढ़ाई-लिखाई का समय सुन्दर बनने के प्रयत्न में चला जाता है। और रूप की दुकानदारीके फेरमें पड़नेके कारण उनके मस्तिष्क दुर्बल, वासनाएं प्रबल और आदतें घृणित हो जाती हैं' ('The youth of this nation are becoming more and more feminized. When one boy sees that more people are attracted to his friend, he starts mimicking this friend. After Venolea he uses White-Rose, after White-Rose, he uses Pears Soap; all these help him begin his attempts in becoming a *chaklet*. The time which could have been spent in studying is wasted in

becoming beautiful. Once they are deeply entrenched in this business of beauty, their brains become weaker, their lusts stronger and their habits more disgusting.’ (*ibid.*)

Later when Gopal is visited by Dinkar and his young friend at his house, Gopal notices that the boy had ‘playful eyes’ and was like a ‘beautiful flower,’ an ‘offering of the Gods’ (103). He could become a ‘beautiful Indian,’ he muses, if it were not for Dinkar. The older men corrupt boys, who could have become valuable citizens of a liberated nation, and the boys corrupt each other. The figures participating in *baazi* – and organizing this entire scene of corruption and self-indulgence – are cumulatively materialized with the debasing consumption of imperial cosmetics like *Venolea*, *White-Rose*, *Pears Soap* (see Gadihoke 2010).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Chocolate, then, made sense. It was part of the catalogue of imperial products that came to be seen as degrading, but not degrading in any localized way, as if for the palette or for the stomach, but degrading in a very a widespread, general manner. What Manohar mentions, *White-Rose*, *Pears*, *Venolia*, all these commodities, dotted the homes of the middle-classes of his colonial city Calcutta. It was the soap industry, in fact, as Anne McIntock and Sabeena Gadihoke have reminded us, which was a first major imperial net of products, furiously advertized in the colonies, so much so that for the longest time, just advertizing, be it for anything, was also called ‘selling soap’ (Gadihoke: 2010: 1, McIntock 2001). Images of soap advertisements, that were regular in colonial English newspapers, or as calendars, would jam the visual *Swadeshi* imagination of Suman, or of Ugra, even as he mobilized the image-repertoires of his story characters, sunk as they were in looking at themselves in the mirrors, going to the cinema all decked up, wearing tight, silk *churidar* payjamas, looking after one’s skin and hands, and sporting fabrics infinitely softer than the *khaadi* associated with Gandhian nationalism. Excess as an entire prospectus of imperial products, each triggering the use of the other, each making space for the other. In Ugra’s scheme alcohol and boys and chocolate were all part of the same picture, they egged each other on. Historically, it is quite ironic then, that one of the major reasons why the Englishman John Cadbury, the founder of Cadbury chocolates, who was a Quaker, went into the business of tea, coffee and chocolate was because he wanted to drive working people away from alcohol. He had lofty beliefs in and was active in the nineteenth century Temperance movement in England. ‘He felt alcohol was a major cause of poverty and other ills among working people. He saw cocoa and chocolate as an alternative to alcohol’ (Samuel: 2000). In fact, the whole of the dream factory town that his sons set up in Bournville near Birmingham for their growing business, true to their Quaker beliefs, did not have a single pub (Bryson and

In another story 'Paalat,' in the same collection by Ugra, *baazi* is presented as a space assembled with fineries. The beloved boy is described wearing 'चिकनका बंगला कुरता , मखमली पोतकी - विचित्र ढंग से पहनी हुई - धोती , बढ़िया पम्प-शू, रिस्तवाच, तिरछी टोपी,' ('an embroidered Bengali kurta, a velvety dhoti worn in a strange manner, excellent pump shoes, wrist-watch and an askew cap') (Ugra: *ibid.* 118). The finery of clothes and accessories contributes to the patterns of excessive habits, stitching together the world of *baazi*. It becomes the place where *various* forms of male desires are articulated. The desire for boys is framed as contiguous with this love of fashion.

In the tenth chapter of her autobiography, 'The Golden Spittoon,' Ismat Chughtai talks of the twins, Munne Miyan and Pyare Miyan, who were enrolled with her brother at the Aligarh University. In Ugra's official social-reformist schema, these boys would be seen as symptomatic of the moral and physical waning thought to be brought about by fashion, cosmetics and luxury, quite useless to the project of building ideal men for fighting for and running the देश ('nation') (see Ugra; 1928: appendix 3), for the training as the future 'शासनके सूत्रधार,' 'the architects of governance' (*ibid.*). Chughtai uses a Marathi word to describe their demeanor, *fatkal*, which implies someone 'without control or composure' (D'Penha; prsnl email: Aug, 2010), close to the Hindi *munhfat*, 'someone who speaks rather freely' (Dalwai; prsnl email: Aug, 2010). 'Typically,' it would refer 'to someone who cannot

Lowe: 2002, Samuel: 2000). By the time, this same chocolate reached the young nationalist Ugra in the colony though, its symbolism, its uses, its family of associations and effects had turned into something else all together, something more 'corrupting', more 'addictive', an object of bad habits.

control his or her tongue, so *tondacha fatkal* would mean ‘someone who has a loose tongue. But it can also refer to *bathacha fatkal*, i.e. someone with a loose fist, given to beating people up’ (*ibid.*). Within such a backdrop of degeneracy, finery and excess, Munne Miyan’s and Pyare Miyan’s lack of relish for women is a positively banal fact, if not actively constitutive of their persona:

‘नवाब के] दो जुड़वाँ साहबज़ादे अलीगढ़ भेजे गए थे...उन लड़कों की सोहबत में नाच-गाने के जलसों में [शमीम] बड़ी पाबन्दी से शरीक होते...पढ़ने-लिखने का कोई प्रोग्राम न था. ये लड़के एक शानदार कोठी में अपने अमले के साथ बस हुल्लड़ मचाया करते थे । नवाब साहब ने जबरदस्त अतिया यूनीवर्सिटी को दिया था । मगर ये साहबज़ादे...जार्जेट के ज़रदोज़ी काम के कुरते , रेशमी, चुस्त पाजामे और कामदार जूते पहने क्लास में कभी ठुमकते आ जाते । उनके साथ साज़िंदे भी क्वाटर्स में रहते थे । रोज़ नाच-गाने का प्रोग्राम जमता । यूनीवर्सिटी के निकम्मे और चापलूसी में माहिर उनकी दरबारी पर तैनात रहते...जुड़वाँ साहबज़ादे कुछ फटकल [‘fatkal’] किस्म के थे। औरतों से कत्तई दिलचस्पी नहीं थी। खूब सजते और मेक-अप करते थे’ ([Nawab’s] twin heirs were sent to Aligarh...In the company of those boys [Shameem] used to regularly take part in the song and dance gatherings...there was no plan to study. These boys lived in a magnificent mansion with their staff and caused a lot of uproar all the time. Nawab Sahab had given a huge grant to the university. These spoiled ones...used to sometimes sway into the class wearing georgette kurtas with golden handiwork, silky hugging pajamas and stylish shoes. Their crew used to stay with them in their quarters. There they kept up daily routine of singing and dancing. All the fools and the sycophants of the university used to hang around their mansion...the twins were of the fatkal sort. They had no interest in women. They used to dress up a lot and apply a lot of make-up.’ (Chughtai; *ibid.* 165-6)

c) *(Launde)Baazi* as a Political Metaphor

The idiom of *baazi* is implicated in the political order of relations. The very language of *baazi* is a dimension of the organization of political relations between men, and between men and women. *Baazi* is one of the ways in which these political relations are worked out. The idiom is a crucial hermeneutic of the very method that structures politics in late 19th/early 20th century colonial India and arguably in the more recent post-independence period. Historical signs of transformations or crises in the way ‘politics’ or ‘administration’ was carried out, or was aimed to be carried out, would correspondingly modify the social life of *baazi*.

The ‘dissolute’ world of Munne Miyan and Pyare Miyan is propped up precisely by the grant that their father, the Nawab of Javra, has made to the Aligarh Muslim University exchequer. The ‘dubious’ activities of the two sons become feasible in the pool of the Nawab’s nepotistic influence, connections and money, which is duplicated in the minor networks of his sons’ own ‘staff’ and ‘crew’ (*ibid.*). Their youthful decadence is hooked onto this political framework of asymmetrical relations, a framework to which the ‘all the fools and the sycophants of the university’ want to get beneficially attached. It begs to be argued that the idiom of *baazi* is an idiom which is implicit in this particular feudalistic political framework, a framework which the formative moments of modern representative democracies always cast as their murky prehistory, understanding them as the constant and frustrating insistence of the ‘backward,’ ‘reactionary’ and the ‘feudal’ within the ‘modern,’ ‘progressive’ and the ‘democratic’. A stubborn and confusing coexistence of different

political orders is aimed to be wiped out, at least in perception, by what is at base a chronological conceit implicit in idea of ‘progress’ (तरक्की tarraqi, प्रगति pragati) that propelled almost the entire late 19th/early 20th century genres of literary, political and social reform; ‘[t]he past clings on to us still in some measure and we have to do much before we redeem the pledges we have so often taken’ (Nehru: 1947).

What is this framework that organizes and shelters the world of *baazi* and is unhinged in that contemporary moment of reformist and democratic overhaul, an overhaul that never fully comes about? It is the various scaffolding of political relations that are cast in the phrases such as ‘the paternalism of traditional Indian models of authority’ (Khilnani; 2002: 2), ‘the “old world” of the nineteenth century’ (Steele; 1981: 2), the ‘inequality of opportunity’ (Nehru *ibid.*), ‘the priestly, academic and decadent classes in whose hands [literature has]...degenerated’ (Progressive Writers’ Association manifesto; 1936) or the ‘forces and...ideas that did not care too much about the niceties of parliamentary politics’ (Chatterjee; 2004: 48).⁶⁵ *Baazi* is an implicit part of the fabric of political relations that can

⁶⁵ Among the ‘theoretical “theocratic” materials’ produced by the Progressive Writers Association in the 1930s/40s India, Geeta Patel finds Akhtar Husain Raipuri’s ‘Adab aur zindagi’ (‘Literature and Life’) to be a ‘highlight’ (2001: 113). To write his ‘(hi)story of literature’, Raipuri was deeply interested in defining ‘three temporal spaces’, in defining a version of the ‘past’ against which the social-literary activity and ideals of the present and the future could be fashioned (115). For Raipuri, Patel outlines, ‘[t]he past was feudal, a time of Oriental despotism, its ornamental poetry funded by a royal, moneyed elite’, the present was capitalist and its literature satisfied the middle classes, and the future was utopian and egalitarian where literature was produced without constraints, in a classless society (115-6). Generally, in her chapter ‘The Terms of the Encounter: Miraji and the Progressive Writers’ Association’, Patel argues that the Progressives, in proposing a call for literature as ‘social action’, offered a ‘univocal system’ for deciding what was ‘good’/‘bad’ or ‘political’/‘apolitical’ writing (82-128, 390). Often, she writes, and this is crucial for my own discussion, ‘[t]he charges leveled by the PWA against bad literature...were, among others, directed at the particular ways in which “sexuality” was explored by certain authors like Miraji, Ismat Chughtai, and Manto’ (103). The

be very loosely called ‘feudal’. It changes when such relations themselves are transformed, even renewed, by different political orders. It also becomes the marker of the very resoluteness of the ‘feudal’ – as politics, as language, as a scene – within the ‘democratic’ and the ‘new’. It marks the very intractability of the ‘feudal’ structures that permeate and work between the lines of the democratic manifestoes. Most significantly, *since baazi is an idiom, a vocabulary, it travels well*. It can unhinge itself from the feudal framework and appear as a language used by characters in varied political settings. This is a significant point to be understood. In an abstract way, both the words ‘Queer’ and ‘laundebaaz’ then stand, quite parallel, charred by the same issues of affordability and hierarchy, unable to really transcend the class. They become markers of a social situation, not an *Identity*. The ordeal is to find a word that *can* mark that identity, which can bring a meaning into *the* body and not just *on how it looks*. I use the word ‘Queer (male)’ hence, as a self-critical term, that engages with this friction, with this problem. By using this term, I underline the people and the spaces that I’m talking about, as bound *within* such an understanding of the ‘Queer’ as majorly socially bound—a homo-normative understanding, not acknowledging the differences within and that is where my critique emerges from.

.....

C.M. Naim (b. 1936) makes an argument which is specifically about the consonance of the world of *baazi* with a feudal political order. Writing about the ‘pre-modern Urdu poetry’ of Mir Taqi Mir (1723-1810), Shah Mubarak Abru (1683/4-1734) and Ghalib (1797-1869), among others, he argues that ‘the Indo-Muslim milieu of the eighteenth-century

temporal conceit of ‘progress’, defined by this literary movement, often meant leaving the so-called ‘deviant’, ‘excessive’, ‘obscene’ or ‘abnormal’ (mostly terms of colonial law and medicine) versions of ‘sexuality’ behind (103).

Delhi...tolerated homosexuality and did not stigmatize a person merely for his sexual-orientation - so long as that person fulfilled the more important demands of the society, namely an acceptance of, and submission to, its socio-economic hierarchies, and a willingness to perpetuate the same in some measure' (2004: 19, 39-40). Naim uses a deeply anachronistic vocabulary – *homosexual*, *sexual-orientation* – but his main suggestion stands: that desire between men and boys, the knack for *laundebaaṛi*, is articulated precisely in its latent compatibility with the contemporary register of political relations in 18th/19th century North India. The Urdu public milieu, Naim contends, showed a 'state of *indifference*' (19, italics in original) or, using Samuel Z. Klausner's phrase, of a 'tolerant jocularity' (20) towards the literary expressions and incidences of desire between men and boys. The poet's own relations and the content of his poetry could substantiate many forms of male desire in so far as it did not violate a reigning political symbolism. Naim writes, a little formulaically perhaps, that the main expressive strand of '[h]omosexual passion in the pre-modern Urdu ghazal remained pederastic - i.e. hierarchical, non-mutual, and controlling - because the milieu's dominant values were of the same nature' (40).

“Such a congruity is evidenced in the fact that the convoluted and the usually favoritist relationships within the political ranks could themselves be expressed using a glossary of male-male desire. Where male-male sex provides an organizing metaphor for political ranks.”⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Akhil Katyal, unpublished thesis, “Playing a Double Game, Idioms of same-sex desire in India.” P.95

*Third Night****Kaizaad***

There is a strange thrill in having a chilled beer on a winter night. Descending your throat, the way it navigates through your body, making its way down, piercing through your chest, almost, dissecting it... One may think that thrill is enough to justify the act, let alone any kind of intoxication. As I embrace another bottle, with my somewhat moist palms—tiny droplets of passion that appear with every passing rendezvous between me and that little green bottle—I get zoned out for a moment. The thumping music in the background, and the orange hue in the light all around... I look around for a source of distraction, in fear, that I may already be inebriated... a state I prefer myself to be in, but not so early.

It doesn't take long before the so far quasi-deserted discotheque starts getting a few visitors. I romanticize my being there, by considering all of it as an exciting adventure; as this is the first, and probably the last time I'm so early for any such party, that too, since I was already very close to the venue for dinner, and didn't want to take all the pain of taking a trip back home before coming here. The only other guests apart from me so far are a group of cross-dressers... I look at that large mirror on the wall next to the dance floor... and notice one of them looking at it, applying lipstick on those already cherry-red lips. For

a moment our eyes meet... we unite in the image, so distanced by the reality... s/he turns back. I lower my eyes, and start fiddling with my phone. As I look up, I notice once again, the loudness of the music, the madness of the crowd, the rolling crystal ball above my head radiating light of all colors... and him in front of me. Song after song, as the music changes its course; I realize that the songs here are probably the first common thing that we share. I hum along with it... 'Mamma mia'. He smiles, I get conscious and stop... "What is it? Why did you stop?" he asks,

"Cause you are not singing..." I pause, "I don't sing alone." His eyes, still on me... Only Me, as he smiles and says—"You are very attractive, more than your pictures," and before I know it, I feel his fingers slipping over my shirt, his arms supporting my falling head, his aroma, filling my breath, and his flavor, satiating all my senses... My ears grow warm and red; I can feel his heart pounding. We smile at each other. "It is unbelievable," he says, forty nine years old, salt and pepper hair and a beautiful French beard, the warmth of his body, the softness of his hair, the sweetness of his voice, "how we didn't even know each other a day ago, and now we are here, in each other's arms."

I smile, "We should thank PR for that,"

"By George we should!" and he hugs me tightly.

A Short History of *Planetromeo*

A small part of this story begins in London. In 2002 a young German man comes to stay in the city and, like most urban migrants, tries to find new networks of friends and lovers for some 'good times' and 'high jinks' (see 'About Us'; *PlanetRomeo* (hereafter PR)). He finds that the briskest and the most undemanding way to search for other men 'of his ilk' was the Internet (*ibid.*). Soon enough, he sets about trying his glass slipper on every Cinderella in town who's logged in.

A few days into it, however, he faces a problem. He finds that most dating portals, apart from being a great deal un-navigable, weigh heavily on his pockets. He has to shell out a few extra pounds every time to avoid abrupt closure of online chats. By the early years of the last decade, the same time as he began his searches, online dating/romance had already become a big business; U.S. consumers alone were spending close to \$500 million on personals/dating content in 2003, up by nearly fifty percent from the year before (Mapes: 2004).

Our protagonist's problem is not surprising. It is a part of what had already been memo-ed by Saskia Sassen at the turn of the century, that the Internet, in its brief history, has already entered a fourth phase, a phase organized mainly under the sign of e-commerce. Most of the Internet's backbone softwares are now chiefly linked to billing, identity-verification and trademarks protection (2000: 583).

Our lad's money crunch had given him an idea. Earlier in spring that year, he had already chosen to ride the e-market brainwave and had started a website with a friend/business partner that aimed to relocate a section of the prolific urban escort/client trade from dirty magazines' back pages on to the web. This was done by the name of Erados.com (now fully integrated into PR). Cobbling together the programme codes from this website, Jens and Manuel sprung the first version of 'GayRomeo', a 'gay' dating website, onto the Internet by the October of that year (*ibid.*). Before the year had ended, 'the good old gay grapevine' had worked and there were already 3000 free registered users (*ibid.*).

Over the next few years the website moved its offices from London to a little room in a backyard of a building in Friedrichshain in Berlin and to more roomy quarters in the 'wild, wild' east side of the city by 2004 (*ibid.*). By the means of a chargeable Plus account, over and above the usual free user account, money had begun to flow in and the website, now a limited company, grew both in numbers and web reach. However, the strict provisions of the German Act for the Protection of Young Persons and Minors, which effectively required that every user be personally verified through rigorous identificatory softwares like PostIdent or Schufa (the German credit protection agency) meant that either *GayRomeo* had to close shop or remove all its users' 'hardcore' photos. This personalized checking was both expensive and complicated. The company chose a third option and, in the summer of 2006, happily exiled itself to Amsterdam where the courts were lax.

In March 2009, by when *GayRomeo* (also by then, called *Planetromeo*) had more than 900,000 profiles from just about every country on the planet, it chose the familiar corporate strategy of merger to expand its business. Merging *guysAmen* that was already popular in Asia and America, with PR that hoarded most of the European 'gay Internet sector'

(PlanetRomeoBlog: 2009), meant that it became the biggest portal online for men seeking out other men for friendship, sex or romance.

As of the beginning of 2010 there were about fifty thousand Indian user profiles hosted on the website. This short history of PR – that travels haphazardly from the lonely hearts in the London suburbia to east side Berlin, to the Dutch capital, while it keeps on exploding onto the thousands of computer screens around the world, including South Asia – is already a deeply transnational one. It sets the stage for the idiom of a worldwide ‘genuine gay community’ (PR) that the PR team constantly uses in its publicity material, and for the heavily globalized references that frame most of its user profiles. It is not surprising to find photographs of Brad Pitt, Backstreet Boys or Daniel Radcliffe used as profile pictures by people in Raipur or Meerut in India, references to the San Francisco ‘bondage scene’ or the Chilean Pokemon subcultures⁶⁷ among Kolkata users, or citations from Ghalib and Robert Frost and Timberlake or Sultanpuri jostling with each other in the same profile. PR, like most of the Internet, is a relentlessly impure space that quotes too many and too much at the same time.

A Small Note on the Jostling Repertoires of Love: The Case of the *Ghazal*

‘I too could recall moonlit roofs, those nights of wine--

But Time has shelved them now in Memory's dimmed places...

World, should Ghalib keep weeping you will see a flood

drown your terraced cities, your marble palaces.’ (Agha Shahid Ali, ‘Not All, Only a Few Return’, 2009)

If romantic love is framed as a narrative of first discovering mutual compatibility and then praying that it lasts, even as one *works* on the relationship, then surely expressions of love

⁶⁷ Queer popular culture references, usually assumed to be culture specific.

that do not adhere to this narrative impulse or those which interrupt its flow must have an ambiguous relationship with it. Like the secular and the sacred aspects of love that constantly intrude upon each other, the modern narrative of romance always has to jostle with the non-narrative expressions of love, such as the *ghazal*.⁶⁸

The form of the *ghazal* from the Urdu poetic repertoire lends itself to heavy situational quotations within PR user profiles. Samar* from Bombay who is 45 years old enjoys ‘reading widely, travel, long solitary walks, good friends who are gregarious,’ and ‘classical and old Hindi film music’ (PR). He believes he is ‘sincere and honest’ in his ‘relations with friends’ and enjoys ‘healthy and safe sex with men willing to explore desire and passion...I hope to find some decent men willing to shed their inhibitions as much as their pants’ (*ibid.*). In his bid to find men willing to share such moments of ‘desire and passion’ he quotes excessively from Ghalib (1797-1869), the nineteenth century Delhi’s Urdu poet, whose *ghazals* have been widely diffused in forms of Indian popular culture such as the ‘classical and old Hindi film music’ that Samar likes:

‘Koi mere dil se pooche tere teere neemkash ko
Yeh khalish kahaan se hoti, jo jigar ke paar hota
[Ask my heart about thy half drawn arrow,
Where would the pain come from, had it seared my heart]’ (quoted in Samar; PR)

I want to suggest that there might be a crucial relation between Samar’s desires and the forms that he employs to accomplish them. His craving is to enjoy men, desirous and passionate, willing to shed their forms of embeddedness, whether social (‘inhibitions’) or literal (‘pants’). His is a desire for a series of high moments of pleasure with different men, not a singular romantic plot of love for one. I want to ask whether it is purely coincidental

⁶⁸ A ghazal doesn’t necessarily have a linear narrative, and different couplets within it can very easily not be connected with the rest of the composition.

that he quotes the form of the *ghazal* or does the *ghazal* lend itself peculiarly to the expression of his desires.

Different repertoires of love invoke different expectations, situations and characters. They facilitate different circumstances of affection. In writing about the ‘range of idioms and images of love’ in the English and Hindi/Urdu manuals of love-letters for men and women that she found on the footpaths in North India, Francesca Orsini seems to find a recognizable difference in the spheres and ways of loving invoked by the use of different languages. ‘English,’ she says, arguing tentatively for those love-letter manuals, ‘indicates one’s willingness to participate in the game of romantic love and/or of individual advancement, independence and career orientation’ (Orsini; 2006: 241). ‘Urdu,’ however ‘indicates either a highly romantic nature or seduction and is delinked from marriage and family’ (*ibid.*).

‘The English booklet *Love Letters*, compiled by ‘Rajesh’ (Delhi, 1995) is one of a ‘Do’s and Dont’s General Books of Everyday Use’ which includes those on baby care, pregnancy, yoga, guests and parties, honeymoon, diseases, neighbours, money, examination and interview, servants and relatives. Love is thus recognized as one of life’s areas of experience about which one needs to have *practical* knowledge’ (*ibid.* 242) (emphasis in original)

It is, here, deeply embedded in the dailiness of experiencing marriage and family – the romantic relationship never simply lasts by itself, you always have to work with it. ‘Literariness,’ staple of Urdu letters, ‘by comparison, plays a less important role’ (244). ‘Earnestness means earnestness of *feeling* (‘true love’) and earnestness of *intentions* (love leading to marriage)’ (*ibid.*).

Samar is looking for playful men outside the setup of marriage, or at any rate, he seeks to temporarily draw them out. He seeks to seduce men ‘willing to explore’ and uses an idiom that is distinctly *unpractical* as advice on long term romance or familial matters, but eminently serviceable as a device of immediate, teasing seduction. The form of the *ghazal* has the wholeness of mood or feeling – a *ghazal* can variously rest on jealousy, hope, desire, despair, pain, seduction – but it never has a narrative of individual growth and achievement through causal linkages. A bildungsromanic conceit would never be possible within the ‘two-line universe’ of the *ghazal* that is composed of autonomous couplets that, except the first and last, can be quoted in whichever order (Pritchett quoted in Orsini; 2006: 18).

Defying narrative, the *ghazal* in a sense is the moment of desire itself. The beloved becomes an object of endless play rather than a staged quest. The conventional *ghazal* is suspended in a timeless universe of dazzlement on the verge of the appearance of the beloved. It stages a continual delight and suffering at the beloved’s hand. It loops an incessant game of seduction, of arrows half-drawn to pierce hearts, hunters preying on innocents, suicides being contemplated and the lover’s enthrallment and wounds perpetually deepening. Kashmiri-american poet Agha Shahid Ali understood this formal element of timelessness in the *ghazal* well enough to describe Ghalib’s tears as perpetual; *World, should Ghalib keep weeping you will see a flood.*

This timelessness is crucial, it skirts narrative. The sight of the beloved, common in the *ghazal*, is an experience of utter mesmerization, but crucially enough, this experience never projects onto a distinct possibility of the beloved’s attainment, or a shared future with him. In other words, it is not the instrumental *love at first sight* of romance. Not a grasping of

interior qualities, but instead a more frontal enthrallment by sheer sight; ‘unkey dekhey sey jo aajaatee hai munh par raunak / voh samajhthey hain ki beemaar ka haal achchhaa hai [As my face lights up when I set eyes upon him / He thinks my illness has passed, I must be better]’ (Ghalib, tr. Khushwant Singh; 2007: 60-1).

Samar is, in his own words, looking for ‘men willing to explore desire and passion’, not for one to set up house with. The *ghazal* for him works as a bit of an inveiglement. It lures the other but not into an everlasting union. It scripts episodes with others but not a shared story. This resonates with the form of the *ghazal* where separation does not simply lead to union, but instead, these two states of being are relentlessly exchanged with each other. This repeated exchange foregrounds the provisional ‘I,’ of the Urdu *ghazal*, as an active placeholder of these elaborate states of feeling, not as a novel character developing with the passage of connected situations (Mufti; 2004: 247). This provisional ‘I’ of the *ghazal* – seductive, desirous, fleeting – is more lucrative for Samar’s aims than the developmental ‘I’ of romantic love.

Modern narratives of romantic love, however, are insistent. They try to incorporate the *ghazal* in at least three distinct ways: as evocative quotations that interpret romance, as ironic or unpractical, campy intrusions, and as museumized Urdu remnants within an aspirationally English language universe. This incorporation is never full and the *ghazal* continues to place the romantic strain in relief by underlining its necessary contradictions.

tanhayi, a 22 year old from Jaipur, Rajasthan, is ‘looking for someone special someone that could recolor,’ his ‘life from Blue to rainbows’; it’s ‘not easy,’ he says ‘being single since

birth...you can't hide the fact that your insecure to anyone who has been in a romantic relationship...ehehehe..' (PR). This insecurity is elaborated in two poetic gestures that form the rest of his profile. It is uncertain whether he quotes or authors it, but the *ghazal* here becomes useful as *a device of consolation* in the face of the high romantic dream and as *a key to the necessary uncertainty* that is at the heart of the search and sustenance of the romance narrative. In other words, the *ghazal* reads between the lines of romantic love:

‘chup rehtein hai koi khafa na ho jaye, / hamari wajah se koi rusva na ho jaye, / saanse chalti hain jis ummid ka daman thaam ke, / kahin woh daaman bhi hum se juda na ho jaye... / Likhi hai yeh ghazal sirf tere liye / Dewane bane bhi to sirf tere liye [‘I stay silent for he might get angry if I speak, / because of me, he might be pained, / He, on whose trust and hope, I breathe / What if he parts from me... / I write this ghazal only for you / I am enthralled only by you’]’ (PR)

The *ghazal* becomes an utterance that at once soothes the subject of romance and educates him in the inconsistencies implicit in this narrative. As a form it becomes useful to romance by simultaneously making sense of the deep captivation at the hands of the beloved – ‘Har pyar se pyare lagte ho tum mujhe [You are more lovable than every other love]’ (tanhayi, PR) – and also understanding the necessary fear of loss that this captivation entails once it is enclosed in a prolonged narrative – ‘kisi ko itna apna na bana / ki use khone ka dar laga rahe [‘don’t make someone so much your own / that you might forever fear his parting’]’ (tanhayi; PR).

The *ghazal* is also often censured on PR as *things that are too poetic* – poetic here understood as hyperbolic, unpractical and outside the alleged realism of self-help or newspaper advice columns on romance and sex with one’s partner. ‘I used to be a poet. I've learnt to be more intelligent and practical now,’ raremoments from Kolkata writes, and continues on his romantic search for ‘intelligent, smart, goodlooking, educated, communicative,

conversant...preferably slim and sexy' men. For dontbugmee from Delhi, who is 34 and a 'die hard romantic...deep-down inside' and 'yearn[s] for permanency...someone to wake up with every morning and do a little nok-jhonk [bickering] about the breakfast/dinner menu, about who messed up the room etc.', the *ghazal* becomes an altogether obsolete form, unsuitable to the 'business' of romantic love. He frames other people's usage of the form as interruptive and campy, as a bit of a hopeless joke: 'Sorry, no enticing poetry, sher-o-shayree [couplets] or boring blogs for introductions! Let me get right to business!' (PR)

The *ghazal*, as evidenced on PR, is at once a strong cultural citation and a pushy remainder that meddles with other languages of love. It is at once a campy efflux and a long-standing non-narrative device plotted oddly with romantic love to make sense of its contradictions. As a form, it is both futile and key to this matter of love.

A 'New' Modernity

At the outset, I would like to establish how I use the concept of modernity. It seems to me that the literature that discusses this concept acknowledges its two distinct directions, its two predominant senses. I call them the *distinguishing function* of modernity and its *chronological function*. The former establishes the trope of modernity *primarily* to mark out differences of particular worldviews from other worldviews. The otherness here is often skimmingly established by either a distance between times, or a distance between regions, frequently giving us problematic visions of timelocked lands and landlocked times. In more rigorous and interesting works, however, this distinguishing function of modernity is established more fundamentally with the distance between ideas, between cognitions, between people's ways of looking at the things around them and making sense of them.

Delhi based writer Ravi Sundaram, for instance, in his *Pirate Modernity* chiefly makes media and communications into the main distinguishing function in his reading of modernity (2010: 1-27). Looking at late twentieth century Delhi, he zones in on an urban mis-en-scene that is populated by screens, phones and wires, on the cheap, pirated production of all sorts of electronic gadgetry that unequivocally mediates the complex relations between people and between the people and the State. Pirate modernity, for him, is *after media*. For him, media is the most interesting and the most influential sign of his field, of the time and region he specifically looks at. The wedge that the idea of modernity draws then, here, is actually the wedge between the presence and absence of this kind of media. In terms of the distinguishing function, then, his particular version of the modern and the non-modern are mainly related to the presence or absence of this sort of dispersal of media, whatever be the time or region.

Another example of the distinguishing function of modernity is French philosopher Michel Foucault's *The Will to Knowledge* (1978). In it, his now famous formula that the 'sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species' rests on the distinguishing function that had been cited in the title itself: that passionate, almost fanatical will to knowledge residing in 'modern' institutions of government, medicine and religion (43). The figure of the 'homosexual' got precipitated within such institutions that mobilized and embodied this will to knowledge. The Christian confession, its recoding as therapeutic within late 19th century European psychoanalysis, the massive output of the Anglo-American family of sexologists of the same time, all this and more contributed to 'the nineteenth century homosexual', now not only a juridical subject of some forbidden acts, but instead, 'a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood...a type of life, a life-

form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology' (*ibid.*).⁶⁹ Foucault could be read, in this instance, to place the idea of modernity in the absence or presence of those institutions that embody that will to knowledge, that 'incite discourse', that practically want to know, count, recognize and abstract out a person from her specific sexual relations. Those institutions –whether the government census, the clinic or the counsellor's couch among others – are the ones that can be said to distinguish the 'modern' from the 'non-modern', whatever time or place.

The chronological function of modernity has a slightly different sense, one which is often invoked wherever the word 'modern' appears. This sense is present as much in the way the concept of 'modernity' circulates in much intellectually rigorous non-fiction (even if it is lurking) as it is in those millions of casual syndications it finds in the media while it travels around us and infuses our worlds. In short, whereas the distinguishing function establishes modernity through *whatever is different*, in whichever time or place, the chronological function establishes it through *whatever is present in the later moment*. I read this not as whatever comes afterwards, to the simple exclusion of the earlier, but instead, whatever remains present in that afterward, whatever has palpable effect in that afterward. This function indeed uses the terms of time, but it is not time-bound, that is, it is not simplistic or linear, because what it posits is an always radically mixed present.

⁶⁹ Foucault cites the Berlin based psychiatrist and neurologist Carl Friedrich Otto Westphal's (d. 1890) article 'Archiv fur Neurologie', published in 1870, as a kind of first iconic moment for the idea of the homosexual. 'We must not forget,' he writes, 'that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized – Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth – less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul' (1978: 43).

Theoretically, this is very interesting and deeply political. In any given moment, all that you can observe around you, all that you can feel the effects of, has to be accounted for in that moment, each of those things have to be mapped out in relations of power to each other.⁷⁰ Things cannot conveniently be seen as belonging to *another time*. They have to be dealt with as effects of the present. Whether it is feudal or democratic politics, middle-class or tribal ways of living, equal or toppled gender relations, secular or religious belief systems, progressive or reactionary worldviews, or conflicting ideas of what constitutes the social norm, an ideal person, or a stable personality – within this particular function of modernity, each of these have to be acknowledged together, as copresent, as coexisting, as making up the ‘modern’. Each of these, as seen in any given moment, are the effects of and transformed by the modern. In simple terms, each of these is radically contemporary, where even perceived anachronism of some over the others is a relation of power. In this thesis, I mobilize both these functions of the concept of modernity, the distinguishing and the chronological, each becoming evident as I go along. Finally I hope to have established the relations between all the copresent idioms of same-sex desire, particularly as seen in the last twenty to thirty years in India. These could be relations of perceived ascendancy of some over the others, relations of irony, relations of language, of imminent demise, of persistence, of differentiation among the classes, of official recognition by the State, and

⁷⁰ American Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s ‘Axiom 5’ in her *The Epistemology of the Closet* was precisely about the mixed nature of that ‘Great Paradigm Shift’, from the ‘sodomite’ to the ‘homosexual’ for instance, in which, she argued, there is no simple ‘supersession of one model and the consequent withering away of another, but instead...[there are] relations enabled by the unrationalized coexistence of different models *during the times that they do coexist*’ (1990: 44, 47, emphasis mine).

then of course, place these relations in an always eclectic and structurally careful-careless use of idioms in the everyday.

Of what particular contemporary do I speak? The 'contemporary' resides in eclectic places and cannot be read without an eclecticism of method. It cannot be read only in the sublime documents of the nation State, or in the legalism of its judiciary. By corollary, it also cannot be read only in the civil society groups which plead to this State on various counts, by using the language which it understands and responds to - legal petitions, press-releases, signature campaigns and mediatized public demonstrations. The story of the contemporary must necessarily talk about them but then exceed these accounts. In fact it is in this 'excess' that the many idioms of same-sex desire lie - idioms which have an odd relation with the legal State. Idioms which often spoil the good progressive story around the 'homosexual' that is tending to become common-sensical within sections of the national media and is making some headway within the medical and psychiatric establishments. Idioms which can be read only when we labour between disciplines.

The vernacular, the paralegal, and the everyday in the story of this fraught modern are more and more inseparable from the metropolitan, the legal and the sublime. These two sets scarcely work as antonyms but keep on transforming each other – sometimes work *as* each other, in each others' names. This is easily evidenced. When the young Delhi based writer Rana Dasgupta tried to take stock of the post-1990 years of economic liberalization in India and what it had done to Delhi, he found a peculiar city at hand. A city in which the 'urban' could not be understood in simple 'liberal' or 'progressive' terms. A city that was embedded in rapid and opaque economic changes at the turn of the twenty-first century

that were 'far too explosive for the tiny English-speaking class to monopolize its rewards' (2010).

The offshoots of the 'former English-speaking colonial elite' - here Dasgupta is thinking of those who pass out of India's premier universities, a section of its bureaucracy, those now in salaried jobs in international banks and consultancies, or those in the privileged sections of the academia, judiciary and media, those whose upper arc populate elite clubs like the India International Centre and other 'sophisticated' spaces of talks and panels, those who consume 'culture' in its polished, curated versions - this class of people, he contends, were not the 'primary beneficiaries' of the economic changes underway. This class which had for long easily dabbled in the prescribed vocabulary of 'democracy', 'liberalism' and 'citizenship' now found itself hesitantly conceding some of its effective power, spaces and key terms to players who were not cast in its mirror image. To those who used a language dissimilar to their own in order to inhabit the very same city.

The city was coming to be dominated, Dasgupta suggests, by a group that had to be analyzed differently because it came with a different ethics, a cruder aesthetics and a more illicit version of post-liberalization commerce. This was the 'new rich' that wielded power 'in vernacular terms' (*ibid.*). This could be seen as 'Delhi's dominant economic group', driven by inherited land and corruption - those factors on which the 'implausible escalations' of post-liberalization commerce rode (*ibid.*). It came from adjoining towns and provinces and had its hands in black-money and local government contracts. This was the big pool of private businessmen, migrant entrepreneurs, real-estate agents, retailers, builders and general wheeler-dealers that surrounded the little islands of those with their

foreign degrees, cosmopolitan habits, fluency in English and liberal-progressive veneers. It began to occupy the same entertainment, education and public spaces as them and transforming them. It began to affect the reigning tone of the city by becoming immanent in it. It found itself at ease with popular, recent innovations in television and print media, including growing use of Hindi in hitherto exclusively English channels like MTV and Channel V, a Bollywoodization of elite 'trance' discotheques, a media-mediated middle-class turn for a well-marketed 'traditional' in a swelling number of observed festivals and 24/7 broadcasts of a Hindu-heavy spiritualism and of astrology *as* news. This group – that made it difficult and pointless to determine any longer the exact contours of an urban 'upper class' or even the 'middle-class' – was not necessarily university educated and had climbed more informal ladders of commercial apprenticeship. This pool came full with religious consumerism, brash discounting of democratic protocol and the confidence of being politically connected and culturally embedded.

Dasgupta's story sometimes reads like that of a city under siege but at its careful moments, it is more about incompatible concepts and imaginations adjusting to each other, an adjustment that is unprecedented in its scale, and even in its clumsiness. More precisely, this is a sort of adjustment whereby the distinction between the 'modern' and the 'unmodern', the sophisticated urban and the crude provincial and the progressive and the reactionary is increasingly untenable if you have to make an adequate analysis of the situation at hand.⁷¹

⁷¹ This adjustment is already palpable enough to trigger popular representation. A recognizably new wave in Bombay cinema, mobilized by young writers and directors from outside the established film families and production houses, has already begun to respond to this post-liberalization moment of adjustment. Films like *Oye Lucky Lucky Oye* (Dir. Dibakar Banerjee: 2008), *Love, Sex aur Dhokha* (*ibid.*: 2010) and *Dev D* (Dir. Anurag

Economic liberalization could not simply be narrated as a transparent rise of pure 'democratic', 'liberal' concepts. This is how it is usually framed in the formal accounts of the Indian State, the sort found on ministry websites, and of sizable sections of the Indian national media and civil society. This conceptual purity is unfounded. Dasgupta's narrative rereads this 'rise' as impure, as far more interrupted, as more maze-like. His story is not about the progressive shedding of the 'unmodern', not the simple fading of graft, not the leaving behind of the vernacular or the religious in favour of an anglicized cosmopolitan and the secular. It is instead about the return of the vernacular, more precisely, the return of *the vernacular as the urban*, as the reigning feeling of the city. This 'return' is in the sense of the reinvigorated presence of the vernacular in urban news and entertainment media and in its knotty politics. The vernacular in this modern moment of reinvention – over and above Dasgupta's story of the 'new rich' - is increasingly recognized for its long-term mass value,

Kashyap: 2009), among others, work with new aesthetics, plot-lines, language, cinematography and characterization. The protagonists speak the confident pidgin that is formed at the cusp of a largely non-English medium education in the small-towns and the preponderance of a seductive English media in the city. The shooting locations are not foreign cities and landscapes, instead, the camera enters the messiness of the Indian urban, sketching its newly visible wealth of luxury showrooms and malls, its diluted versions in local supermarkets for the burgeoning middle classes, its old-cities and extensive pirate markets, its highways and gullies, and its lit surfaces and *noir* backwaters. The protagonists themselves have been made possible at the turn of the century. They use cheaper, pirated electronics, fly in a more affordable aviation sector, work, love and pray in situations pervaded by video and telecom technology and watch scandalous exposes and reality shows on television. They work around formal State and market systems with an informal, even illegal flair. They mark a confident vernacular that is working the city on its terms. In *Oye Lucky Lucky Oye*, remarking on a section of the Delhi rich, super crook Lucky's buddy tells him: 'बस ज़रा इन गेन्ट्री वाले लोगों से बच के रहियो , बोलते इंग्लिश हैं ये , करते देसी हैं भाई' (Just remain careful of these gentry types pal, they speak English but do it country-style' or as the film subtitles put it, 'just watch out with this swish set, they speak posh but play dirty').

for its broad commercial possibilities for the growing service sector and for its hold over 'the people's imagination'.

This kind of a return is intensified and is possible *only within the modern*, matched to its current economic and political movement. Modern media networks mobilize the vernacular into newer and endlessly redistributable circuits. This rejuvenated vernacular – multiplied by the feverish media channels and publications – is mainly an outcome of last two decades. An exploding Hindi media take on 'offbeat' ('कुछ हट के') issues of 'lesbian' film roles, is part of a post-liberalization universe.

A universe in which vernacular television and print media, which has continued to consolidate its top readership and viewership numbers over its English counterparts, confidently and uniquely tackles 'progressive' issues of 'sexuality', transforming them in the process. The 'sensitivity' pitch for the 'serious issue of homosexuality' sits right next to the hints of play and sensation that are regular in popular racy broadcasts and lurid Page 3 gossip. Dasgupta's story - which is sometimes weakly framed as a scandal wreaked upon the English types by slightly threateningly framed, provincial, Hindi-Punjabi types - is only one of the many current stories. His story can be made more nuanced. Its characterization can be given depth. The besieged elite can be framed in less absolving and less pathetic terms. Dasgupta's view of the vernacular can be reframed to be less glaring, more expansive, sometimes even benign, exciting and full of possibilities. However, its central argument - that the present moment is not subject to any smooth progress of liberal ideas but is riddled by many criss-crossing influences - has to be taken up and deepened in our own story. An information-heavy modernity, by its very nature, can only criss-cross ideas, never able to put them in one gear.

We need to take into account a third group, one that is an absent presence in Dasgupta's story. This group also makes up a mass vernacular but one that is usually more intricate and always more stressed than the vernacular of Dasgupta's 'new rich' in the contemporary urban. This group, which comprises of slum-dwellers, squatters, low paid irregular workers in urban markets, domestic servants and migrant skilled and semi-skilled labourers, is a large chunk of the city. It has an odd relation with the governing State and is also embedded within the media networks of the city. Ravi Sundaram's *Pirate Modernity* sees this group as living in those moments where the official legal and civic structures of the city are disrupted by large mass-based pirate economies – by siphoning off electricity, by squatting in unauthorized colonies, by cultivating local political favours, by consuming cheap imported electronics, assembling them, and by pirating sources of entertainment and television connections. 'The YouTube buddies'⁷², playing with each other and calling each other *laundebaaz* in what is most likely a shop of pirated CDs and electronic items – are

⁷² [Video begins] In a small crammed VCD/DVD and electronic items shop, male friends in their mid twenties, seemingly working class salesmen, are having a bit of fun with their mobile camera when no customers are around. Friend kisses Naeem's shirt, his collar, his neck, Naeem, slightly awkward, lets him, is irritated that another friend is taping all this nonsense.

Naeem [making a fist, pushing his friend away]: Teri ma ki choot ['You motherfucker']

Friend [hugging him, fondling him, being playfully crude]: thodi de na yaar, kabse... [unclear, they struggle a bit with each other] ['give me some, buddy, since when...']

Naeem gets into the game. Holds his friend tight in his arms, pushes him against the VCD stacks on the shop wall, and aggressively dry humps him as a way of getting back at him. The friend enjoys it and makes mock-yelping sounds. A third man pats Naeem's moving butt, and the guy who is shooting all this on his mobile shouts 'yeh do laundebaaz' ('here are two boyfuckers'). Naeem, gives it a rest, laughs, says 'bas' ('enough'), friend tries to kiss him again, he ducks. [Video ends]

- 'naeem londebaz: 2 loonde bazoon ki kahani un ki apni zubani' ('Naeem the boyfucker: The story of two boyfuckers in their own words'), labjab1234 channel, *YouTube*, accessed December, 2008

more a part of this grey zone by which ‘subaltern populations, out of place in the contemporary city’ get to inhabit it, get to find place in it (Sundaram: 12). The liberal civil society seems to be at odds with this urban poor often posing them as the ‘problem of the city’, as variables to be disciplined in the legal plans of the city (22). The affluent Resident Welfare Associations, the transparency campaigners, local city courts, bodies of ‘experts’ on different issues and media managers, armed with new technologies of TV campaigns, bio-identification, figures on air and river pollution, among others, try to control this bulky poor population but not without resistance. They move them around *en masse* according to their expedient models of an ideal city; ‘[t]o date the court-supervised expert committees have removed more than 200,000 people from their old habitats’ (22-3). There is an ongoing clash between what can be called the pirate version of the modern and the official civic liberal version – both effects of a now heavily mediatized world – and this clash in primarily of ways of thinking about the city and functioning in it. A clash in which each imagines and inhabits the urban differently, even incompatibly. This clash is not at all immaterial to our study. It theorizes the mixed nature of the contemporary in urban India. It tells us that the contemporary, being home to clashes, has not decided among all its options.

In terms of the different idioms of same-sex desire, some of the most crucial meeting points where the unlike concepts begin to merge, or let’s say, the meeting points between the ‘laundebaaz’ of vernacular humour and of liberal ‘decriminalization’ and ‘LGBT’ rights of an English media program are the almost twenty year old anti-AIDS NGOs that have dotted the Indian cities and small towns. They become some of the most interesting points of experiment between social idioms and classes – important not only in their work hours

but also for the after-work sense of community that forms among its members and volunteers. Here individuals from the lower-middle classes, including Hijra communities, have come to add to and own the language of ‘rights’, ‘sexuality’ and ‘transsexuality’ in the vernacular and, sometimes, in a slightly bureaucratized English. Writing about the emergence of the HIV-AIDS industry in the last two decades in India, Akshay Khanna writes that this industry ‘is primarily involved in establishing ways in which...socio-economically marginalised bodies are made available for intervention, research, and clinical trials for drugs and vaccines’ (khanna; 2010: 45). ‘This process of establishing relations of availability,’ however, ‘has simultaneously engendered social mobility for Queer folk who are otherwise excluded from masculinist political economies’ (*ibid.*).

The ‘field’ of work of these NGO employees – condom distribution in cruising parks, spreading sexual health awareness among ‘Men who have Sex with Men’ (MSM) – till very recently, exceeded the boundaries of the legal and its terms and conditions.⁷³ This public health focus has imagined the population as divided into distinct ‘high-risk’ groups in need of targeted interventions, whether MSMs, CSWs (Commercial Sex Workers) or IDUs (Injecting Drug Users) as culled out from the ‘general population’ which it is thought to endanger. This stress on formalizing categories, and of filing people within those categories as evidence of intervention work and rationale for continued funding has remained at best ambivalent, with each of these categories behaving differently inside and outside of official

⁷³ This contradiction was the basis for the filing of the PIL against section 377 in the Delhi High Court to facilitate targeted interventions with the MSMs without any police hassle. For more on the history of the two petitions against section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in the Delhi High Court, see khanna, akshay, 2010, ‘The Social Lives of 377 - Constitution of the Law by the Queer Movement’ in *A Refracted Subject: Sexualness in the Realms of Law and Epidemiology*, PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, pg. 118-142.

NGO registers.⁷⁴ When the annual Pride marches in Delhi are noticeably attended both by the English-speaking middle and upper classes and by those groups that have come to consolidate around HIV-AIDS NGOs and speak a mixed, confident vernacular, then these events of 'Pride' become strong visual markers of the clumsy proximity of classes. Thus,

⁷⁴ Within the HIV-AIDS industry's 'development' discourse around sexual health, the categories of 'kothi' (the effeminate male who is penetrated), 'panthi' (the masculine partner who penetrates), the 'double-dekker' or 'do-parantha' (one who both penetrates and is penetrated) or of 'MSM' ('Men who have sex with men') are some of the targeted answers to the incredibly complex social situation in India in which much sexual relations between men are carried out but without categories akin to 'homosexual' or 'gay' that could have facilitated specified sexual health interventions directed at a specific 'community', like in the U.S.A. in the last decades of the 20th century. In response, with its massive focus on keeping records for donor bodies and of formalizing specific groups that need to be intervened upon, this strand of public health organizing and 'development' work began culling the vernacular idioms of same-sex desire, building on them, re-framing and solidifying them, even exaggerating and adding to them to make them into tenable categories that could be understood by the government and private funding bodies. This formalization however is never complete, or without its share of double play. Neither is it insulated from the language of 'gay rights' popular within the media and other 'sexuality' based groups. After a few visits to the Milan Centre in Delhi, run by the Naz Foundation, an NGO working on HIV-AIDS and sexual health, I realized that there is a diversity of terms and concepts at work here to understand same-sex relations and to live out male effeminacy. Community workers understood the pliability of identities like 'kothi' and 'panthi', even as they might have penned them down with bureaucratic rigidity in their registers. At other times, they used words like 'kothi' and 'gay' seamlessly and unselfconsciously, suggesting an unprecedented confluence of their meanings and uses. Neither was the penetrator/penetrated (panthi/kothi) model very rigidly set. In mid-2009, when I attended one of the group meetings in the office of the Humsafar Trust, also a group working on HIV-AIDS and sexual health, in Vakola, Bombay, one community worker told all of us that, on his rounds of the 'field', he gives information both on 'active' penetration and 'passive' reception to *all* people involved because he can never fathom when they might 'switch,' 'kab palti maar lein'. In contemporary India, these offices of AIDS-based NGOS become exciting and unpredictable points where different idioms of same-sex desire come to experiment with each other. For more on this, see Cohen, Lawrence 'The Kothi Wars: AIDS Cosmopolitanism and the Morality of Classification' in Vincanne Adams, Stacy Leigh Pigg (ed.) *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality, and Morality in Global Perspective*, Duke University Press, 2005: pg. 269-304, and, khanna, akshay 'Taming of the Shrewd *Meyeli Chbele*: A political economy of development's sexual subject', in *Development*, 2009: 52, pg. 43-51, and of course, khanna, akshay, 2010, 'The Soft Boy and heris Hard (Epidemiological) Fact' in *A Refracted Subject: Sexualness in the Realms of Law and Epidemiology*, PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, pg. 45-84.

also of the nearness of the many idioms of same-sex desire in contemporary India. The four Delhi Queer Pride marches (2008-11), not unlike their recent counterparts in other Indian cities, have been fairly assorted both in their demography and their language and content of sloganeering.⁷⁵ These events bring together various contemporary registers – ways of speaking and doing things – that have made space for representing and living out same-sex relations in India. They form wild, visual clusters of memes and bodies, all mixing with odd results.

⁷⁵ A text cloud of slogans on banners used during the three years of the Delhi Queer Pride would include: 'Greedy Bisexual', 'Happy Homo', 'Delhi Be Proud', 'Proud Indian Lesbian', 'Love knows no Gender', 'Yes to Gay Rights', 'Dilli Ko Satrangi Salaam [A Rainbow Salute to Delhi]', 'Proud to be Bisexual', 'Stop Oppression of Transgenders', 'Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isai, Hetero-Homo Bhai Bhai [Like Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs & Christians, Heteros, Homos are Brothers]', 'Keep your laws off my body', 'Queer Dilli Meri Jaan [Queer Delhi My Life]', 'Ham Hain Rahi Pyaar Ke, Hamse Kuch Na Boliye [We Are Travellers On The Path Of Love, Don't Tell Us Anything]', 'Give Me Support, I Want To Take Off My Mask', 'Gay ≠ Freak', 'Straight But Not Narrow', 'Pyar To Pyar Hota Hai [Love is Love After All]', 'No Need For Homophobia, Lesbian Suicides, Forced Marriages', 'Ham Dilli Ke Dilwale [We the Hearty of Delhi]', 'Born Gay, Follow the Ray, Born Straight, Refuse to Hate', 'My Hero is Homo', 'Boys will Be With Boys', 'Out Is In', 'Out Of The Closet And Into The Streets', 'I Am Proud To Say My Grandson Is Gay', 'Drop 377', 'Loving Isn't A Crime', 'Don't Criminalize Love', 'Gay by Nature, Proud by Choice', 'Delhi Queer', 'Gay and Proud of it', 'Queer and Loving it'. The first Delhi Queer Pride, June 29th 2008 was simultaneously translated, spoken about and publicized as *Dilli Samlaingik aur Transgender Garv Utsav*. *Garv* implies pride. *Samlaingik* comes from the Sanskrit prefix *sam-* implying same (homo- is the combining form of Greek for 'same') and *laingik* is a derivation from Hindi *ling*. Here *ling* is used to denote the gender of the person, male or female; it works as a part of the Hindi grammar system, *stri-ling* (female gender), *pu-ling* (male gender) and *napunsak-ling* (closest in sense to neuter, but outside grammar, also a term of invective for those who are effeminate or for Hijras). *Samlaingik* was an attempt of liberal activists and sexual health NGOs since mid-late 90s to create the Hindi equivalent of the term 'homosexual'. It is now very common in popular Hindi print and visual media. In the same vein, Delhi-based non-profit organization working on women's sexual and reproductive rights – Sangini (India) trust simultaneously produced its *Guide To Your Rights: Legal Handbook For Sexual Minorities In India as Hakon Ki Aur: Bharat Ke Yaunik Alapmaton Ke Liye Kanuni Sahayata Pustika* (2005).

In the year 2007, when AIDS activists and NGO coordinators Aditya Bondyopadhyay and Vidya Shah were putting together ‘stories of violence and tales of hope’ of the ‘Kothi community in India’, for their organization Naz Foundation International’s coffee-table publication, they performed this very habitual merger of frames. ‘When 18 years old Gunaseelam [from Tamil Nadu, and most probably lower middle class] decided to come out as a Kothi,’ they wrote, ‘his family and friends made him an object of ridicule. Calling him names such as ‘Vadi’ and ‘Podi’ (slang in Tamil for come and go for women). His parents noticed this and began abusing him and ill-treated him, to the extent of poisoning his food. Gunaseelam was scared, angry and decided to seek support from an MSM network’ (2007: 36). Here, *kothi*, a fairly new term that found life and circumstantial use (and imagined histories) mainly within the context of the two-decade old HIV-AIDS NGOs is used breathlessly with the idea of ‘coming-out’ that is a direct loan-word from liberal-confessional framework ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ identity politics.⁷⁶

Bondyopadhyay and Shah state that Kothis are ‘feminized males’ who do ‘male-to-male sex’, they are ‘very much a subculture in South Asia’ and their ‘exclusion from the mainstream’ is ‘deepened due to their ‘different’ gender identity and sexual behavior’ (17). How do you then *come out* as a Kothi? How do you *come out* as an effeminated male, a condition constituted precisely by an apriori visibility, something possible due to the gendered social attitudes about how bodies should look and behave visually? Is *kothi* starting to work here like sexual identity, something that can be hidden and revealed, *closeted* and *outed*, something that is thought to be a factor of the self, its permanent aspect constant through secrecy or disclosure? Bandyopadhyay and Shah were less concerned with

⁷⁶ For more on the history and use of the term ‘kothi’, see Cohen: 2005; khanna: 2010; Reddy: 2005.

conceptual rigour. They were describing Gunaseelam's self-identification as *kothi* to mark a clear break in his life's narrative, a turning-point, akin to that popular conceit of breakage in 'coming out', the iconic watershed moment milked in much 'gay' and 'lesbian' literature and liberal politics. Here, in an NGO publication, different contemporary registers mix and cast situations and people in their own messy images. This proximity of idioms, this nearness of registers, it is easy to argue, has a veritable historical legacy in India.

A Discussion on the Idioms of (Male) Intimacy and the Self

Discotheques and nightclubs in Delhi made a peculiar promise at the end of 2009. In working their New Year party policies they decided to open the doors to 'gay couples'. This was the first New Year celebration in the city after the Delhi High Court judgment that read down section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, decriminalizing same-sex sexual acts. Tarina Shah of Noida's up-end club Elevate said '[i]f the government has accepted, then we are all for it' (Sharma; 'Gay party goes on': 2009).

However Delhi nightclub owners had a peculiar worry, a worry that is possible only within the logic of this strand that we have called *specifying*. Afraid that 'straight' men will pose as 'gay' couples to gain the cheaper couple entry rather than the customary 'stag' charges for men, they devised a plan. Sohrab Sitaram of the nightclub Tabula Rasa said, '[w]e'll allow gay couples. But will check the *genuinity* of the couple' (quoted in *ibid.*) (emphasis mine). The same Tarina Shah says that 'pretenders will be a problem, but we will have to use our discretion' (*ibid.*). DJ Rummy Sharma of Pure-The Club Lounge, considers checking the 'authenticity' of gay couples a complete non-problem. He has schooled his gate-managers

in a peculiar lesson that re-rehearses Cath's game of signifiers. 'It is easy to assess' he says, 'if they are being honest. One of the partners in a genuine gay couple is a 'king' while the other is the 'queen'. And we engage them in a conversation to check if they are faking it' (*ibid.*).

It is in response to this peculiar lucidity, this easiness of checking that the study of figures unfolds, that the analytic of doubleness is proposed. In these instances, the rules to recognize 'gay' men or 'dykes' get folded into the category of the common-sense.⁷⁷ A problem is temporarily made to appear as a non-problem. This is the strand where same-sex desire can be read with a theoretically always limited and practically always tiny set of rules: Cath's signifiers, Shah's discretion, Sharma's criteria. It rests on a premise that there *are* distinct forms of recognisability for 'gay' men, as against the pretending 'straight' men. In fact the very possibility of faking, the point of worry for the Delhi club managers, is possible only within their premise. They make their own worry. They consider 'gay' men to exemplify a distinct set of characteristics that can then be aped, that can believe any self-report. Here, the script of gayness always already exceeds self-report because it is visual.⁷⁸ It

⁷⁷ 'Lesbian' women – Cath's dykes – seem to be the non-subjects for Delhi clubs. As usually gratis entries in clubs, women pose no money crisis, and do not necessitate checks or even expectations of genuine 'lesbian' couples. One wonders how the figure of the female masculine, of the 'butch dyke' would interrupt the bouncers' imaginations.

⁷⁸ The sexologists Iwan Bloch (1872-1922) and Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), German and English respectively, used to search for female curves and lack of beards in *male homosexuals* and for enlarged clitorises and hanging sacks in *female inverts* (Bloch 1938, Ellis 1927). This is the sexological world of typed bodies and catalogued behaviors, where physicality and gestures become the visual codes to map people. The sexological map ever since its articulation in late 19th-early 20th century Europe and colonial India has been relentlessly visual.

is necessary to then understand the same problem as an aural proposition? What does 'Queer' music really mean? Does it 'signify' an identity? (So you like 'The Sound of Music? Oh! You are so gay!') or a larger 'fluidity' of form/gender/identities? This is one of the central questions I take up in the last chapter.

The study of figures, however, explodes this premise. Same-sex desire is plucked out of this world-mapping of people as 'gay' and 'straight' and is reinstalled in its wider historical and rhetorical legacies. Here, the gay/straight map is necessarily only one of the ways of understanding or enacting same-sex desire. It is only one of the figures, always already in a conversation with others. Here, it is humble. It can only do so much and no more.

This allows us to explore a wider terrain of self-images of men in India and of intimacy between them. It allows various idioms of intimacy and the self to analytically coexist and clash against each other. Each figure is then given its due without exaggerating.

Framed this way, the study argues for the unsustainability of any one figure – gay, *laundebaaʒ*, migrant, lover or friend – in our bid to understand people on PR, their self-images and the ways in which they relate. If each of them is a figure, a scene of language, then one is never implicitly better than the other, one never explains all of the other. There is no one figure that is *more* basic or *more* elemental. A *laundebaaʒ*, for instance, is not a subset within gay. In the study of figures, we avoid lowest common denominators, we do away with supersets.

He is intrigued now, sipping his beer, I can see a sparkle in his eyes. Now there are some more strangers around us. The leather of the couch is shrinking a little more, the bodies are brushing against it. It's acquiring different aromas, and I can sense light pats on my shoulders, fingers brushing my hair, and palms caressing my cheeks every once in a while—I know that the party is swelling now. I stand up, and walk towards the bar, waving another note at the bartender, who's well acquainted with my order by now. As I walk back, I see familiar faces. "All of the Internet comes alive on such nights," I say to myself, and then get back to my couch, bored, with the same people, both in the virtual and real spaces. However, I notice that my place has already been taken over by two enthusiastic lovers, or shall I just say, practitioners of passion, who leave no room, not even on the brim of the couch, to rest my biggest asset tonight. He's already waiting for me at the turn of the staircase, beckoning me to follow him to the darkened dance floor upstairs.

The case of Item Numbers and the Performing Queer Vs Performative Queer

DJ Fakir, who started his career in Mumbai and now works in Velocity—a popular discotheque on the Delhi-Noida border that turns 'gay' every Saturday—remembers the times when he started working, "Disco meant English music then, we would play popular tracks like 'Smooth Criminal' (Michael Jackson) or 'Careless Whispers' (Wham: George Michael) and the audience used to go gaga about it. The concept of Hindi songs in discotheques was in its infancy then with Indian composers (like Bappi Lahiri) trying hard to create tracks which would match the level of western hits in popularity." Lahiri's (Disco

Dancer, 1982)⁷⁹ rather gaudy music arrangement is influenced by the disco music already prevalent then. However, with the change in scenario, disco became a symbol of High Culture and modernity, a diversion from its origin in the west (where it started in resistance to the High Culture). In India, the ideological backing that (Queer) Disco music carries is actually of the subversion of ideologies itself. It creates the space of amalgamation in a way, that different paradigms of identity, gaze, body politics, sexuality come together and create a very complex space; where dominance of any one hegemonic ideology can't survive. The meta-narratives that the music creates, by taking itself to a dance floor, where each and every body reads it as a personal text, sheds the hierarchical text on one hand, and converts into a 'rainbow' of sounds on the other.

As Farrer observes, discotheques were perceived as a “cosmopolitan space allowing for appropriation and consumption of ‘foreign’ sexual styles”⁸⁰ which were not allowed in other spaces. The symbolic for westernism was also the use of western (basically American) music. However, as time passed, the accessibility of the disco space did not remain exclusive to the ‘urban cosmopolitan elite’. With the rise of the upper middle class, discotheques witnessed a plethora of new kinds of patronage coming in, which was ready to afford the expenses but, at the same time, also wanted to identify with the music, and since unlike the previous audience, they had a closer nostalgic relation with Hindi movie songs—towards the beginning of the 90s, an acute need for Hindi music in discotheques arose. This is where Dasgupta's subject comes back to us—a group that had to be analyzed differently because it came with a different ethics, a ‘cruder’ aesthetics and a more illicit version of post-liberalization commerce. This was the 'new rich' that wielded power 'in

⁷⁹ Composition 1, till 1.50 mins.

⁸⁰ James Farrer, Disco 'Super-Culture': Cosmopolitan Dance culture and cosmopolitan sexual culture,p4-5

vernacular terms'. To cater to this, bands like Instant Karma and composers like Biddu, Leslie Lewis, Bally Sagoo etc. came forward with remixes of popular old Hindi film songs. The elements of fusion are easily identifiable in these remixes (as in the case of Instant Karma, which borrows its musical aesthetics from the gothic music that the band Enigma explores in the west.)⁸¹

With the rise of Rahman, whose 'Muqabla'⁸² (Humse Hai Muqabla, 1995) and 'Hamma Hamma' (Bombay, 1995) songs were the initial discotheque film hits, musical scene in the discotheques went through a major transformation. Now these songs were frequently requested. John Cage's concept of randomness in music was incarnated in the music space in discotheques as now it was not only the DJ who selected the music, but his mixing abilities were also challenged by the active audience participation in the selection of random songs which practically had no relation with each other in their musical structure. Post-modernism in music is where the anxiety of the listener to 'make sense of' the piece is either perpetually frustrated by pure randomness (Cage's music of chance) or assuaged and dissipated by a bland, 'easy listening' surface with changes happening only in a Californian 'longue duree', as in the musics of La Monte Young, Philip Glass, Terry Riley or Steve Reich. The intention of such musics, we might say, is to transgress both the Imaginary and Symbolic, as Ben Dryer says, a sort of 'Brainwashing into the Real'. The variety of rhythm patterns these songs followed posed a major problem for the DJs to maintain the fluidity of transition. Thus, the remixing of contemporary popular tracks also became a significant practice. With the use of similar disco beats (usually twelve beat per minute, but can vary) these songs were easier to mix, matching their beat-count and tone. This practice became

⁸¹ Composition 2, Stolen by Jay Sean, Remix of Chura liya hai tumne (R.D. Burman, Yaadon ki Baraat)

⁸² Composition 1, post 1.50 mins

so popular in due course of time, that a lot of music labels started releasing the remix version of a song along with the original track, sometimes in the same album. In some cases the remix version preceded the release of the original track to ensure its popularity. Once a hit in pubs and discos, a song was bound to be a chartbuster everywhere else. The recent increase in disco and pub songs in Hindi films attests to the same phenomenon, as the success of these songs is looked at as a precursor to the success of the film. It is also interesting how owing to this trend, the club/bar/discotheque space—which in the earlier times was the space of ‘illegal’ activities in the movies where the villain would be hiding, the murders would take place, the ‘transactions’ would happen, and the songs would have a haunting, thrilling quality like ‘Aaiye Meherbaan’ in *China Town* (Shakti Samanta, 1962), ‘Baithe hain kya unke paas’ in *Jewel Thief* (Vijay Anand, 1967), ‘O Haseena Julfonwali’ in *Teesri Manzil* (Vijay Anand, 1966)⁸³—transforms into a ‘friendly’ space where the protagonists would meet, love stories would commence and a lighter, ‘fun’ mise-en-scene would emerge and the songs would be about forgetting everything else and enjoying the moment like ‘Koi Kahe Kehta Rahe’ in *Dil Chahta Hai* (Farhan Akhtar, 2001), ‘It’s the time to Disco’ in *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Nikhil Advani, 2003), ‘Where’s the party tonight?’ and ‘Rock-n-Roll Soniye’ in *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna* (Karan Johar, 2006). This can be looked at as a self-serving method, where both the discotheques and the film industry depend on each other and serve each other. The films popularize disco as the cosmopolitan space, and the discos attest film songs as cosmopolitan music, leading to profits for both of them.

⁸³ In the song from *Teesri Manzil*, as the protagonist Rocky (Shammi Kapoor) plays the percussion and sings for her, Helen, is constantly seen, in various interesting frames as an object of mystery. The moment that justifies my point is when the huge prop of the eye emerges, and we see her dancing in the retina space-marking her as an objectified body, an object of fantasy and some kind of voyeuristic perversion. This moment also sort of foretells her death, almost placing her parallel to the character of Marion Crane from the 1960 movie, *Psycho*, who’s been looked at through a peephole by Norman Bates, before being brutally murdered.

Till here, the music was still in some way, ‘cosmopolitan’. There was a certain kind of imagined universality in aesthetic and composition. The song ‘Who Lamhe’ (Anu Malik) from the film *Zehar* (Mohit Suri, 2004) can be looked at as an example here. The remix of the song appeared before the ‘original’ slower version released. Mixed in the ‘house’ style, this track had screeching vocals by Atif Aslam, filled with *alaaps*—a kind of *sufi pop* aesthetic (in fact, the Pakistani Pop band ‘Jal’ accused Anu Malik for plagiarizing their tune.) The song, despite borrowing clearly from that structure, has very ‘mainstream’ Hindi lyrics, and hardly ever delves into any word that might conspire against this identity. The remix of the song by DJ Suketu keeps that aesthetic intact, but adds more groove to it, the tempo is certainly increased significantly, and thus a song about nostalgia and longing is certainly turned into a dance number.⁸⁴ This was the aesthetic that was clearly picking up in the initial phase of Hindi film remixes in Queer (male) Discotheques. However, things changed soon, the ‘new’ subject *had* arrived on the scene, and with him came a new sensibility. Not only Q(M) but also presumably straight discotheques started echoing the desires to light a *beeri* from someone’s *jigar* (Beedi Jalaile, Vishal Bharadwaj, *Omkaara*, 2006)⁸⁵, get smitten by someone’s *kajraare kajraare kale kale naina*, (*Bunty aur Babli*, Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, 2005)⁸⁶ and were dancing to *munni badnaam*⁸⁷ (*Dabangg*, Lalit Pandit, 2010.)⁸⁸ This is also the moment when, for the first time, discotheques in Delhi truly turned into spaces of performing identity, instead of a performative identity.

⁸⁴ Composition 3 and 4

⁸⁵ Composition 5

⁸⁶ Composition 6

⁸⁷ Composition 7

⁸⁸ Director of *Dabangg* Abhinav Kashyap stated that the song was inspired by his childhood memories of the folk Bhojpuri song "Launda Badnaam Hua Naseeban Tere Liye" from the album *Balma Bada Bavaali* sung by Rani Bala. (quoted in the Times of India, September 16, Diksha Kamra’s report, ‘Folk Inspiration for ‘Munni Badnaam’)

As Bollywood celebrated its new mantra of success in the garb of what people would call an ‘item number’, the discotheque space all of a sudden turned alive—probably the first time any space became so alive after the private rooms of many Queers did, long ago, on songs that had Sridevi dancing to them. The uninhibited desire (अल्हड़ जवानी मेरी सूखी सूखी जाये रे), the ‘dare’ to accessibility (तेरे हाथ न आनी, शीला, शीला की जवानी)⁸⁹, the intense expression of love (हमने कलेजा रख दिया चाकू की नोक पर)⁹⁰, the sexual innuendo (रात भर छाना रे, नमक इस्क का) —a whole new expression of desire seemed to have incarnated on the dance floor. Things which were only being said by the Lady Gagas, Madonnas and Amy Winehouses so far, all of a sudden turned ‘desi’. It was significant however, that this scene was constantly dominated by female artists, even though in the mainstream clubs, the ‘male’ item dancer had also entered. However, the only such song that really made it to Queer discotheques was Salman Khan’s ‘Character Dheela’⁹¹ (Loose Character, Ready, 2011) which interestingly comments on the hypocrisy of the society, as it says “When everybody has ‘fun’ in the name of love, it’s ok, but when I do it, people call me Loose Character?” Otherwise, from ‘Chikni Chameli’ to ‘Anarkali Disco Chali’, all of them featured female singers/artists.

“**B**ut what is with this association of the Queer men with female artists? What is it that binds them together?” He asks as he looks for his cigarettes, I offer him my box. He smiles

⁸⁹ Composition 8

⁹⁰ Kajraare, Composition 6

⁹¹ Composition 9

and takes one with extreme gratitude. I'm amused, not being used to such politeness, certainly not in spaces like this.

I'm reminded of a recent episode of the highly talked about *Satyamev Jayate* (broadcast on 13th May, 2012) with Amir Khan as its host. This particular episode was about child abuse and one of the people who shared their stories was Harish Iyer, a Queer activist and counselor. Harish, according to his own account, was raped by his uncle for around eleven years for his life. On being asked what gave him strength during all these years, he responded that he would create a secret world of his own—a sanctuary, where he would feel safe, and how Sridevi's films helped him through his ordeal. Sridevi, arguably the most successful Indian film actress during the 80s, did several films which had her as the central character (including *Nagina*, *Nigahein*, *Chandni*, *Lamhe*, *Chaalbaaz*, *Suhagan*) as opposed to the other end of the spectrum, where films had men as their central characters and heroines would appear only for the songs. Her films had stories which revolved around her hardships and struggles and eventually her victory. Harish looked at her as a 'role model' and believed that just like in her movies, everything would be all right in the end.

This identification with a popular icon epitomizes the Queer imagination of the self. I believe Disco's core gay dancers take to these female vocalists because they relate to their tales of hardship, pain, and emotional defiance in the face of adversity.⁹² The practice of gay men establishing a rapport with a female vocalist can be traced to the operatic tradition—this is, for example, the central theme of Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's*

⁹² Hughes, Walter. "In the Empire of the Beat: Discipline and Disco." *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture*. Eds. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose. New York and London: Routledge, 1994. 147–57

Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire (1993)—but it is an alliance that has come under attack from authors such as John Gill, who criticizes the notion of the alliance of gay men and female divas in relation to dance in his book *Queer Noises* (1995). “We could talk irony and intertextuality until we were blue in the face and dance music would still be about heterosexual hegemony. . .” writes Gill. “Worse, when they address the subject of love, which they normally do, the lyrics hymn the sort of relationships, and the sort of politics, that would otherwise be an anathema to Queers.”⁹³ That is obviously not the case in disco, though, where the lyrics are often coruscating in their critique of the happy veneer of heterosexual romance, with betrayal, loneliness, anger, jealousy, and postrelationship survival the bread-and-butter themes. Gill’s reference to irony and intertextuality alludes to ironic, camp humor, perhaps the most discussed mode of western gay expression, but there is little space for irony in the discotheque, where emotion (feelings) and affect (bodily sensation) are far more prominent. After the introduction of reinforced sound (tweeter arrays and bass reinforcements), the dance floor functions as a space in which distance—and therefore irony—is impossible.⁹⁴ The force of the sound system, as Kodwo Eshun and Julian Henriques point out, envelops the dancer to the extent that s/he cannot exist outside of or be removed from the experience⁹⁵ and when the music selected by the DJ includes a female diva, which it so often does, her powerful, amplified voice permeates the body of

⁹³ Gill, John. *Queer Noises: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Music*. London: Cassell, 1995. 254

⁹⁴ If anything, the experience is closer to what Judith Halberstam has described as the trope of lesbian sincerity, which “rejects the association of all things Queer with irony, camp, critical distance and innovation” (Halberstam 2005).

⁹⁵ Eshun, Kodwo. *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*. London: Quartet, 1998. 188
Henriques, Julian. “Sonic Dominance and the Reggae Sound System Session.” *The Auditory Cultures Reader*. Eds. Michael Bull and Les Back. Oxford: Berg, 2003. 451–80

the gay male dancer, who in turn has been charged by the vocalist's refusal to assume the role of the downtrodden underdog within the conventional heterosexual relationship.

In a recent movie, which brings a lot of above notions together, and which has challenged the body and its performative aspects to a great extent, 'The Dirty Picture' (Milan Luthria, 2011), loosely based on the life of Silk Smitha (a contemporary of Sridevi, also worked with her in *Sadma*, 1983), the song 'Ooh la la, ooh la la'⁹⁶ talks of an interesting sexual lexicon where words like 'fantasy' float into the aural space with the body of the actress filling the screen and creating a voyeuristic experience. In a singular, linear reading, this can be looked at as an obvious case of male gaze and female objectification, but this is a more complicated moment—as the female singer keeps singing about how the 'lover' has been pinching her all over the body, this 'pinching' takes a more performative turn, when we invoke a previous moment in the film where the protagonist whips herself as a 'performance of sexuality'. The performance is happening on several levels here—one, is the event in the life of Silk Smitha and her objectification; then there's a moment where her whipping, her pain, creates her 'performative identity' through which she attains a point where she ends up 'performing her identity', or what seems to be the pleasure of her success (which gets metaphored by a song about her sexual coming of age). But the last and most interesting layer of this paradigm is that this 'identity' itself is a performance, i.e., there is no exact point where that differentiation can be made, and actually the song is a double performance—a part of what she is, and a part of what she thinks she should be. How are pain and pleasure related? How can a moment of self-wound be transformed into a performative moment of sexual performance? I pick up another example to clarify this

⁹⁶ Composition 10

point. The film I choose is slightly different from the above mentioned films in several respects. *Khalnayak* (1993, Subhash Ghai) is an interesting film to look at with respect to gender, sexuality, myth and interpretation, added with a flavour of contemporary history.⁹⁷ The whole episode of Sita's abduction is always looked at in a very conventional patriarchal manner in all forms of representation, according to which Sita is considered a poor, helpless figure, who, unable to save herself from the evil hands of Ravana, is abducted against her will and has to wait for Rama to come and save her. This interpretation continues even in the modern adaptations of the story, like *Tezaab* (N.Chandra, 1988). In *Khalnayak*, however, this point of view is reworked, by making this abduction a conscious decision on the part of Sita (in this case, Ganga, underlining her purity). Moreover, in several interpretations, Sita's act of crossing the line drawn by Lakshmana is looked at as the cause of her abduction, and as a moral to women that crossing the borders set by men can lead them to unpleasant situations (examples can be films like *Dehleez*, *Gumraah*.⁹⁸) The character of Ganga in *Khalnayak* in this respect becomes an important tool of liberation as here the decision of crossing the line and standards set by the male society ceases to be a helpless one, and instead becomes a conscious decision. She keeps her agency of saying 'no' to sexual advances intact even though she acts as a 'slut'⁹⁹ and 'elopes' with a stranger to an unknown destination. This is also the moment, where the most controversial song from the film takes place. In 1993, R.

⁹⁷ The tale is between Rama (Jackie Shroff) and Balaram, literally meaning 'the powerful Rama' (Sanjay Dutt). So here, instead of being merely an antagonist, Sanjay Dutt's character comes up as an alter-ego to the Rama's Character, and they become two sides of the same coin. This point is emphasized upon by making them childhood friends. However, here also, the Rama character stands up as the virtuous one as opposed to the evil Balarama. The film begins with Balarama under the custody of Rama, a controlled alter-ego that threatens of being dangerous if set free. Eventually, he 'does' get a chance to escape one day. What follows is an interesting interpretation of the Ramayana tale.

⁹⁸ Vidyut Aklujkar, 'Family, Feminism and film in remaking Ramayana' p. 43

⁹⁹ I invoke this term as a part of the Queer lingo, and to underline the similarity between the situation and moment of identification.

P Chugh, an advocate and a Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) supporter filed a legal petition in Delhi alleging the song

“is obscene, defamatory to women community and is likely to incite the commission of offence. The song is grossly indecent and is being sung through cassettes at public places, annoying the people at large, the undersigned specially.” (R. P. Chugh 1993)

The song in question was called ‘Choli ke peeche kya hai?’¹⁰⁰ (What’s behind the blouse?). The veiled sexual reference made the song, in Chugh's eyes, not only obscene but derogatory to women. What increased his annoyance was the song's unhindered circulation in public. Chugh's cluster of complaints drew together three specific assumptions about sexuality, assumptions which are common to patriarchal discourse in India: first, that sexuality is obscene; second, that sexual references dishonor women; and third, that sexuality's entry into public space disrupts social boundaries. Chugh's petition was a means for seeking redress against such affronts. In my opinion, the song challenges exactly the same notion. Its occurrence at a moment, when the ‘traditionally bound within the boundaries of the house’ women takes the step of going out with her own choice and stays confident about her choices is not just a co-incidence. I argue that the song is a performance of her identity, a celebration of the liberation of female sexuality where Madhuri Dixit though unconsciously, liberates the character played by her in a previous adaptation (Mohini in *Tezaab*) and literally acts as a Mohini (illusionist) to turn the table around and acquire the power of action. The whole binary of relationship is interestingly manipulated at this juncture in the film. Later in the same film, when the gang of rogues

¹⁰⁰ Composition 11

she elopes with performs on the same song, crossdressed in long skirts, the song acquires its complete ‘Queer identity’ and moves beyond the symbolic. Now, keeping this reading parallel with the Queer (male) dancers in the discotheque spaces—in the darkness of the club space, when they shift from a performative identity (this is how I should be performing as a top/bottom/versatile/queen/drag) to a performing identity—a more difficult to point out, complex state of affairs where the body and the aural space come together to formulate a complicated text which cannot be deciphered within the semiotics of a non-Queer understanding—very close to what Harish refers to, where a cinematic image comes face to face with life and there is an element of empathy and ‘identification’.

The Politics of Pain and Pleasure and the creation of a Queer Body

The explicit S/M theme of domination and submission might have been far removed from the discourse of diva resistance, but it connected with the popularization of leather culture in gay discotheques following the introduction of the Black Party, in effect a leather party, by Michael Fesco at Flamingo in 1975¹⁰¹. Soon after, Michel Foucault experienced leather and S/M practices during his trip to the West Coast of the United States and was inspired to call for the making “of one’s body a place for the production of extraordinary polymorphic pleasures, while simultaneously detaching it from a valorization of the genitalia and particularly of the male genitalia”¹⁰². By the early 1990s Queer theorists, drawing on Foucault and opposing the belief that sexuality was natural, advocated a sexual politics that, amongst other things, sought out instability and surprise through a

¹⁰¹ Op cit. Lawrence, 118

¹⁰² Miller, James. *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. New York and London: Anchor Books, 1993. 269

demonstration of the constructed, performative nature of sexuality¹⁰³ They also argued that even gay sexuality risked becoming ‘a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation’ that forgot to resist ‘the normal’¹⁰⁴. Drawing on the unsettling theme of sadomasochism, the lyrics of ‘Kiss Me Again’ anticipated this shifting debate between gay and Queer politics.¹⁰⁵ Before Arthur Russell came onto the scene, gay disco was in fact already Queer. Even though Richard Dyer doesn’t use the term, his classic essay ‘In Defence of Disco’ articulates this position thanks to his highlighting of the way in which disco’s emphasis on open-ended, mutating polyrhythm and timbre ‘restores eroticism to the whole body’ and contrasts radically with the ‘indelibly phallo-centric music’ of rock. Whereas rock confines ‘sexuality to the cock’¹⁰⁶, disco opens up into an open-ended way of becoming that coheres with Butler’s conception of the Queer body, as well as subsequent theorizations developed by critics such as Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti, who together, as Jeremy Gilbert writes, “have all in different ways sought to develop a politics of embodied identity which is radically materialist as well as explicitly feminist and pro-Queer in character”¹⁰⁷. Suzanne Cusick, in her chapter in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, suggests that Queer music might combine elements that are normally understood to be ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ in one piece in order to upset notions of any stable, essential gendered self (76). Susan McClary, in a chapter written for *Microphone*

¹⁰³ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990, 6

Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’. New York: Routledge, 1993, 228

¹⁰⁴ Warner, Michael, (ed.). *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1993. xxvi

¹⁰⁵ As Gayle Rubin notes, “Unmarried couples living together, masturbation, and some forms of homosexuality are moving in the direction of respectability.” She adds, “Promiscuous homosexuality, sadomasochism, fetishism, transsexuality, and cross-generational encounters are still viewed as unmodulated horrors incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness, or transcendence” (Rubin 15).

¹⁰⁶ Dyer, Richard. “In Defence of Disco.” *Gay Left*, summer 1979. Reprinted in *The Faber Book of Pop*. Eds. HanifKureishi and Jon Savage. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995. 518–27.

¹⁰⁷ Gilbert, Jeremy, and Ewan Pearson. *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, 233-36

Fiends, similarly argues, “the music itself—especially as it intersects with the body and destabilizes accepted norms of subjectivity, gender and sexuality—is precisely where the politics of music often reside” (McClary 32). With regard to disco, Gilbert adds, “Dyer’s ‘all-body-eroticism’ would seem to be precisely the objective of a Queer musicology’s erotic politics, informed at once by a rigorous anti-essentialism and by Cusick’s rather beautiful suggestion that ‘music *is* sex’¹⁰⁸

Implicit here is the way in which Queer disco was felt as a corporeal phenomenon (rather than understood as a signifying text) on the dance floor. Reflecting this experience, songwriters, producers and remixers started to condense their disco vocals into bite-sized injunctions that complemented the dance floor dynamic¹⁰⁹. ‘Dance Dance Dance’ sang Chic, while Taana Gardner instructed her listeners to ‘Work That Body.’ Indeed the seemingly mundane experience of dancing in a discotheque was itself a likely entry point into Queerness thanks to the fact that the discotheque culture, in contrast to its 1960s articulation, broke with the long-established practice of partnered social dancing in favor of freeform movement in which participants danced solo-within-the-crowd. The highly affective environment of the dance floor—in which bodies were penetrated by sound, came into contact with other bodies, and experienced further disorientation thanks to lighting and drug effects—destabilized normative conceptions of sexuality and boundedness still further. And there can be little doubt that gay men, along with women, were the key protagonists of early 1970s disco culture because they were less invested than

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Op. Cit Hughes, 149

straight men in holding onto the dominant form of the autonomous, rational, masculine self.¹¹⁰

As his fingers tickle my palms, I see that sparkle in his eyes again. He draws me closer as we sway to the last song of the night, 'The Best Time of My Life' from Dirty Dancing. We move out of the club, and he asks his last question as he opens the door of the car for me: "Your place or mine?" The car starts moving, and... Purple... I see a purple sky, and a magnificent hue of red, orange, yellow flames. Ah, how they melt in that purpleness, like a comet with a fire-tail. All I see is the tail, never the comet, and a movement which my eyes can't really trace, giving it a queer continuity... a moment hanging in time, slightly elongated... A visual rubato. Life is moving at the speed of twenty five frames per-second, and everything is animated. And in this animated world, my imagination is running wild, and my memory is playing games with me...

¹¹⁰ As Ramsay Burt puts it, "Gay male dancing bodies signify the possibility that men can dissolve in pleasure within the leaky boundaries not of women but of other men. This blurring of masculine subjects and objects destabilizes notions of male objectivity and rationality that, within Enlightenment thought, guaranteed the disinterestedness of the rational unitary subject" (Burt 211).

*Second Night****Ankit***

We meet at the KFC outlet behind Select City Walk, Saket. He's dressed in a beautiful yellow sweatshirt. He compliments me on my jacket. He has clearly missed his dinner. I wait as he places his order in what seems to be a giant mass of human bodies. I curse consumerism, and these unkind self-service joints. Oh, how I detest them! He settles with his tray in a certain booth, I sit and watch him eat. He is very beautiful. His curly hair, high cheekbones, lustrous lips, two-day stubble, innocent charms... I say to myself—I'm not going to sleep with him. He's too young, and there is nothing that connects us to each other. We scarcely have a topic to share. I ask him, casually, "So how did you realize, that you are..."

"What, gay?" He nibbles on his Zinger, as I nod my head in affirmative. "I'm not gay."

I smile.

"No, I'm serious, I'm not gay, I like sleeping with men, but I'm *not* gay."

And I said to myself, "I'm so not going to sleep with him."

Music, Language and Ideology

"This whole problem can be stated quite simply by asking, "Is there a meaning to music?" My answer to that would be, "yes." And "Can you state in so many words what the meaning is?" My answer to that would be, "no."

Aaron Copland, *What to Listen for in Music*, p2

The French critic Pierre Lere remarked in a passage quoted centrally by Herbert Marcuse in one of the key statements of 60s aesthetic radicalism—

“...the liberty of the musical form is only the aesthetic translation of the will to social liberation. Transcending the tonal framework of the theme, the musician finds himself in a position of freedom.”¹¹¹

What I have in mind is not at all the problem, common both to Saussurian and a general (what Ben Dryer calls ‘vulgar’) Marxist musicology, of ‘how music expresses ideas.’ Jacques Attali has correctly observed that while music can be defined as noise given form according to a code, nevertheless it cannot be equated with a language. Music, though it has a precise operationality, never has stable reference to a semantic code of the linguistic type. It is a sort of a language without meaning.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Pierre Lere, ‘Free Jazz: Evolution out of Revolution’, 1970, 320-21, translated and cited in Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, (Boston: Beacon, 1972),114

¹¹² See Attali’s ‘Noise: The Political Economy of Music’, trans. Brian Massumi, 1985

As is evident from the above equation, music is looked at as syntax without a semantic code of linguistic nature. Could we think of music then as outside of ideology (or its carrier) to the extent that it is non-verbal? (This, one can recall, was Della Volpe's move in his 'Critique of Taste'). One problem with post-structuralism in general and deconstruction in particular has been their tendency to see ideology as essentially bound up with language—the 'Symbolic'—rather than organized states of feeling in general.¹¹³ But we certainly inhabit a cultural tradition where it is a common-sense proposition that people listen to music precisely to escape from ideology, from the terrors of ideology and the dimension of practical reason. Adorno, in what I take to be the quintessential modernist dictum, writes: "Beauty is like an exodus from the world of means and ends, the same world to which beauty however owes its objective existence."¹¹⁴

What I propose then, is not an ideological narrative that flows through the notes of music, but an 'effect', or rather what Prof. Soumyabrata Chowdhary suggested as 'forms of affects'¹¹⁵ that stand as a 'catharsis' of an aural awe, probably backed by an ideological stand. In the case of discotheques for example, whose etymological interrogation will lead us to a set of two words—'disc+bibliothèque', French term meaning a disc/record library, which later also turned into a space where these records were played; we are aware that during WWII, in Paris, as a manifestation of French resistance, American Jazz records were heard in underground spaces, also as a part of a record of collective memory. In that sense, the ideology may not be a direct subject of the music, but the interrelationship of this music (which later turned jazz as the soundtrack of French resistance) cannot be neglected.

¹¹³ Barthes is perhaps an exception, and Derrida has written on pictures and paintings. I. Stoianova's 'Geste, Texte, Musique' 1985, is a significant text on music from a post-structuralist perspective.

¹¹⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 402

¹¹⁵ Prof. Soumyabrata Chowdhary, personal discussion, February, 2009.

This interrelationship is very important to be understood to understand what disco music stands for in Indian (Delhi) society in the contemporary times.

This reminds me of Althusser's early essays ('A Letter on Art to Andre Daspre' for example) where art was said to occupy an intermediate position between science and ideology (as, so to speak, its raw material), but in such a way as to provoke an 'internal distancing' from ideology, somewhat as in Brecht's notion of an "alienation effect" which obliges the spectator to scrutinize and question the assumptions on which the spectacle has been proceeding. In the section of an interpellation in Althusser's later essay on ideology, this 'modernist' and formalist concern with estrangement and defamiliarization has been displaced by what is in effect a postmodernist concern with fascination and fixation. If ideology, in Althusser's central thesis, is what constitutes the subject in relation to the real, then the domain of ideology is not a world-view or set of (verbal) ideas, but rather the ensemble of signifying practices in societies: that is, the cultural. In interpellation, the issue is not 'whether' ideology is happening in the space of something like aesthetic experience, or whether "good" or "great" art transcends the merely ideological (whereas "bad" art doesn't), but rather 'what' or 'whose' ideology, because the art work is precisely (one of the places) where ideology happens, though of course this need not be the dominant ideology or even any particular ideology.

If the aesthetic effect consists in a certain satisfaction of desire—a 'pleasure' (in the formalists, the recuperation or production of sensation)—and if the aesthetic effect is an

ideological effect, then the question becomes not the separation of music and ideology but rather their relation.

Music would seem to have in this sense a special relation to the pre-verbal, and thus to the Imaginary or more exactly to something like Kristeva's notion of the semiotic.¹¹⁶ In the sort of potted lacanianism prevalent in cultural studies, we take it that objects of imaginary identification function in the psyche—in a manner Lacan designated as 'orthopedic'—as metonyms of an object of desire which has been repressed or forgotten, a desire which can never be satisfied and which consequently inscribes in the subject a sense of insufficiency or fading. In narcissism, this desire takes the form of a libidinal identification of the ego with an image or sensation of itself as (to recall Freud's demarcation of the alternatives in his 1916 essay on narcissism) it is, was or should be. From the third of these possibilities—images or experiences of the ego as it should be—Freud argued that there arises as a consequence of the displacement of primary narcissism, the images of an ideal ego or ego ideal, internalized as the conscience or super ego. Such images, he added, are not only of self but also involve the social ideals of the parent, the family, the tribe, the nation, the race, etc. Consequently, those sentiments which are the very stuff of ideology in the narrow sense of political "isms" and loyalties—belonging to a party, being an "Indian," defending the family "honor," fighting in a national liberation movement, etc.—are basically transformations of homoerotic libidinal narcissism.

¹¹⁶ The semiotic for Kristeva is a sort of babble out of which language arises--something between glossolalia and the pre-oedipal awareness of the sounds of the mother's body--and which undermines the subject's submission to the Symbolic. "Kristeva makes the case that the semiotic is the effect of bodily drives which are incompletely repressed when the paternal order has intervened in the mother/child dyad, and it is therefore 'attached' psychically to the mother's body." Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988), 121.

It follows then that the aesthetic effect—even the sort of non-semantic effect produced by the organization of sound (in music) or color and line (in painting or sculpture)—always implies a kind of social Imaginary, a way of being with and/or for others. Although they are literature-centered, we may recall in this context Jameson's remarks at the end of 'The Political Unconscious' (in the section titled "The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology") to the effect that "all class consciousness—that is all ideology in the strict sense—, as much the exclusive forms of consciousness of the ruling classes as the opposing ones of the oppressed classes, are in their very nature utopian." From this Jameson claims—this is his appropriation of Frankfurt aesthetics—that the aesthetic value of a given work of art can never be limited to its moment of genesis, when it functioned willy-nilly to legitimize some form or other of domination. For if its utopian quality as "art"—its "eternal charm," to recall Marx's (eurocentric, petty bourgeois) comment on Greek epic poetry—is precisely that it expresses pleasurable the imaginary unity of a social collectivity, then "it is utopian not as a thing in itself, but rather to the extent that such collectivities are themselves ciphers for the final concretion of collective life, that is the achieved utopia of a classless society."¹¹⁷

My purpose behind invoking all the above debates was to discuss the interrelationship between music and ideology and also whether in this case, music can be treated as a language. As we realize that even though it lacks a semantic code, the language of music carries ability to create 'forms of affects' over its audience. Since I have also discussed 'a

¹¹⁷ Fredric Jameson, 'The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act' (Ithaca: Cornell, 1981), 288-91.

collective utopia of a classless society? I would also argue that music creates at least a ‘simulacrum’, to invoke a term from Baudrillard, of this utopia in a discotheque.

If it's too loud, you're too old!

— *Barrythemod*

*A*s we proceed towards Orange Hara, we see a huge crowd around it, and wonder what the matter could be. It takes us no time to realize that the permission for the party has been cancelled and the organizers are moving it somewhere else, but where? There’s a complete chaos in the place. The police is everywhere, and then this huge crowd of dressed up people, some already slightly drunk (owing to the high prices of alcohol in these parties, a lot of people already get drunk before they arrive), and some angry and disappointed. We walk away, to avoid unnecessary attention and I suggest to him that we should get some cigarettes, adding “Do you smoke?”

“Only when I’m drunk,” he replies in a very matter-of-fact way. “That seems to be a faint possibility tonight.” I wink at him. He makes a sad face, and then bursts out into laughter. His loud laughter attracts the attention of some Transgenders—a group of five to be precise, all decked up in colorful miniskirts, walking past us. I don’t know what encourages me, someone usually shy with strangers, to pass a friendly smile at them. One of them who notices me smiles back. I don’t miss the chance, and sustaining my eye contact, ask, ‘Do you know where they are having the party now?’

‘The Garden of Five Senses’

***Nigah* in Delhi Sexuality Politics, or, Disjointing as Method**

In or about the beginning of 2011, a small Queer collective in Delhi *Nigah* found itself in the middle of a crisis of self-definition. Building up quickly on the heels of the July 2009 Delhi High Court judgment, which decriminalized adult consensual same-sex relations, this crisis of definition was a response to the changed climate of Queer spaces in the post-judgment city. The alleged watershed of this legal order and its visible fallout in the city had triggered a revision in the group’s politics. This revision was framed precisely as a call for disjointing, trying to figure out what *different* role the group could play from other newly available spaces in the city, and how it could update itself to its new-found situation.

Nigah was a collective started by a ‘couple of’ like minded middle-class or upper middle-class people who ‘met through random circumstances’ around 2003 in Delhi and realized that they were interested in similar issues of ‘gender and sexuality’ and ‘also had a very strong belief in the various kinds of media as a tool for social change’ (Arasu: c. 2005). The founding members were young, more or less in their early twenties, either in the last term of their B.A. at Lady Shri Ram College in Delhi University, or fresh returns from their undergraduate studies in the U.S., some were theatre performers and some ‘worked’. Also, soon, there were students from the city’s Jawaharlal Nehru University, where they had started JNU’s first Queer collective *Anjuman*. I use the term ‘founding members’ loosely because *Nigah* was always in a sense a loose collective, never overly formalized. Internally,

it mostly worked as a network of friends. The Queer (male) and some lesbian discotheques and clubs, as we see them today, emerge from a juncture which is the consequence of several moments in time coming together. Nigah plays an important role in the creation of this space, not only in terms of ‘facilitating’ it, but also in providing them their first clientele. Thus interestingly, a critique of Nigah would simultaneously incorporate a critique of the parties and vice versa.

Unevenly over the rest of the decade, the group became a cluster of some permanent, several itinerant members, many of whom were students, others worked in gender-based NGOs, in embassies, in autonomous feminist groups, in corporate offices, in PR firms, as photographers, or were finishing their PhDs offshore. This difference in profiles meant a regular diet of internal differences in vision and politics. ‘No one can make any collective space be what they want to,’ one of the *Nigah* members wrote reflecting on the group’s past, ‘and understandably it causes frustrations, some that we can live with, some that we can’t’ (Deepti; prsnl email: Mar 28, 2011). It was this space of debate and friendship that I had joined around July 2006 and continue to remain a part of it.

Slightly irregularly over this last decade, *Nigah* organized scores of cultural events like film-screenings, Queer open mics, picnics and one off salsa workshops and play performances. Some of its members frequently went to Delhi University colleges doing workshops on ‘sexuality’ and the idea of ‘intersectionality’, and several in the group were part of organizing and participating in public demonstrations in the city on feminist, Queer issues, often in association with other groups and NGOs. A few of its members also played a significant role in the Delhi-based group *Voices against 377* that filed its petition in the Delhi

High Court, in support of the Naz Foundation petition, asking for a reading down of section 377.¹¹⁸ Since 2009, *Nigab* has been organizing a yearly international Queer film festival in Delhi. This was hosted in venues like the Indian Social Institute (ISI), which is a resource centre and research institution, connected to several people's movement in India, specifically those around poverty, caste and agriculture, and the Max Mueller Bhavan, which is the cultural and educational wing of the German embassy in Delhi. Some of the *Nigab* members, in their roles outside the group, were also actively involved in issues relating to women's rights and safety in urban spaces, communalism, sexuality training in Hindi among semi-urban groups, addressing human rights violations in situations of conflict, urban poverty and displacement, and corporate accountability, all debates which they tried to flag within *Nigab* as well, as friends, as members not invested in the singular issue of 'sexuality', as participants of its online and offline internal discussions. It was specifically these perspectives that were to initiate and deepen the debates about self-definition post the judgment.

Over all these years, *Nigab* had become a meeting point, a space of friends, of friends of friends, and other 'familiar faces', which were often cast in the name of the Queer 'community'. It became a rare space for them to get together, often made cheerful by the appearance of 'newbies' or new faces in the audience, some of whom expressed interest in joining. The sense among the group members was, as one of them had put it, that '[w]hen Nigab began, it was one of the few available spaces', that was not an AIDS-based or a

¹¹⁸ For more on Voices against 377, and on the important debates that went in the drafting of its petition, see khanna, akshay, 2010, 'The Social Lives of 377 - Constitution of the Law by the Queer Movement' in *A Refracted Subject: Sexuality in the Realms of Law and Epidemiology*, PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, pg. 118-142.

women's rights NGO with its rules and procedures, neither a support or counselling group with its specific formats, nor a collective geared specifically towards the legal fight against the anti-sodomy law (Arasu; prsnl email: Mar 28, 2011). It was instead a casual space for Queer people – mostly English speaking and middle class – that mixed and matched between more 'political' events and informal, cultural ones, which it saw *as* political. This space, in that sense, also worked as a space of leisure, its events were also sites of flirtation and banter, its after-event drinks and dinner sessions among the members and their friends were as much part of the *Nigab* ritual as the organized event itself. Looking back at the decade, one member understood the group as being 'incredibly political in a way that the politics do not weigh you down...allows for lightness to exist, understands contradictions, lets you breathe' (Sharma; prsnl email: Mar 28, 2011).

However, as some members pointed out, this 'lightness' of *Nigab* was 'both its strength and what it will always struggle with'; 'it's the push and pull that I love about it as a space even when its infuriating me' (Bhan; prsnl email: Mar 28, 2011, sic). There were substantial contradictions between political vision and practice for several in the group. One was the almost consistent use of English and the other was the more or less familiar bandwidth of the audience it was catering over the years; 'Queer Fest is talking,' one member suggested during the discussions over self-definition, 'to the same two degrees of who we know, it either needs to change in terms of who we talk to, or what we talk about' (Rastogi paraphrased in Bhan; prsnl email: Feb 19, 2011). In this bid, *Nigab* had started translating some of its publicity material into Hindi only towards the end of the decade, when not doing so seemed politically lax if not untenable. These debates often came up in its meetings as things to be seriously worked upon, especially after the judgement. There were

fears that the group was sticking to its comfort zones. In these recent discussions, a member pointed out that ‘we need to take that big move. For all events in English, we need events in Hindi. It’s easier to do the English events. We need parity of number of events – but this is a drastic change, it’s not just add one Hindi event types’ (Arasu paraphrased in Bhan; prsnl email: Feb 19, 2011, sic). Discussions like this were also triggered by the general feedback about the unapproachability of the group. After some of its events, and particularly after the first film festival, the group often received emails that it appeared to be too ‘closed-off’ to outsiders, that it was difficult to figure out how to become part of it, that it was too cliquey. Words like ‘elite’ were not uncommon in such charges. These were not allegations that the group could simply deny but had to use as points of self reflection.

These debates spiralled particularly after the High Court judgment. From ‘one of the few available spaces’, *Nigab* now overwhelmingly found itself among a matrix of spaces that were doing the similar thing, that were geared towards creating ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ spaces, mostly the former, but of a different makeup and guided by a different political imagination. *Nigab* found that its job had been partially outsourced, reinvented, and sometimes thinned out politically. It found itself in the middle of an over-enthusiastic English and often Hindi print and television media that were now regularly soliciting comments from ‘Delhi’s gay and lesbian community’ about a film, or during annual Pride marches; at the time of writing, Delhi has had three Prides. They were no longer unhappy to pitch stories about the progress of the legal case against the anti-sodomy law which was now in the Indian Supreme Court. Some fortnightly English magazines had regular stories pitched as being of ‘gay and lesbian’ interest, if not a permanent ‘gay and lesbian’ events/comment four page spread. In answer to the many serious efforts over the last

several years by sexuality activists and friendly sections of the media, the liberal language of ‘sexuality rights’ and ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ identities had more or less become common-sensical among the media circles. There were less and less aberrations in the story angle in the metropolitan English media – a pitch that was with a liberal bent, with secular ‘progressive’ reasoning, and talk of ‘community’ and ‘growing acceptance’; all this despite the stories of some excited journalism graduates that edged on the simplistic and unresearched even when they were excruciatingly sincere.

There was also a multiplication of spaces of entertainment, leisure and enjoyment, most visibly for gay men. Groups like ‘Boyzone Delhi’, ‘Gay Delhi’ or ‘Boyzrus Delhi’ built upon the existing and far sparser network of ‘gay and lesbian’ discotheque parties – also frequented by *Nigah* members and its usual audiences – and took its frequency to almost five times a week, with differentiation that comes with expansion, of cover charges, of clientele, of ‘gentry’, of a everyday gentrification at the doors, of a more palpable, sometimes explicit resistance to ‘drag’ and ‘those transgenders’ at these parties than before, for the sake of the ‘comfort level’ of individuals.¹¹⁹ Groups and individuals organizing such parties had enough of a catchment area of customers now to compete over the turf. Other

¹¹⁹ The one palpable difference that I note is that the ‘terms and conditions’ of such parties organized in Delhi have gotten visibly more formalized and consistent, particularly in the post judgment city. One typical example is from the ‘Sizzling Saturday’ party hosted by ‘Boyzone Delhi’: ‘TERMS & CONDITIONS/* ENTRY WOULD BE ‘STRICTLY’ FOR "WELL DRESSED" PEOPLE ONLY. Its a request to you to be sensitive to the comfort level of others and to behave and dress up accordingly. Chapples,shorts and free casuals are not allowed. / *RIGHTS OF ADMISSION RESERVED. / **No sex on the premises; if found indulging in any "hanky panky" you shall be asked to leave the party / **CLICKING PICTURES FROM ANY DEVICE (i.e.....mobile phones, cam....etc.) IS PROHIBITED. / **PLEASE TAKE CARE OF YOUR BELONGINGS. MANAGEMENT WILL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY THEFT OR LOSS. / **During and after the party please DO NOT gathers outside the venue. The management has requested us to ensure that, in the middle of the night’.

online and offline groups like ‘Symphony in Pink’ and ‘Pink Delhi’, which catered specifically to lesbian and bisexual women and had more or less reached an alleged consensus on emphasizing ‘social and cultural events’ and get-togethers over ‘politics’, also grew post judgment and were functioning as meeting points, as spaces of leisure, and were giving a sense of community to their participants. Such groups were, in a sense, doing the same job, a part of which *Nigab* had always seen itself doing – of making safe spaces for gay and lesbian people to meet – although in the *Nigab* version this was done in a more gender-mixed crowd, and as the group liked to believe, with a particular political spin on Queer sociability and its possibilities.

Nigab now found itself in a climate where *creating a safe gay space* by itself, particularly for a middle class and English educated audience, was no longer as difficult as it had been before, no longer as persuasive a political project as it had seemed earlier. What was indeed difficult, more than ever it seemed, was working on *the contradictions in that space, of differentiating its internal priorities*, that is, precisely a problem of disjointing. “When *Nigab* began, it was one of the few available spaces,” one member had said, as we noted above, she continued to point out that ‘[t]oday it is part of a complex set of contexts vis-a-vis Queerness in India. The challenges are many and have changed’ (Arasu *ibid.*). For her, different questions now had to take centre stage, different kinds of urban venues had to be chosen, different audiences had to be found. It was here, in the urgency of these discussions, that disjointing was articulated as method. This form of disjointing had the importance of a strategy, the precision of historical detail, an eye for the changing contemporary, and the lucidity of humour – a member of the group had once joked in a meeting that ‘one good thing about the judgment is that *now* we do not have to bond

together with those we always hated just because they are gay' (prsnl conversation: July 2009). One of the post judgment phenomena was precisely this freedom to disband, of not always being together, of disaggregating one's politics, methods and goals. A freedom to form other lines of solidarity.

"For me," a member added, "the questions are who is left out of the victories of Queerness that we see in our context so much more often nowadays...what does this mean in the contexts of a range of other social movements in our region" (*ibid.*). She was pointing out a general climate where in it had become progressively easier to talk about 'homosexuality' and its 'gradual acceptance' in the popular urban news and entertainment media, even easier if it is affluent, English medium and male. But in this precise same climate, it was still quite difficult to raise other types of questions – questions which were not simply celebratory of the legal or the legislative apparatus of the Indian nation State. Specifically those questions that brought serious scepticism to the idea of a '9% growth' 'rising' 'super power' India, that questioned India's extensive military presence and 'exceptional' security laws in Kashmir, and in the Indian North East, or those that tried to understand causes of the internal civil wars, notably the 'Maoist' uprisings in central and east India, not simply as perversion of dissent by violence, but instead in the policies of the post-liberalization government that had not made the benefits of this economic 'growth' reach most of the urban and rural poor in India, particularly its large tribal populations.

When it becomes easier to raise one kind of questions over other kinds, the member seemed to point out, when it becomes easier to raise questions of 'homosexuality' in its progressive, secular, nationalist and affluent avatar, it should always be a point of serious

introspection as to why this ease is not equally distributed among the Queers that come from other classes, genders, castes and political orientations, and also why this receptiveness has not been extended to other social and political mass movements that might overtly question the State government, not simply plead with it. These questions will then really determine where 'sexuality' activism is headed in relation with other people's movements. 'Raising such questions,' the same member believed, is 'fortunately or unfortunately...a celebration with critique of our victories' (Arasu *ibid.*). She found these questions slipping further away from the 'everyday reality' of *Nigab* and to bring them back into the fold, she was certain, 'requires a jolt...a jolt in what we do, how we do it, who does it' (*ibid.*). It requires an incisive exercise in disaggregation, of doing other kinds of Queer work.

"This party is tad boring. There is all NGO-type crowd here. The dance floor is too small and soooooo crowded," He complains. I'm already bored, both with him and the party. I suddenly spot a friend from SAA, and thank my stars for the rescue. I suggest to him to go to the dance floor and dance again and accompany him up to the bar so that he doesn't come back, get myself a beer and go out to have a chat with my friend. 'Finally some sanity,' I say to myself. My friend is with a large group of friends, and he introduces me to all of them. We have a pleasant chat and then bitch about how the party sucks bigtime! Eventually one of them comes up with an idea that perhaps we should go to Polka. Someone retorts, "Oh but the crowd there is so cheap and downmarket, and the drinks are cheap too, so everybody is drunk." My friend and I are appalled by his description, so we decide to intervene. He says, "But I think that is precisely the point, the

best way to get laid in a drunk train, is to get drunk.” I give him a high five in agreement, and then remember that I must take Ankit along with me, it’d be terribly rude to not do so. He’s quite excited with the idea, and enthusiastically accepts it. So here we are, two strangers, meeting for the first time, and already two parties old, I wonder what the night has in store for us . . .

Who goes to the party? (the connection of people to the Internet to the party circle and the performance of identities)

a) The Migrant

Related figures: the traveler, the online user, the autobiographical narrator, the itinerant, the consumer, the gay

‘luding 4 cute, smooth n fair bottom. / i m 25 yrs, 5' 8", 60 kg, 30 w n average body top *without place*. i m not into relationship n just wnt long strnglss frnshp n fun vd a cute, smooth, sexy n fair bottom.no response 2 ny message without pic n bottom *vd place* is preferred’ (bottomseeker, Noida, Delhi National Capital Region; PR)
(emphasis mine)

I use *migrant* in its broadest root sense which implies any movement and shifting of location and any experience of new conditions and forms. Cities are a shifting sum of many kinds of movements and experiences. They are marked by immigrants, tourists and a steady traffic of daily itinerants. This active mass of motions is variously triggered by individual aspirations and dreams, by obligatory needs and a willed sense of duty, by active searches or by plain flanerie. These movements criss-cross between different kinds of

urban living arrangements, as people dwell in formations as dissimilar to each other as nuclear families, college hostels, pavement communities, individual flats and slums. To be enclosed in one's own space or to have an entire ownership over the discretionary use of that space is not a general urban experience; people have a differential access to privacy, and moreover, they do not share the terms of what is counted or valued as privacy. Home as a site of permanence and of realization of personal dreams of intimacy is not available (or desirable) to everyone, every time. This urban web of movements is necessarily plotted onto another web which is the one of countless physical encounters.

Throughout most of year 1997 Jeremy Seabrook had spoken with men and boys in parks and bus-stops of Delhi (1999). These were men of varying ages and occupations and of different places of origin. Of the seventy five men he interviewed, only sixteen called Delhi their native place. Others had come to the city mainly from the neighboring states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, apart from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. This is the index of the extent of migration to Delhi in the last quarter of the twentieth century (*ibid.* 11-12) and of the experiences migration makes possible structurally.

The only commonality that tied all these men together was their search for other men. The public spaces of Delhi, such as Central Park in Connaught Place and Nehru Park in Chanakyapuri, became the sites of this search. Away from their families, their wives (of the 75 Seabrook spoke with, 29 were married and 2 were widowed), from their work or familial circuits where they could be recognized, these men experienced many kinds of intimacies with other men, whether it was conversations, sharing a joke, hand-job, blow-jobs, or

intercourse. In the overbearing publicness of the park, little enclaves of privacy were carved behind the bushes, in darkness, in little conversations, or in public loos.

These little spaces, determined as they were by pursuits of pleasure, were also always surrounded by a threat of police, uniformed or in mufti, of *goondas* (goons) out to sexually abuse or blackmail men or of fateful chances of an exposure to someone known. While to the regular park patron – well versed in this game of cruising – it became more or less easy to ensure small moments of pleasure, there was always a possibility of being betrayed by circumstances. The maneuverability of the park, then, as a space of same-sex pleasure was never complete.

“[I]t remains precarious, even in this protected site,” Seabrook writes, “[s]uddenly, once more, the police are present. A corpulent officer in khaki, with red flashes on his uniform and a revolver in his holster, is patrolling the jungle paths. He walks stealthily and for a moment looks like a hunter” (*ibid.* 173). The park – in real time – is always a place of pleasure *and* danger. In his fieldwork, Seabrook often sees “a policeman in plain clothes, who has been acting as an *agent provocateur*, encouraging men to follow him into the bushes. In the jungle they round up and arrest a few *kothis* and their clients found with their pants down. They take a few of them to the police station” (*ibid.*).

It is in the context of the real-time simultaneity of pleasure and danger of the park that a parallel story of the 1990s becomes vital. This is the story of the spread of the Internet. The park and the loo are never fully absorbed into this parallel story but they concede some of their plots, characters and actions to this online world. The Internet is

foregrounded here in one of its primary roles as a search tool and a proxy meeting space. Here, for its users, the Internet takes the form of togetherness itself.

Although lots of cyber cafes have cubicles and curtains, or the computer screens set in such a way that only the user can see them, this is not commonly the case. PR user Karthik's complaint against the website is driven by this practical impossibility of a strictly private access to the Internet:

‘planetromeo should decrease the explicit porn stuff on the very 1st page, so that people who use the site from cyber cafe or a public place can use it without any hassle, that too in a country like India’ (karthik, in *guys4menblog.com*, June 2009).

However, in another interview in March 2007 with Rohan D'souza, late-20s, graduated from Jawaharlal Nehru University and working in Delhi where he had shifted from Thane for his college studies, I was told that the Internet, at any rate, was a ‘safer’, more ‘maneuverable’ space for meeting other men than public spaces like parks. He said he was speaking having experienced both spaces. It is in this context that the peculiar wording of bottomseeker, quoted in the section's epigraph, makes sense. The bottomseeker from Noida, himself ‘without place’ searches for a bottom ‘vd place’; the Internet is a way of predetermining the location, finding a safe, uninterrupted venue for meeting other men. This is the opposite of real time desultoriness and is possible only within the peculiar form of the Internet. Internet as a space of proxy physicality, and more crucially, of a proxy time. Your profile as always working behind your back – in another time independent from your body – always visible to others whether you are online or not. A proxy time in which real time encounters are talked about at ease and fixed as desired.

For the real-time tentativeness of the park encounters, for all their quickness and unpredictability the Internet seems to give a different, more expansive cyber time. Talking of such meetings in parks, Harish, who came from Bhopal and feels 'very lonely in Delhi', picks up on their peculiar temporality:

'[o]f course there are so many people here, you can make contact for sex very quickly...Sometimes I go to Nehru Park. There, people meet in darkness. They do not even see one another properly...[they] finish and go away...there is no continuity, no follow-up' (Seabrook: 130)

This is the interrupted temporality of real-time encounters in which apart from fears of being spotted, fears which inevitably rush these encounters, their shortness is also usually intended by the men themselves. Not everyone comes, like Harish, with a longing for continuity, for the encounter to be followed-up. To quote Harish again, and this time uninterrupted, we notice a peculiar hope that is hidden behind his wish for a continuity in encounters. This is a wish for lasting friendship, for the possibility of love. 'Of course there are so many people here,' he says,

'you can make contact for sex very quickly. But that is not what I want. I want love, but especially someone to take care of me. Sometimes I go to Nehru Park. There, people meet in darkness. They do not even see one another properly, let alone make a friendship. All they want is sex, then finish and go away, pretend it does not happen. There is no continuity, no follow-up, no friendship' (*ibid.*)

Another boy, Paras Ram, 22, says that all he wants is ‘affection. Maybe sex will come, I do not know; but I want someone I can talk to, to whom I can tell everything that is in my heart’ (129). In parks, he says, ‘as soon as people have done sex together they lose interest in one another. I don't like that’ (*ibid.*). For the real-time discordance of meetings in the physical cruising-grounds, the Internet provides another kind of comfort time of interaction. For the temporariness of physical meetings and the low odds for sharing what lies in the heart, the Internet provides a possibility of thoroughness of scrutiny – *over virtual time* – the possibility of heart-to-heart chats, of those conversations which Harish and Paras consider the bedrock of affection, of friendship and love.

The irrevocable_GUY from Meerut in Uttar Pradesh latches onto this peculiar possibility enabled by the form of the Internet when he says that he is ‘here [on Pr] to make "FRIENDS"...lets jst chat together to know more abt each other...’ (PR). This is the desired clock-time of friendship. In fact, friendship is framed here as being possible and sustainable primarily by a sharing of time, by making a mutual gift of personal time. Rashid, a garment-worker who had come to Delhi from near Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, had told Seabrook that all he wanted was ‘sex in a bed, no clothes, *aram se* [in comfort], taking it easy, then sleeping together with your legs wrapped around each other and in his arms. It doesn't happen very often, but I dream about it’ (131). ‘If you have a place of your own,’ he says, ‘if you have privacy in India, I think you can get almost anyone to come with you, whoever you are. Friendships here are in the park only; they finish at the bus stand outside’ (*ibid.*).

Migration is an individuating phenomenon.¹²⁰ One of the peculiar collaterals of migration is that it temporarily isolates the self as the core object of narration. The self becomes the locus of all that migration entails, be it stories of movements, experiences of newness, or any good or bad lessons of individual progress. The self as experiencing a new place or a new-found sense of placelessness is the central motif of migration stories. This is not limited to stories of permanent immigration to new cities but also refers to the very sense of movement – any movement, any exchange of place, short-term or long-term – involved in the Latin *migrare*.

Migration triggers descriptions of oneself as journeying in an elsewhere, at once the object and the driving force of the story. It precipitates situations of self-reflection. Ram001 makes a user profile on PR. He writes: ‘hi i am new 2 bangalore, btm first stage lay out, any body hav place ping me’ (PR). A move to a new place triggers a battery of specific self-designations: *new, first stage et. al.* There is a crucial structural analogy between individuating experiences of migration and the private online experience. To access the Internet is already to be on the move – almost always singly – to shift to a new place, to haphazardly cross different spaces and time-zones.

¹²⁰ One could dispute this by offering many examples, including the case of the Indian diaspora to the Gulf countries or generally of diasporic urban ghettos where people having plucked themselves out of one community space end up plugging themselves into another equally webbed community with its own collective ways of being. However, in my consideration, I want to sustain the very palpable individuating and liminalizing character of migration.

To be online is always a sort of *moving*, a moving away from all that is entirely familiar. It is the point of meeting other people, of individually entering hitherto unfamiliar circuits, of being a part of something never or partially known before. chotugaadu is new to PR and says ‘helloo’ to ‘every friend in hyderabad’ before telling them that he is ‘new to dis site pleace help me out.am looking fr good friends yaar’. To be at once an amateur, a seeker, to plead for help and to be at the threshold of a world of ‘good friends’ who are as yet unknown, is a situation activated by Internet experienced *as* migration, that is, an individual movement driven by dreams and needs.¹²¹

In his essay *Capitalism and Gay Identity*, John D’Emilio gives a central place to migration in writing the history of gay and lesbian identities in 20th century America. He considers sexual identities nothing but a sum of the ways in which we arrange our lives in relation to our desires. Capitalism, according to D’Emilio, ushers new conditions for this particular arrangement of the category of life. With the withering away of the family as an independent unit of production, it became necessary and possible for men (and less so for women) to move out of their places of origin to new places of employment. This was the reality triggered by the rise of capitalist wage labour.

‘Only when *individuals* began to make their living through wage labour, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for sexual desire to coalesce

¹²¹ Formally, chotogaadu is in exactly the same place in his movements – of migration, of experiencing new things, of finding friends – as the young founder of PR was when he had shifted to London. It was migration which had triggered the making of PR in the first place. It is unsurprising then, that the structure of PR, and its finding home nowhere else but on the Internet, responds especially to the needs and desires of those in a position of itinerance. For those affected by the political economy of large scale movement to cities and towns, PR reduplicates the experience of migration with an added seduction of emotional and sexual success.

into a personal identity – an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one’s own sex’ (1983: 104-5) (emphasis in original)

Men suddenly found themselves away from their family, living alone, in hostels, in same-sex dormitories and same-sex places of work. They also found a category of leisure time that could be spent outside the family, a time that they had to spend based on individual inclinations. These were decidedly new conditions and possibilities of socialization. Of the people erotically interested in their own sex, some gravitated towards each other and began to entertain ideas – even if inconsistent and haphazard – of a group life.

‘Already, in the early twentieth century, large cities contained male homosexual bars’ (105). Riverside Drive in New York City and Lafayette Park in Washington became cruising grounds for men. Specific places got saturated with codes of possibility for men meeting other men. ‘Public bathhouses and YMCAs became gathering spots...’ (*ibid.*). The Queer Parties, hence became spaces of this ‘group’ experience of sexuality and sexual identity. Constantly, the notion of ‘be-ing yourself’ became very important. In some extreme cases, it went all the way to the creation of some kind of ‘heterophobia’, but mostly, it was aimed at comfortable, intimate spaces for homosexuals where all the different kind of experiences could be lived. From the very ‘physical’ aspect of it, to the space for ‘talking’, to ‘follow up’, the Queer Party provided all these spaces. ‘Simultaneously,’ D’Emilio writes,

‘ideological definitions of homosexual behavior changed. Doctors developed theories about homosexuality, describing it as a condition, something that was inherent in the person, a part of his or her “nature.” These theories did not represent scientific

breakthroughs, elucidations of previously undiscovered areas of knowledge; rather, they were an ideological response to new way of organizing one's personal life. The popularization of the medical model, in turn, affected the consciousness of the women and men who experienced homosexual desire, so that they came to define themselves through their erotic life' (*ibid.*) (emphasis in original)

Migration isolated for these men and women an independent life-story, which was increasingly more internally referential, being as it could be, without the outside references and obligations towards the family or the need to procreate. Around 1955, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, founded the San Francisco group 'Daughters of Bilitis' for women who desired women, noting that '[w]omen needed privacy...not only from the watchful eye of the police, but from gaping tourists in the bars and from inquisitive parents and families' back home (quoted in Meeker; 2006: 77). The migration story was often framed as the story, even if partial, of self-realization and movement of an individual, of being able to chart out on one's own without being seen by some. The newly and increasingly possible experiences of same-sex intimacy in the city were inevitably treated as the subsets of this larger story. The 'coming-out' story came to involve, more often than not, a literal *coming out* – from the house, family, village, any context of origin – a movement that is structurally indispensable to the narrative of sexuality. The individuated migrant story is one of the conditions of possibility for sexual identity, for the very modern way of understanding sexual experiences only *in* a narrative realization of one self, as a coming into one's own.

In India, this teleology is more interrupted. It cannot explain all instances and conceptions of same-sex desire. Capitalist migration, like elsewhere, does create the conditions of

possibility for a 'gay community' – with now decade old parties, new fashion salons, safe meeting spaces and holiday planners – but all migration does not simply lead to a 'gay community'. Here the playing ground is always already populated by a multiplicity of idioms. 'Gay' finds itself already interweaved with ideas of habits and personal inclinations, with flexible boundaries of male friendship, with an already higher mobility of men in marriage, and with conceptions of what is considered excessive but not uncommon. 'Gay' never simply takes over these other idioms.

For understanding this, we need to have a working knowledge about this figure of 'gay'. We need to elaborate how *identification as gay* is actually lived out. For if we are able to prove that this process of identification is never final or complete, then we would have performed a space-clearing gesture for the other idioms, for all the other figures. We would have proved that 'gay' emerges not in an erasure of other idioms. Instead, it emerges in between them, in their little interruptions, always short of winning over them, and crucially, always short of winning over even him who openly identifies as 'gay'. This makes room for us to observe the complex self-images as they are lived out in the everyday. This was the whole point of studying in terms of figures rather than take the 'gay' of a 'gay dating website' as a simple point of departure.

b) *The Gay*

Related figures: the migrant, the scene-queen, the consumer, the online user, the community member, the activist

‘Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over it became a butterfly / i am here to meet people be with them and be myself chill over a cup of coffee or roll in bedimportant part is that to be with *the gay world*.....Mummmmmmmmah’
(gingernut, Pune; PR) (emphasis mine)

In introducing John D’Emilio’s essay when it first appeared in a collection of essays, the editors made a crucial distinction. They disaggregated his work from psychoanalysis. ‘Elsewhere in the volume,’ they said, ‘Adrienne Rich argues for a profound lesbian identity, one forged in the ties of infancy; she separates this ‘lesbian existence’ from the evolution of a gay male life which she sees as anomic and very far from nurturant’ (Snitow, Stansell and Thompson; 1983: 100). John D’Emilio, they were certain, was on a different track. He used a different model of arriving at sexual identity. He, they argued,

‘would no doubt disagree from this claim of historical discontinuity between gay men and lesbians, since...he sees the creation of the ‘homosexual’ of either sex as a specific, modern phenomenon. Lesbians, he argues, were rarer presences in the ‘male space’ of streets, parks and bars because of women’s continued economic dependence on men. It was economic oppression, not a more caring nature, he implicitly argues, that kept them more quietly at home’ (*ibid.*).

D’Emilio sets his arguments in a different setting. The clauses important for D’Emilio are not those which sustain the alleged psychoanalytic or bodily make-up of the homosexual woman or man. Instead of the big players like the unconscious, ‘the ties of infancy’, or the primal memories of childhood which might leave a permanent imprint on an individual

and determine her sexuality – and nurturing ability – forever, D’Emilio’s field has a different *dramatis personae*.

He looks at economic processes, physical locations, distance from family and new spaces for socialization as the crucial criteria for new arrangements of life and memories, arrangements that are especially conducive to the creation and adoption of gay and lesbian identities or for forming different groupings based on a shared desire for the same sex. His study of urbanization is in terms of new arrangements of ‘life’ in the city that can coordinate individual episodes of same-sex desire into narratives of self-advancement and self-realization.

D’Emilio does not read people or situations psychoanalytically, but instead – and this is a crucial distinction – he reads psychoanalysis historically, as only *one* of the many factors that triggered people to read their lives, attractions, living patterns and encounters within umbrella terms such as homosexual, gay or lesbian. He elaborates on many other dimensions of coming together on the basis of shared desires.

For instance, *gay* for D’Emilio, would not simply be a condition of being, a name for oneself, but instead, it would be an imaginative gesture to participate in group situations. It would not be a wholesale adoption, but a more provisional plugging-in. It would be a sign insisting on togetherness – be it in events, in locations or in life-styles – which provides more opportunities to meet other men. The gesture implicit in *gay* would then *link* people as much as it would *tag* them. D’Emilio would foreground the former mobilizing aspect inherent in the word, its abilities to bring together a mass of people and be a presiding sign

over this togetherness, as much as its latter, more individuating role of marking particular people *as* gay.

These points of togetherness ordered under the totemic symbol of *gay* would be shored up by an array of consumption practices and a set of urban locations which are the consistent sites of meeting and recreation. At the very edge of thinking that his world is over, gingersnut leaps out of his larval stage and transmogrifies into a butterfly and what beckons him is his imagination of *the gay world*. Gingersnut's story is of a piece with the ebullient narratives of self-realization that are explained better by a political economy like D'Emilio's than by the psychoanalysis of Rich.

The *gay world*, or in its more common urban idiolect, the *gay scene* is the main location for such narratives. The gay scene works as shorthand for an array of experiences, practices of consumption and memories. It is not *simply there* but is imagined into being. When discotheques with 'gay nights' and websites with 'gay dating', when pride marches voicing 'gay rights' and salons servicing 'gay people' are frequently heard about or lived out, when they begin to sediment into people's imagination, when they trigger a template of wonderful and terrible experiences, a peculiar world begins to take shape. In these experiences the word 'gay' worlds itself, it begins to accrue a recognizable (because consistent) set of urban references. This world – *the gay scene* – at once a wonderland calling for exploration, a butt of regrets, and a dreamland of possibilities.

We will see how *PR* users articulate this gay scene into being. Every online utterance about this scene supplies it with a cumulative set of characteristics. These utterances are, most

commonly, made at the *gateways* of this scene, by those people who are either *new to it*, by those dissatisfied with it or by those who feel they cannot or do not want to be a part of it. It is at these many thresholds of the scene that its descriptions occur. A definition of a thing is best garnered at its edges, at the points of entry and departure. The scene itself is not ‘an unproblematically verifiable social entity but...a rhetorical construction, produced...through a number of key spatial tropes as location, home, stage’ arrival and leave taking (Payne: 2007).

For the new, it is almost always a space of unbridled promise and a little hesitation. Here ‘the scene is figured as destination – a place of arrival and welcome’ (*ibid.*). phoenix382, from Ahmedabad writes on his profile on PR: ‘visiting for a few days / excited. is there a gay scene in Ahmedabad - help a tourist find the right places’. The gay scene is clearly an urban imaginary composed of a theoretically limited number of ‘right places’. The scene then has to be a shifting set of directions practically pointing to such places. Here the scene becomes a marketable touristic vision of the city (*help a tourist find the right places*), appearing most exemplarily in the genre of travel guides like the *Lonely Planet* or the *Spartacus Gay Guide*. For instance, the Spartacus hotel guide for gay men responded to the July 2009 Delhi High Court judgment by noting the overhaul in the *scene* – ‘India's newly emerging LGBT communities,’ it said, ‘along with changing gay scene in larger cities such as Delhi is an exciting development...gay nights are becoming more and more popular in several discos and bars’ (‘India’ at spartacusworld; accessed January, 2011).

PR user Manchanda (name changed) from Raipur in Chhattisgarh does not point us yet to those proverbial ‘right places’ but elaborates on this *scene as a series of expectations*. Setting himself up as an amateur on the scene, he writes:

‘Hi friends, a new kid on the block in the gay scene is here, i am 19, fresh, raring to go, i am seeking to be a model, but first i want to be a good human being, god gave me looks and i am thankful for that, but definitely not proud of that as it says beauty lies...I am a very fun loving and warm hearted person. Hope i get good friends through this site Thanks for reading my profile.Hey i also wanna add sex seekers, i wanna b polite to u,but i m not ur cup of tea..My fave Quotation is... The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep, / And miles to go before I sleep. / Robert Frost. [pulitzer prize winning american poet] / I hope u liked it too, it touches me as many times as i read’ (PR, ellipsis and box brackets in original)

The gay scene is expected to be a substantive meeting space (*hope I get good friends*) and the website which assists in such meetings, even enacts them, is always already a part of this scene (*hope I get good friends through this site*). Manchanda’s interrupted prose is full with expectations and it works as a clumsy signpost for the scene. It is where he expects friendships to materialize – which is why he indulges in the common tactics of the ‘personal ad’ where you describe yourself, your interests and ambitions, give your favorite quotations *et. al.*, that is, you set yourself up as a script awaiting perusal, and hopefully interest and ‘compatibility’. This is also a space where he expects he might run into ‘sex seekers’ who are an integral part of Manchanda’s imagination of the scene and are precisely what he wants to avoid – the scene as reckless, to be maneuvered by restraint, *the scene as a*

bunch of invitations and rejections. The words of the new always prefigure a peculiar world through their expectations. The scene is what they *expect* into being. *The scene as a set of dreams.*

Manchanda is self-avowedly ‘a new kid on the block’ and is yet to set his expectations at the altar of experience. It might be interesting to shift to the profiles of the self-avowedly experienced, even the disgruntled, for understanding the alleged ‘right places’ of the scene, places that both invite and repulse, that accommodate you but often also tacitly disqualify. *The scene as the shattering or realization of dreams.*

I cite three PR users at that particular moment when they try to describe this scene. Kamal09 from Hyderabad associated the scene with a few set leisure locations even as he distances himself from them. ‘Just a simple guy,’ he calls himself, who is ‘here looking forward to chat with people. not much into gay scene. so please don't try to invite me to gay pubs or parties. i do have a good group of people where i can go and enjoy ...u know what i mean’ (PR). Rony2009 from Bangalore prefigures the scene as a place for muscular male bodies primed in the gym and sustained under the sign of fitness as *bon sens*, the sign of muscle as beauty; ‘[t]he gay scene is good for some people but not for me...I am not into muscles, although I like the gym, sensible walking shoes, although I see why they make sense’ (PR). Yourboy from Bangalore writes that he does ‘like to go out with mates for dinners, drink or even clubbing’ but that he is ‘not much of a scene queen at all, lol!’ He adds that he prefers to go to ‘straight clubs to gay clubs....they tend to be less seedy! (And tend not to stink of urine so much...lol!) But yeh, do go out to gay scene from time to time. Also like nights in at home on the sofa in front of the television’ (PR)

Peter Jackson studies the structural conditions of possibility of international urban 'gay capitals' and it is no coincidence that their primal condition is that of a well-elaborated market economy. 'Research on global Queering,' he says, 'has concentrated on cities that, in popular gay parlance, are called "gay capitals"—Amsterdam, London, Paris, Berlin, New York, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Bangkok, and Tokyo—all of which are in countries with long histories of market economies' (2009: 370). 'A gay capital,' he argues, 'is a metropolis commonly regarded to be the first site of the emergence of new male homosexual identities and cultures in a particular region. It is a city with the largest commercial gay scene in a region, a site for homosexual in-migration' (*ibid.*).

In the three citations, from Rony, Kamal and Yourboy, the gay scene begins to assume a limited, that is, a coherent set of meanings in sync precisely with this market economy. Its meanings majorly depend on a burgeoning middle class with increasing spending power in a liberalized market. The rhetorical centre of this scene is often a muscular affluent English-speaking gay man who frequents urban gay-exclusive spaces at ease. The gay scene itself is a market-friendly phenomenon. It works as an urban constellation of related acts of consumption. It relies on '...the so-called gay marketing moment, when 'coming out' meant coming out in terms of purchasing power' (Puar; 2002:104).

Paul Birrell, of Pride London, the commercial body that organizes the annual pride marches in London, makes clear how embedded gay scenes and their expressions are in local urban businesses. The 2009 July London Pride's titular message was 'Come and play'. A more 'politicized' message, Birrell said, was avoided due to conditions of local

sponsorship. 'If we were heavily politicised,' he said, 'there's no way we would be in Oxford Street and Regents Street. The traders wouldn't want it and they have a lot of clout with the council, but when they can see it attracts people into the city, they're happy' (quoted in McVeigh: 2009). *Come and play* is a teasing variation of *come and spend*. It is a transformed form of 'gay politics' where the strategy of visibility, articulated most strongly in the 1960s/70s moment of gay lib in Western Europe and the States, has increasingly come to mean visible consumption in the city. The very word 'scene' is 'more appropriate to the *worldliness* of a subculture that participates in a global capitalist economy and is open to global influences' (Gelder; 2005: 9) (emphasis mine).

Rony, Kamal and Yourboy each have peculiar relationships with this scene. Crucially enough, no one is ever fully at the center of this scene, its full participant. The ultimate scene-queen remains a rhetorical device. They set themselves up at different distances from the scene and the acts of consumption it entails. Each of them is at a tangent to it. Similarly, PR user True_Companion from Bombay says that "[a]s for me, I love music, reading, spending time outside of the `gay scene`, and hanging out with my close friends. I enjoy just simple pleasures in life - a movie, a good dinner... life doesn't have to be extravagant - although occasionally that is nice to splurge on' (PR). The scene is never a simple object of participation for *all* users. It is always an object of reflection, a reflection that is structurally a distancing maneuver. These distances are variously elaborated as choice, as distribution of personal time *outside* and *inside* the scene, as pure inability to be in it or as sour dissatisfaction with it.

Ken Gelder, in elaborating the history of subcultural studies in Euro-American scholarship since the early 1940s, makes a significant remark about how people always inhabit subcultures in an uneven way. If subcultures are, in some loose sense, about thinking about one's group identity as different from an imagined norm, then these differences never take one form and are never valued or adopted consistently. They are at once bemoaned, relished and exploited by its participants (Gelder: *ibid.* 1). Subcultures can never become wholly discrete entities for its members to inhabit (8). Gelder argues that point of inhabiting a subculture is already a point of its leakage. In elaborating on the Californian sociologist John Irwin's 1977 book *Scenes*, which first introduced this term as a cultural analytic, Gelder argues that

'[o]ne's attachment to scenes can stem from choice rather than predicament; relations to them may be 'casual' rather than complete or permanent; they may change routinely, but they can also 'overlap' so that one's social identity can be associated with a *number* of scenes rather than just one' (*ibid.* 11) (emphasis in original)

There is no one patent relationship with the scene. There are always inconsistent and jagged lines of discontinuity between the imagined subcultural world and its participants. In talking about the 'gay world', Delhi PR user not_intrested marks his relationship with the scene with a streak of mordancy: '[i]n D City Of Sex Don't Expect Love.If U R Expecting...Get Prepared With Some Hanky Nd Tissues...Coz Gay World Is Face World..Here Relation n Ppl Get Changed Like Clothes.. U Wear Dem Or Remove Dem Upto U...' (PR). Similarly, vviisshhaall from Bombay articulates his specialized relationship with the scene. 'Please note,' he says, 'Im looking forward to have discreet friendship with only good looking and closet gays or bisexual guys...so, feminine guys, and the ones who

are openly gay, very much into the gay scene, belonging to gay groups and attending gay parties...pls pls pls excuse me, bcoz we wont gel together' (PR). For vviisshhaall, the scene is cast by too much *openness* and by a peculiar masculinity which calls attention to itself, which catches the eye and does not pass. He relates to this overbearing scene by making demands of discreteness from its members, by excusing himself from those who can not. The entry to the scene is always necessarily partial.

It is clear that *gay* as a *scene* or as an *identity* is never occupied simply or steadily over time by people. Gay is not a permanent name but a series of situations. It is an object of a wavering relationship. It is always an inconsistent contract of belonging through consumption, through experiencing togetherness *in* and *outside* consumption. It is constantly reimagined over time, rehashed by experience and reflected upon in casual or serious, delighted or dissatisfied online exchanges. PR is the place of this wavering relationship – being its trigger point – and the very form that this relationship takes.

c) The Lover

Related figures: the friend, the poet, the narrator, the *mehboob*, the *kaatil*, the romancer, the online user, the consumer, the compatible, the *premi*

'We duly felt the right anguishes' (John Fowles, *The Magus*; 1966: 17)

27 year old Kumar* from Delhi takes recourse to a popular cliché related with love. He launches his profile with a slightly impish line: 'Do you believe in love at first sight or should i walk by again...:-)' (PR). The idea of *love at first sight* is integral to the modern idea

of romance. It is always a moment of revelation of everything special in the other and it always prefigures a shared future with this other. It is a hugely loaded moment saturated with expectation and a formally religious belief – Kumar specifically asks ‘[d]o you believe...?’ – in its ability to reveal a lot in a little time. It is above all a narrative device that is crucial to the modern plot of romance, being as it is more often than not a retrospective utterance used to hold together a narrative; *it had been love at first sight et. al.*

Anthony Giddens locates the rise of the idea of romantic love with the rise of the genre of the novel in the late eighteenth/nineteenth century in Europe (1992: 40). ‘[T]he connection,’ he says ‘was one of newly discovered narrative form’ (*ibid.*). This new literary narrativization of love was embedded in social and legal changes of the nineteenth century, particularly of women staking greater claims to rights over their own life and its choices, such as reproduction, career and marriage, making individual life into something that could be owned and maneuvered like one’s own story (1-3). Romantic love, he argues, makes of passionate attachments or moments of attraction something that is uniquely projectionable into an individual’s future; ‘[s]uch love projects in two senses: it fastens upon and idealizes another, and it projects a course of future development’ (45).

Love at first sight functions as the launching action in this narrative course. As part of the romantic plot, it always has to overwork its capacities than just an independent moment of attraction; ‘[i]nsofar as immediate attraction is part of romantic love...it has to be separated quite sharply from the sexual/erotic compulsions of passionate love. The ‘first glance’ is a communicative gesture, an intuitive grasp of qualities of the other. It is a process of attraction to someone who can make one’s life, as it is said, ‘complete’” (40). The first

meeting might be a capturing of the heart, but it is almost always framed as a beginning of a mutual narrative biography of the two that make up the romantic pair (46).

Romantic love is always composed of the secular and the sacred interrupting each other. '[T]he more I live, the more I think / two people together is a miracle' (Rich; 1976: poem XVIII). 'Or in this poem, [t]here are no miracles...[i]f I could let you know...two people together is a work / heroic in its ordinariness' (ibid. poem XIX). The eighteen year old PR user tman3108 from Chandigarh reposes a degree of expectation habitually invested in the first meeting: 'im a fun guy n wanna meet someone cute with a good personality...if you're him...lets meet n *see if there's a spark...*' (PR) (emphasis mine). This first sight carries the baggage of its possible revelatory function – at core a sacred function – and this always yields peculiar metaphors of chance such as *spark*. The possibility of love is always latent in the first sight but it will not always come through. There is a necessarily aleatory (because always unpredictable) connection between the first sight and the possibility of durable love that it is supposed to trigger.

Like with the Biblical God's grace in 16th century European Calvinist interpretations, some are predestined to be received into God's favour and others are not (Calvin: 1536). Human beings can never know who the chosen ones are so all must necessarily continue to believe in divine munificence. This essential and canonical impossibility of human pre-knowledge shapes the Christian sacred traditions with the maxim that only God foreknows everything and that there is always a need to believe in his kindness.

It is in this sense that romantic love never becomes a fully secular feeling in terms of form because there always has to be an element of belief that has to compensate for the chanciness of first meetings and invoke tentative, desired futures out of the exigencies of the present moment. ‘In short, *whatever happens*, knowing that it is ordered by the Lord, he will receive it...’ (Calvin; 1536: Book 3, Chapter 7) (emphasis mine). Belief is always a way to override chance by plotting it in a causal narrative, even if the cause is usually the grace of the primal divine, or the happening of love. Here, ‘[r]omantic love,’ treated as a causing agent, makes of ‘*amour passion* [passionate love] a specific cluster of beliefs and ideals geared to transcendence’ (Giddens: 45), that is, to a projected longevity of the romantic connection. ‘Love is never wanting to lose faith, never wanting to give up, and never truly moving on’ (Sam2007, New Delhi; PR). Romantic love, formally similar to religious faith, becomes a ‘potential avenue for controlling the future, as well as a form of psychological security (in principle) for those whose lives are touched by it’ (41).

The spark, in the wide ranging aleatory metaphors of online users variously reincarnates in popular PR bywords such as *chemistry, tuning, clicking together, special, our wavelengths, gelling et. al.*. The first sight of the romantic other is prearranged like an epiphany, expected like a sacred appearance. Romantic love is often framed as the only possibility of a miracle *in* the modern secular realist universe in which it is plotted. It perseveres as such *despite* this emplotment within a generically realist-causal framework which treats this miracle as a bit of a joke – Kumar’s ‘do you believe...or should i walk by again’. love_forever23, from Pune, hooks himself onto the paradox implicit in Kumar’s joke. The paradox between the realist uncertainty of this miracle of first sight and yet of a sacred belief in it. ‘Kab kaun kaha kis tarah pasand aajaye,’ he says, ‘aur wo hamari life ka sabse special person ban jaye

pata hi nahin chalta...I know mere liye bhi koi hai aisa' ['Who knows, sometime, somewhere, we might begin to like someone and he might become our life's most special person...I know there is someone like this for me'] (PR). *Who knows* and *I know* coexist in the modern concept of romantic love.

Chatterjee (name changed) from Hooghly in West Bengal rehearses the common wisdom of over-aphoristic greeting cards when he writes: 'its not miracle to make good friend but its miracle to have a friend who will b wid u *always*' (PR) (emphasis mine). The real miracle of the first sight was never simply the promise of love but of its longevity – the promise of the many sights after the *first*. Writing at the end of the century of the novel in Europe, Oscar Wilde had felt the pulse of this widespread, allegedly ridiculous belief in the miracle of romantic love understood as long narrative, understood as a matter of *always*. A belief which the long and realist form of the novel fed into and ordinarized in its non-epic, bourgeois protagonists, even as it implicitly questioned it by placing it within the everyday conflicts and interruptions staple of the narrative form. *In narrative*, lay the realist inconsistencies of love. However, precisely, *in narrative*, lay the sacred seduction that these inconsistencies might continue. 'Always! That is a dreadful word,' Wilde wrote through his character Henry Wotton, '[t]hey spoil every romance by trying to make it last forever' (Wilde; 1890: 18). Romantic love, in terms of the modern novel form, works as a promise of a shared, durable narrative. Something that would not be warranted by passionate enthrallment, of the *extraordinary* epic kind, or in sexual attraction by itself.

The modern premise of this faith in the miracle of love is not any divine promise, immutable kinship structure or continued sexual attraction but the more secular 'qualities'

of the individual other, such as intelligence, personal style or career prospects. Each person looking for love is individualized as a unique string of these qualities. 'Am handsome, intelligent, career oriented, stylish, gym toned and single. Seek d same' (chiseled, Bombay; PR). Love, and the pervasive search for it, has become a more individuating phenomenon in the last two centuries culminating in the self-oriented genre of the user-profile on dating websites like PR. I explain the history of this individuation with the case of the modern Bengali novel.

The rise of emotional ideals of love as embedded in the newly consolidating genre of the novel, of personal characters traits as significant factors for love, and of the thing called the 'mutual compatibility' of these traits that was later popularized in the genre of self-help literature on romantic relationships (Giddens: 87-110). This 'compatibility' was the new secular equation of love, it was the possibility of it happening, the possibility of that notional *spark*.

'Compatibility matters!' (Mahan27, Uttar Pradesh; PR). On PR, Piyush8 from Bombay rehearses the proverbial spark as a chemical metaphor of chance: '[t]he meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed' (PR). The modern ideals of romance provide a peculiar setting for such experiments between people. They organize the very conditions of possibility and the course of such encounters. PR becomes their heightened testing ground. Self detailing

user-profiles are nothing but basic, required scripts of *love understood as a compatibility experiment*.¹²²

In his lecture 'About Love' Michael Hardt made a simple point that love 'may be natural but is not at all spontaneous, or rather the forms of love are not spontaneous' (2007). It seemed to him 'that love requires organization or training, in other words there are better ways of loving, there are different ways of loving' (*ibid.*). It is in this sense that love encounters on PR often find themselves happening under the organizing sign of compatibility.

Compatibility is one of the major keywords of romantic love, one of its chief *ways* of occurring. It is an examining mechanism that produces report cards on the possibility of love between any two people. Formally, this ensures that those people that are to meet each other have to be exhaustively profiled, *as personalities*, prior to and during such a meeting.

¹²² In an interview I conducted with the founder of the website *PlanetRomeo*, Jens, he told me about the online search of love through the 'right criteria', that is, through the frame of compatibility: 'A: The trigger that got Planet Romeo started was loneliness of a boy in London, an inability to meet the 'right' guy, the perfect Cinderella fit. In some sense Planet Romeo sells that which is the common dream of our times that in our lives we will find a special person who will salvage us. Has the website made this search easier or messier? / Jens: Although Internet can never really replace physical contact, it is a great jumping board to make acquaintances. So PR makes it easier to make the first step and put yourself out there. That has definitely been made a lot easier, since it's rather anonymous and you can turn it off any time you want. On the other hand, it has made the search perhaps more complicated too. With more than 1 million active users of the website worldwide and around 90,000 guys online simultaneously on our website it is likely that you can't keep track of everyone and *you may miss on the 'love of your life' simply because you haven't put the right criteria in your search*' (Jens; prsnl email: Feb 20, 2010, emphasis mine).

This entails that the central text on PR, its basic online unit, the user-profile, has to function as a ripe individuated script for the compulsory test of compatibility. It does this by being saturated with individual descriptors like *tastes, hobbies, interests, likings, values, one's nature, shauk* (interests), *pasand* (favorites), *temperaments*, and *types*. jeevan_wlnew from Bangalore writes that his 'hobbies are reading, watching movies, some good literature, some politics, a lot of fitness related, sports and the last thing is IT...I am an IT guy' (PR). ajay from Bombay says that he is 'an ardent lover of music and an instrumentalist', that he is a 'socially inclined guy with an interest in spirituality sans religion n superstitions' (PR). He 'believes in intellectual quotient and emotional quotient' and is

'searching for a partner with whom,' he 'can share everything. Not looking for one night stands but just love, care, respect, fidelity, emotional attachment...physical relation will be a result of these. Consummating a relation has its own importance, never saying no for it. *but definitely it will start with friendship... dates.. n if we click then further?* (*ibid.*) (emphasis mine)

It is only within the scheme of romantic love that the paradox of putting effort and organization – the routine of *dates* as the ritualistic quest of compatibility – into something that is after all framed as happening spontaneously and unforeseeably – *if we click* – has the accuracy of experience. Romantic compatibility is always framed both as the object of excessive, banal human labour and also a gift of God.¹²³

¹²³ Jens, the founder of PR, told me in an email interview that '[t]he 'search for the one' is something that remains important for a lot of us. And as said before, that is not only regarding finding a 'life partner': it can be and also often will be a search for a person for special experiences, for a short or longer period, sex-related or not, or a search for a guide or a club or interest-group which our website provides as well. So, people don't only search for fairy tales. Our users are much more aware of the fact that fairy tales don't really happen...users are much more cautious. When you meet someone outside, you'll know quite instantly if it clicks or not. When you want to meet people online, you need to set some criteria. *Next to your fact-based stats*

The individual descriptors listed above are the basic criteria for making judgments of compatibility. In talking about compatibility as the guiding principle of modern dating websites, Alia Somani makes a provocative argument about the structural similarity of ‘astrological prerequisites and caste affiliations’ on South Asian matrimonial websites with the strict ‘psychological profiling’ that is staple in websites geared towards ‘dating’ and ‘romance’. She calls each of them ‘the literal counterparts’ of the other (2009). ‘Among these [dating] websites,’ she points out, ‘*Eharmony* has perhaps the most extensive psychological testing process. In order to register for the site, users are compelled to take a personality test, which the website claims is based on ‘scientific’ research concerning heterosexual couples’ (*ibid.*). The website ‘categorizes those who register for the service, and tells them with whom they are compatible’ (*ibid.*). Such rigorous, secular tests of compatibility, Somani hints, might themselves approximate ‘a singular absence of real choice’ (*ibid.*), an absence that is more visibly obvious in astrological match-making and caste-based marriages.

Michael Hardt can be seen as elaborating on Somani’s provocative argument of ‘compatibility’ as covertly limiting the field of choice, on the contrivance of the figure of the ‘most compatible’ as advertized on dating websites. In the same lecture cited above, Hardt talked about five different ways in the modern period in which love has been foiled

and rigid information about someone’s life and physical appearance, our users need to factor in other parameters too, more vague ones. Chemistry is one of them. It’s also a good built-in exit strategy, some users look great on paper but when you finally meet them in person, there is no magic. In that case you can simply say, ‘Sorry, there is no chemistry’. Our users are aware of the restraints of Internet dating. And, for some people, having a profile on PR takes a lot less effort than going out to bars and clubs every night’ (Jens; prsnl email: Feb 20, 2010, emphasis mine).

from attaining its ‘radical potential’, from functioning as a ‘political concept’, as ‘a field of training for constructing a more democratic society’ (Hardt *ibid.*). One of these is the repeated distillation of the concept of love as an ‘identitarian concept’ (*ibid.*), that is, love as essentially the love of the same.

This identitarian concept appeals to the ‘very limited notions of the love of neighbor but,’ Hardt thinks ‘the most common notions of the love of neighbor, as the love of those closest to you’ (*ibid.*) whether socially, geographically, racially or physically. The concept of romantic love, as driven by the wonder-word of compatibility, is a form that often lends itself to be framed as the love of the same. A form that broaches only the familiar and is resistant to forms of newness, whether it is newness of behavior, interests, class, body, caste, language or political stands. ‘I M LOOKING FOR FRNDS n Person with similar background’ (Manifor4, Chandigarh; PR). ‘Looking for someone with similar interests’ (samsonite555, Trivandrum, Kerala; PR). ‘Dude My frnd should be very very hygienic just like me’ (sanu, Cochin, Kerala; PR). ‘...lookin for someone likeminded & who likes to live life to the fullest...just like me’ (mlrguy, Mangalore, Karnataka; PR). ‘Tiger Looking for another Tiger’ (horny_tiger, Bombay; PR).

These are tentative pointers for the search for love *as* the search of the similar. These, however, are also indicative of a larger trend where websites like PR become private, targeted tools for getting at a more *defined* version of the desirable. The proxy time/space of the Internet allows users to elaborate, even harden, what they desire and what they hate. What is at work here is the current major role of the Internet – as an extension of the service sector market, a way of providing individualized services to customers, meeting

specific demands of each user (Sassen: 2000). User-profiles are after all *custom-made* texts. They are driven by the key word of *choice*. This trend manages to skirt ‘uncomfortable’ differences, which are more frequent and unavoidable in unorganized, physical cruising sites like parks and public loos (Seabrook: 1999).

These differences might be of language; ‘If there is one thing i can't tolerate, it's WRONG ENGLISH!...I can be rude , insensitive , sarcastic depending upon the level to which you irritate me...check your grammar before you message me’ (spicy_twink0, Chennai, Tamil Nadu; PR). They might be of body-type; ‘I am too cute too fair sexy gym toned body. I want some one hunky Masculine Guy only...I just cant go with Feminine/Chubby/Shapeless guys. Pls dont messege me if you are like that’ (Sexysammy4u, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh; PR). The differences could also be effected through the favourite word-concept of the Indian newspaper matrimonials – ‘decent’. It involves a battery of social criteria like class, educational background and lucrativeness of career; ‘hi I am decent smart well educated guy i love to have very decent cool guys to keep in touch’ (rai, Bangalore; PR)). Individualized thus as user-profiles, the tendency can be to encounter only the familiar, aspects one has already encountered in oneself. This makes sense in the more recent services-oriented form of the Internet (Sassen: *ibid.*). It is, in a larger sense, the rejection of the figure of the dissimilar, the strange and the distant.

Our group of around ten people waits outside Polka, where there’s a surprisingly long queue tonight. He blames it on the cancellation of the other parties, merely stating the

obvious. I don't respond to his blabbering. The 'straight' couple at the front is stopped by the bouncer, as he asks the woman "Do you know what party this is?"

She confidently responds "Yes I do,"

"Okay," he jokes, "just don't molest people inside." She sniggers.

We get inside and within a few seconds, there's only the two of us left as the group has scattered all around, hunting. He tells me that he's going to the washroom, and I take this opportunity to get drunk, thinking that might help me in sleeping soundly as I'm not getting laid tonight anyway. I go to the bar and help myself to several tequila shots. I turn back and realize that I'm already sloshed. The party turns into the grooviest party of the night.

The Music as the Site of Performance

When I wandered around in several discotheques in Delhi, and noticed the music that was being played there, one thing which certainly struck me was the ability of this music to 'transform'. Quela Robinson has argued that the transformation of 1889 Edison Phonograph machine into the 'Jukebox', which also served as the first tool for the wide scale distribution and appropriation of independent black music (the verb 'juke' is a rural black vernacular for the possessed movement of the body as in dance or lovemaking), was a marker of the transformation of a 'machine into medicine'¹²⁴. This transformation, a medicinal quality that music acquires here is a significant point to consider. I have

¹²⁴ Quela Robinson, History of the Discotheque, International Journal of Audiology.

witnessed this transformation happening in the disco, where shy and introvert-looking people transform into extrovert, dancing/jumping jacks (of course elements like alcohol, drugs etc. and the interior space design of a disco also add to it, but the power of music in bringing about this change cannot be neglected.). The music *is* undoubtedly the drug here, a medicine that ushers the above mentioned transformation. DJ Palash, my friend and the official DJ of Pegs n Pint (now Pepperz), a discotheque in Chanakyapuri says that discotheques have always laid great stress on being able to create a ‘fluidity of form’ – that is the key. If at any level this fluidity is broken, the audience might come out of the mirage and to take them back into the same mode may take hours. To maintain this fluidity, a DJ has to be extra cautious while mixing the songs that they fall in proper sync with each other and the transition is smooth. For Palash, the greatest DJ is the one who can play “George Michael and Ila Arun together without the audience realizing it.” Of course, he is speaking of the post-modern era where cross fertilization of genres has become a demand as well as a feature of discotheques, but the truth in his comment can be cross-checked in the light of the historical fact that in the ’70s, when for the first time, instead of discotheques looking for music, music was specially created to be played in the discotheques—the albums didn’t have many tracks, but only a handful of long tracks which kept the beat going—the singles were issued on 12-inch records, which allowed for extended remixes. DJs could mix these tracks together, matching the beats on each song since they were marked with how fast they were in terms of beats per minute.

The continuity of the disco-beats is a significant element—a bridge for the transition, a site for the transformation. In one of the examples that I remember, an Arthur Russel song (Goodbye old paint, a 1973 recording that appears on the 2008 album, ‘Love is overtaking

me')¹²⁵ is fused with a Hindi number, It's the time to Disco(Kal Ho Na Ho, Nikhil Advani, Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, 2003)¹²⁶, but the transition is significant. It's a beautiful piece of music, where the beats modulate in a very distinct fashion to allow the other song to step in, while providing space at every counter-beat allowing the DJ to create the right aural ambience and then, just at the time the mood is set, the Hindi song slips in, as if it was always there. The Tabla beats count is kept as the site of transition here. Appropriately for a time that sits in the shadow of the more well-loved musical "peaks" before and after, this piece explores a nocturnal, ambiguous territory that is perhaps more understated but also more bewitching than the others. The fantastic beats are still featured, and the genre-eschewing, world-spanning ethos remains in place. But there is a greater emphasis here on spaciousness, noirish shadow and light, and slow-boiling sexiness—on mystery. For people like Palash, this moment of formlessness in music is a triumph every time they are able to do it successfully. All though, this is a difficult genre, and very few clubs use such kind of music. As Palash puts it "Lesson One: Before approaching the avant-garde, watch where you're putting your feet."

To really test the ability of 'transformation' this music has, I will quote an example which will prove how it supersedes the effect of alcohol, drugs and interiors etc. in acting as the site of performance. Just after the terrorist (?) attacks in Mumbai on 26th Nov. 2008, when even in Delhi there was high alert everywhere, I went to Bacchus—a resto-bar/discotheque in Vasant Vihar, on 5th Dec. 2008, Friday night, where the DJ was requesting the people at

¹²⁵ Lawrence, Tim; *Hold On To Your Dreams: Arthur Russell and the Downtown Music Scene, 1973-1992*, Duke University Press, p. 361

¹²⁶ Composition 12

regular intervals to not indulge in dancing, but only interact. The alcohol and space were just like any other day, but what was remarkably different there was the music. The music was more like what Cage writes as, “a music which is like furniture—a music, that is, which will be part of the noises of the environment, will take them into consideration. I think of it as a melodious softening the noises of the knives and forks, not dominating them, not imposing itself. It would fill up those heavy silences that sometimes fall between friends dining together.”¹²⁷ In some of the work of La Monte Young or Brian Eno, music becomes consciously an aspect of interior decorating. What this takes us back to is not Muzak but the admirable baroque tradition of “Tafel Musik”: “table” or dinner music. Mozart still wrote at the time of the French Revolution comfortably and well ‘divertimenti’ meant to accompany social gatherings, including meetings of his Masonic lodge. After Mozart, this utilitarian or “background” function is repressed in bourgeois art music, which will now require the deepest concentration and emotional and intellectual involvement on the part of the listening subject.

I present an example of the music that was being played that night. This particular piece is called ‘the spirit of Rajasthan’ (DJ Kash, *Electro Bollywood IV*, 2006)¹²⁸ Studying this piece, we realize that this follows a very different pattern of composition and mixing. Even though the beats stay in place like any other remix for most of its length, the electronic soundscape seems very meticulously scattered. Different kinds of sounds appear in an almost unrelated, counterharmonic way, making as much melody as an old cellphone ring. This motif doesn’t expand or give way to any other melodic development, but instead, in a

¹²⁷ John Cage, “Erik Satie,” in *‘Silence’* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), p.76.

¹²⁸ Composition 13

very Philip Glass way, gets repetitive, unless intervened by the first melodic intervention of a far away 'shehnai' sound (1:50 mins), soon followed by an unperturbed rhythm routine. At 3:15 mins. the composition bursts into the sound of vocals by some folk singers, uncannily seeming alienated from the earlier soundscape, but soon the previously established beat pattern comes back to follow the composition. By not letting the melody develop, there is a monotonous soundscape established, the music doesn't 'speak' to you, it just stays there, as a part of the environment.

Most of these discotheques have special nights for the Queer community (P' n P', now known as Pepperz, Chanakyapuri, on Tuesdays and Velocity, Orange Hara, Veda, Asia7 & Polka on Saturdays). Here again, music acts as the site of performance as all the other elements remain almost constant. Palash has significant views about such nights, as he believes that compared to other nights, these nights are more 'sexually charged' (and my observation proves him right in a way). Therefore, to make the music go with the mood of the crowd, he doesn't only concentrate on the beat pattern and fluidity like he usually does, but pays more attention to his selection of songs. He says "Songs which are more vocal about sexual urges make the crowd really excited on such nights. Playing already established gay icons like ABBA is always a safe bet." However, I believe that most of these icons do not circulate as a unique feature in India but only as an extension of their west image followed by the Indian crowd which may not even be aware of the reasons of their identification as gay icons. Palash doesn't agree completely, "The feminine swing and oomph that ABBA has is not the same as, say, what James Blunt offers, and audience can identify with it." How does he deal with the heterosexual crowd which accidentally lands up on these days? "They are not stopped from dancing ofcourse, but the subtle charge that

the songs carry, usually doesn't interest heterosexuals much, though there are exceptions too." After listening to an encyclopedia of ABBA songs on these nights, I realized that the 'subtle charge' that he talks about (vaguely speaking) is a curvaceous, easy note pattern that the songs follow where the tunes do not trespass each other but rather follow, in a more unified fashion (the harmonies, for example are usually complimentary to the primary tune, and rarely counter it, even in songs like Chiquitita), a structure which contains easy melody with pounding beats as opposed to the hard hitting harshness of rock (which, by the way does not stand as a foe to disco in India, as opposed to its stand in the west where 'Disco Sucks Movement'¹²⁹ was a rock endeavour to prove its masculinity over the 'feminine' disco). Let's understand this by looking at the chord pattern of one of their songs, called 'Fernando', (later we'll look at a Lady Gaga song 'Alejandro' to understand their musical similarities. (Fig.3) Fakir believes that the Queer music has more 'sensuality' than the 'utterly romantic' music they play on weekdays. However, I find it rather a very vague definition to be translated into music.

¹²⁹ <http://noexpiration.blogspot.in/2011/07/disco-sucks-movement.html>
for more on this, watch <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2009/jun/18/disco-sucks>

What are the songs that are played in these nights?

Fernando

Words & Music by Benny Andersson, Stig Anderson & Bjorn Ulvaeus.

Moderate slow march

Can you hear the drums, Fer - nan-do? I re - mem - ber long a -
They were clo - ser now, Fer - nan-do. Ev - 'ry hour, ev - 'ry min -
Now we're old and grey Fer - nan-do, and since ma - ny years I

- go an - oth - er star - ry night like this. In the fire - light, Fer -
- ute seemed to last e - ter - nal - ly. I was so a - fraid Fer -
have - n't seen a ri - fle in your hand. Can you her the drums Fer -

- nan-do, you were hum - ming to your - self and soft - ly strum - ming your gui -
- nan-do, we were young and full of life and none of us pre - pared to
- nan-do, do you still re - call the fright - ful night we crossed the Ri - o

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Fig.3

Fernando¹³⁰, owing to its extreme popularity (usually considered to be ABBA's most successful single) is obviously a song with a strong nostalgic value. But at the same time it doesn't really have that peppy-ness that would make it a party favorite, definitely unlike other songs from ABBA like 'Gimme, Gimme, Gimme a man after midnight' or 'Money,

¹³⁰ Composition 25

Money, Money'. The music starts with a faraway flute sound, soon in the aural foreground, we hear a soft march rhythm accompanied by piano chords at moderate tempo, with powerful strumming and yet delicate movements between the notes, as the chords elaborate and give space for the melody to enter. At this point, Frida opens the song, soon joined with a soul-stirring harmony by Anna. The flute is of course a reminder of the Mexican revolution, as the English lyrics of the song pay a tribute to it. The song brings back an interesting mix of emotions—loss, nostalgia, hope and friendship. The lyrics of the chorus go like this—

There was something in the air that night, the stars were bright, Fernando

They were shining there for you and me for liberty, Fernando

Though we never thought that we could lose, there's no regret

If I had to do the same again, I would my friend, Fernando

If I had to do the same again, I would my friend, Fernando

The melody stays in the same clef and between close notes, doesn't go to high or low, and the tempo also stays moderate apart from the last verse which goes from *moderato* to *moderatissimo* but in a very, very mild way, almost inaudible in difference, more like a *rubato* actually. The military beats associate the song with the military homoeroticism that Lady Gaga picks up in the video of her song Alejandro, although, for the lyrics she depends more on the Spanish version of the song, which have remarkably different lyrics, about loss of love.

If we take the case of Delhi Q(m) discotheques, then there are some songs which are sure to be heard in all of them. I discuss some of these songs here and try to talk about their role in what I call an 'auracle'. I push the idea of 'auracle' as something very close to what

Debord tries to talk about when he mentions a ‘spectacle’, as the accumulation of capital to an extent that it becomes a sound. This brings together all the ideas that I’ve been trying to deal with through the course of this dissertation. It brings back the ideas of consumerism and consumption capacity, of the economy, of liberal policies and the new ‘rich’ together into this one sound... the sound of the thumping 1100 watt stereo where all other sounds drown. The darkened dance floor, with momentary flashes of light, clicking pictures of those ‘unprepared’ moments, surrounded by bodies—unaware(?), performative, pleasure seeking bodies, with touch as the only sensation... apart from a surrounding sound of the music system. The sound overshadows all other sense of experience here, the ‘true’ site of performance, with a series of songs—living up to its “mystery” moniker, the series threads through the darker edges of progressive funk, pop, folk, fusion-oriented jazz, electronic and concrete music, nascent art-rock (that would eventually be called “post-punk,”) and even touches of country and sound library music. Much of the music is difficult to categorize meaningfully, to celebrate the “mystery” of the connections and blurring lines between seemingly disparate forms of recorded sound. The ‘auracle’ both emerges and absorbs this ‘mystery’. To imagine, that every week, so much of pink (and black) money¹³¹ is invested in the creation of this soundscape will easily allow us to understand why and how the music which is played here becomes important. Surveying through several nights, I made a kind of working playlist of the songs that I’d frequently hear in these parties. It is not surprising that the first time I encountered Lady Gaga was in one of these parties.

I heard Alejandro (Lady Gaga, *The Fame Monster*, 2009) during a party in Velocity in 2009, and was instantly intrigued with the song. Later my research confirmed that the song

¹³¹ The money spent by Queer people for their own pleasure.

has a number of ABBA allusions, including a reference to their 1976 song "Fernando", which Gaga cited as one of her influences.¹³² Michael Hubbard called the song "brilliantly catchy, deceptively simple and wonderfully melancholy" quite close to the description of ABBA music that Palash had given—where even heartbreak is celebrated! Scott Plagenhoef believed that although "Alejandro" is an ABBA morph, "it comes off very modern, in part because U.S. pop and hip-hop is currently drawing heavily from Europop, hi-NRG, and dance music."¹³³ In May 2010, Gaga said in an interview to *The Times* "[Alejandro is about the] purity of my friendships with my gay friends, and how I've been unable to find that with a straight man in my life. It's a celebration and an admiration of gay love—it confesses my envy of the courage and bravery they require to be together. In the video I'm pining for the love of my gay friends—but they just don't want me to be with them."¹³⁴ The remix of the song¹³⁵ by Gaga herself, has a wonderful racy edge to it, it paces the song almost to the double, uses echo sound as one of the important stylistic interventions, and creates a rhapsodic exploration with the chorus, reworking on the texture of the sound electronically.

Another Gaga song, very popular, and played almost like a gay anthem in these discotheques is 'Born This Way.' In her own words

"I want to write my this-is-who-the-fuck-I-am anthem, but I don't want it to be hidden in poetic wizardry and metaphors. I want it to be an attack, an assault on the issue because I think, especially in today's music, everything gets kind of washy sometimes and the

¹³² Ryan, Chris (2009-10-11). "Song You Need To Know Now: Lady Gaga, 'Alejandro'". MTV (MTV Networks). Retrieved 2010-02-09.

¹³³ Plagenhoef, Scott (2010-01-13). "Pitchfork: Album Reviews: Lady Gaga: The Fame Monster"

¹³⁴ Moran, Caitlin (2010-05-23). "Come party with Lady Gaga", *The Times*

¹³⁵ Composition 14

message gets hidden in the lyrical play. Harkening back to the early '90s, when Madonna, En Vogue, Whitney Houston and TLC were making very empowering music for women and the gay community and all kind of disenfranchised communities, the lyrics and the melodies were very poignant and very gospel and very spiritual and I said, 'That's the kind of record I need to make. That's the record that's going to shake up the industry.' It's not about the track. It's not about the production. It's about the song. Anyone could sing 'Born This Way'. It could've been anyone."¹³⁶

According to the sheet music published at Musicnotes.com by Sony/ATV Music Publishing "Born This Way"¹³⁷ is written in the time signature of common time, with a moderate dance beat tempo of 124 beats per minute It is composed in the key of B major as Gaga's voice spans the tonal nodes of F \sharp_3 to C \sharp_5 . "Born This Way" follows a chord progression of C \sharp_5 -F \sharp_5 -E $_5$ -B $_5$ in the verses, and F \sharp_5 -F \sharp -E-B-Bm $_7$ -C \sharp in the chorus .

This is a classic progression for a catchy club number, and Gaga uses it rather wisely by having interesting interludes, especially the one where the music stops and she sings an acapella¹³⁸, or where she keeps repeating 'don't be a drag, just be a queen'. The song became an instant hit and no wonder, ruled the gay discotheque scene. I look at this association almost like 'iconolatriy' where Gaga's sermonous songs are worshipped in a community space. Adele however emerges as a very different icon. Her 'fat' presence and 'I-don't-give-a-damn' attitude puts her on a high plinth in the young Queer imagination. The perception of her body and her comfort with it adds another layer to her already

¹³⁶ Werde, Bill (2011-04-18). "Lady Gaga 'Born This Way' Cover Story". *Billboard* (Prometheus Global Media): p. 4.

¹³⁷ Composition 15

¹³⁸ A voice only piece

enticing yet strong voice charisma, winning immense support and fan-following in the Queer (male) discotheques. Gaga's target audience as Queer is almost pre-defined, she keeps invoking imagery from gay culture (homo-erotic militarism in Alejandro for example) and keeps referring to the struggles of gay people as her inspiration whereas Adele addresses them in a far more subtle way. This can be one way of understanding how Queer music can operate, but not the only. I pick another example here.

In recent Q(m) parties, the one Hindi song which has been particularly popular, is a song from the movie *Desi Boyz*, 2012, called 'Tu mera Hero aka Subah Hone na de'. The movie is about two friends who become male escorts for money. The song in question, although quite hetero-normative in the first look as far as gender roles are concerned, is filled with quite an interesting play of sexual desires. There are two versions of the song, and I will work on both of them one by one. The first version is a racy 'original' track with 124rpm beats¹³⁹, a moderate dance beat tempo, and a quick very Punjabi sounding 'toasting' prelude.¹⁴⁰ The lyrics are very interesting which go like this—'*tainu main love karda, bematlab karda, babon mein aa soniye, bas aaj raat ke liye. Subah hone na de, saath kbone na de, ek doosre ko, hum Sone na de, tu mera hero.*' (I love you, without any reason, come into my arms, only for tonight. We won't let the dawn fall, won't leave each other, won't let each other sleep, you are my hero) what Kumar, a not so regular party going academician deciphers as 'sadly, very ableist, masculinist' lyrics (my translation). The song has a very 60s disco-meets-pop feel to it. The song talks of a very ephemeral sexual encounter. There's no promise of lifelong companionship. Of course in the narrative of the movie, this idea is associated with the 'escort' culture; but what I'm interested in, extending my argument about Khalnayak

¹³⁹ Composition 16

¹⁴⁰ Toasting is the art of introducing a song by speaking rhythmically.

and *The Dirty Picture* in the section on item numbers, is how songs can also leave the narrative context (unlike *Choli ke Peeche*) and acquire this very different meaning when they come into the discotheque space. This also associates with my argument about how a song is read on a 'body' on the dance floor. This song, with its very flirtatious lyrics, acquires a different level of interpretation once played in Q(m) discotheques, where its narrative context and clearly defined gender roles get nullified by its sexual force. Arjun, a 21-year-old software engineer, who gladly calls it 'his song' and runs to the dance floor as soon as he hears the prelude says "I really identify with this song. When I'm with a boy dancing on this, I start seeing my hero in him."

The remix version of the song¹⁴¹ is racier, with a better use of synthesizer, a different, more 'happening' toasting piece in English saying "come on let's move to the beat of tonight, and shake their mother*****r a** in the disco light, I want to see you on the dance floor shaking that booty, sure you want some more, turn on the radio." With only two lines resounding- 'Tenu Main Love' and 'Subah Hone Na De' before the song bursts into the mood setting pop beats with interesting work with scratching.¹⁴² It is then followed by the first verse quoted earlier from the song. This version is faster and sleeker than the first one. The sound is slightly more electronic and the twiddle¹⁴³ is used very effectively. There is a moment where very pop kind of chords appear before the song repeats its leitmotif and

¹⁴¹ Composition 17

¹⁴² The cut scratch is also known as a release, chop or stab (sometimes even 'sampling' when done at a basic level), and involves both hands. The record is released (the scratching hand lets the motor take control) whilst the fader is open to let the sound out the speakers, and then the fader is closed whilst the record is rewound back to the start of the sample. If this scratch is to be performed fast rhythmically, the scratching hand must gently push the sound forwards to let it catch up to speed quickly (especially true with very slippery slipmats). The terms chop or stab generally refer to much faster cues of the sound than just a plain cut.

¹⁴³ A twiddle is a scratch where the index and middle finger on the fader hand are used in conjunction with the thumb to create the cutoffs, or clicks, in the sound. The record hand may perform a number of movements, and the clicks may be placed in a number of places relative to the record movement, so both flares and transforms can be performed with twiddling. Alternatively, any two fingers can be used by the turntablist if more comfortable.

closes with a prolonged synthesizer sound. These chords have an important role here, as they act as a sort of bridge between ‘ABBA’ and ‘Born This Way,’ and the song in question, giving it a very easy listening surface. You can easily expect the songs getting mixed with each other with these chords.

The third category is of ‘groovy’ dance numbers, as DJ Honey calls them. Here the music takes an upper hand over the context or lyrics and the peppy format of songs is what gets noticed instead. An easy swing is what determines the popularity of these songs. This is a complicated category, as personal tastes in music play a really big role here. So on the one hand Aditya believes that “Bhangra music is so not gay, it is like a call of an alpha male to an alpha female, I don’t associate with it at all!” and on the other, there is Rafiul, who clearly praises the bhangra-based song saying—

'Gal meethi bol' is one of the best party numbers ever! The music keeps me grooving even on a Saturday night when I'm on my bed and the lights are off!

The alphaness of Bhangra is, however, played with by the DJs in the Queer Clubs a lot, giving it a very fluid form and hence manipulating it into a more Queer Space. For example, the previously discussed ‘Ooh La La’ from *The Dirty Picture* is mixed with loud Bhangra beats, yet retains its flirtatious tone and delicate sounds of acceptance-rejection.¹⁴⁴ There are songs from almost all genres and fronts which assimilate this part of the night, usually the last part, where the DJ makes it a point to have as DJ Dee, a resident DJ of Hotel Ashoka puts it ‘something for everyone’—a kind of a Pandora’s box. So there would be a *The Best Time Of My Life* (*Dirty Dancing*, 1987), *Tonight’s Gonna Be A Good Night* (*The Black-Eyed Peas*, the E.N.D., 2009), *Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom, I*

¹⁴⁴ Composition 18

Want You In My Room¹⁴⁵ (Vengaboys, single, 1999), Hot n Cold¹⁴⁶ (Kate Perry, 2009), Sexy Back (Justin Timberlake, FutureSex/LoveSounds, 2006), My Humps (The Black Eyed Peas, Monkey Business, 2005), Sober (Pink, Funhouse, 2010), Love the way you lie (Eminem, Recovery, 2010) and the list can go on. Of course this list is interspersed with the songs mentioned in the item number section. Evidently these songs cover a wide range of emotions, and subjects, but it is my hypothesis that a very specific kind of aesthetic is what determines their popularity in a discotheque space. What can this be? Besides, since I've already talked about their general 'dancing' quality, how do we *really* differentiate between their aesthetic? As much as it is okay to believe that a lot of these songs are shared in both straight as well as Queer/Queer friendly¹⁴⁷ discotheques, there still are subtle differences, sometimes in aesthetic and sometimes in the content that can decide the space that these compositions are played in.

Tonight (I'm Fuckin' You), also known as Tonight (I'm Lovin' You) is a song by Spanish singer Enrique Iglesias. It features American rapper Ludacris and producer DJ Frank E. The song was released to the US radio on November 1, 2010, as the album's second U.S single and it was released digitally on November 22, 2010. The song was included on the French Limited Edition of *Euphoria* as well as the New Edition of "Euphoria" which was released in 2011. The official remix features American rapper Pitbull. The song aims directly at the dance floor with a galloping, club-ready dance beat, along with an insistent, heavily synthesized keyboard zipping all over the place. The version with the cuss word

¹⁴⁵ Composition 19

¹⁴⁶ Composition 20

¹⁴⁷ These are discotheques, which do not have a 'Queer night' per se. but would not come policing if they see a Queer couple kissing just like they won't if they see a straight couple. 'Urban Pind' in Greater Kailash is an example.

created quite a controversy in the music scene on its release, to which Iglesias said “It's probably what a lot of guys and girls think about at times, but they don't have the guts to say. It's pretty straightforward. Music has become so direct and you can say whatever you want, which is cool. At the end of the day, it's just a song — you don't have to take it seriously. You can have fun with it.”¹⁴⁸

The ‘clean’ version of the song¹⁴⁹ is the more common version of the song, which is played mostly in the straight clubs. The song excels with very sophisticated twiddle work and speech-song aesthetic, somewhere between pop and rap. The crooning voice of Iglesias, however, rarely makes the thumping sound that we hear in the later version. The ‘unclean’ version¹⁵⁰, starts with a very predictable beat routine, with an accelerating rhythmic pattern, that goes subtle after a while, and only when he chants the final statement, the mantra of ‘Tonight I’m Fuckin’ you’, it comes to a complete halt. The version that we have here is from DJ Shiva of Polka, who mixes it with a song from the popular band Stereo Nation, called Main Jagi Saari Raat. The remix works really well, the Punjabi lyrics talk about impatience all through the night in the pangs of love, and mixed with Iglesias’s very ‘in the face’ verdict of Desire, create a very interesting text in the discotheques. He’s been playing the same mix for quite some time now, and I’ve always witnessed a huge participation on the dance floor to this track.

¹⁴⁸ Ziegbe, Mawuse. "Enrique Iglesias Debuts "Tonight" At American Music Awards" MTV news

¹⁴⁹ Composition 21

¹⁵⁰ Composition 22

Music and Transcendence

In the previous section, my focus was on trying to understand the ability of music to transform its own space into multiple heterogeneous spaces and its operative forces. In this section, I'll argue that having said that, discotheque music has a unique homogeneity and a significant effect plan. As Berman¹⁵¹ has noted, the aestheticization of everyday life was also the goal of the historical avant garde in its attack on the institution of the autonomy of the aesthetic in bourgeois culture, which made it at least potentially a form of anti-capitalist practice. The loss of aura or desublimation of the art work may be a form of commodification but it is also, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, a form of democratization of culture.¹⁵² This homogeneous, democratic element is what I wish to explore.

In their book *Deleuze and Music*, Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda describe an East London night club in the following words, "The music is a furious amalgam of beats, noise, snatches of scratched melody, propulsive lines and percussive figures spinning laterally in all directions. No-one knows who's playing it: Maybe we all are. Maybe it's just playing itself. Maybe it's playing us."¹⁵³ The figure of a Rhizome used by Deleuze and Guattari, as opposed to Freud's hierarchical understanding of the mind, comes to the forefront here to invoke a kind of polymorphous perversity of the body politic. 'Rhizomatic' music might include the fractal, flow motion funk, and the 'nobody solo

¹⁵¹ Russell Berman, "Modern Art and Desublimation," *Telos*, 62 (Winter 1984-85): 48.

¹⁵² Susan Buck-Morss, "Benjamin's Passagen-Werk: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution." *New German Critique*, 29 (Spring-Summer 1983), 211-240;

¹⁵³ Deleuze and Music, Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda, p.118

everybody solo' with its dismantling of the normal ranking of instruments in the mix and the cut n splice mixology of hiphop, house and jungle DJs.

My argument is that the DJs create a kinetic mix-and-match collage that's potentially infinite. The authors further quote Manuel Delanda, a writer who attempts to build theoretical bridges between Deleuze and Guattari and chaos theory, and believes that the frontier between order and chaos is where the 'magic' happens. This would seem to be true in music, judging by the groove and improvisation, repetition and randomness in the discotheque music. If we compare this with the minimalist work of La Monte Young in a purely formalist way, we realize that this is the state that Deleuze and Guattari call 'becoming cosmic' and attainable. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 250) This is the moment where Trance music emerges in the discotheque spaces. This music is truly fluid, and to borrow a term from Deleuze and Guattari, in its construction of various strata, "invents a kind of diagonal running between the harmonic vertical and the melodic horizon." It is this diagonal, this pseudo-polyphony that serves as a musical critique of the inherent connection between technique and intentionality. Thus I also move further from the Quela Robinson argument of 'Primitivism' and 'Negritude' in disco music space, and try to understand the (pseudo)poly-rhythmic/phonic sounds through the glass of an interrogation of ritual spaces, Sufism and transcendence. This research is important to establish this popular form of music against a cannon (which itself must be questioned in its categorization of high art and low art) and try to understand the event that music is—specially in the heterotopias that architecture creates within a city through the other social/intimate spaces and Discotheques where "Music has the ability to create a state of

magical suspension of spatial and temporal limitations which is free floating in fantasy space, distancing us from reality, and at the same time enabling us to approach reality.”¹⁵⁴

No one can say who's truly the 'author' of a DJ mix, the lines between the composers, producers, performers and audience are deliberately blurred in this context, and the relationship between authorial intention and sonic product is radically destabilized. Thus music made through a non-hierarchical process of lateral connections between sounds, genres and musicians, which opens always onto a cosmic space must be archetypically modern and rhizomatic in Deleuzian terms. “central to the methods of music-making which Romanticism inaugurated is the role of the conductor as representative of the composer—Pope as representative of God—by contrast to which improvisation involves the ceaseless subversion of any such singular authority by a process at once mysterious and thoroughly material: mystical yet irreducibly social”¹⁵⁵ This is the point where the lines between the composer and audience and between themselves and music and the participants are all blurred, where music is absorbed in the space and it absorbs everything, it 'becomes' the space. This is the moment of the opening onto the 'Cosmic' which is also an experience of sociality as such.

Studies of the culture and religion of Electronic Dance music Culture (EDMC) are explored under four broad groupings: the cultural religion of EDMC expressed through 'ritual' and 'festal'; subjectivity, corporeality and the phenomenological dance experience (especially 'ecstasy' and 'trance'); the dance community and a sense of belonging (the 'vibe' and 'tribes'); and EDMC as a new 'spirituality of life'. Moving beyond the cultural Marxist

¹⁵⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *A Pervert's Guide to Cinema: A Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, the film.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 124

approaches of the 1970s, which held youth (sub)cultural expressions as ‘ineffectual’ and ‘tragic’, and the postmodernist approaches of the early 1990s, which held rave to be an ‘implosion of meaning’, recent anthropological and sociological approaches recognize that the various manifestations of this youth cultural phenomenon possess meaning, purpose and significance for participants. Contemporary scholarship thus conveys the presence of religiosity and spirituality within contemporary popular cultural formations. The concept of transcendence can best be seen in the ‘Sufi’ belief and music, where the constant claps become an interface between the two worlds, and melody becomes a metaphor for the smooth movement of soul between them. When a darwesh attains that moment of transcendence, he performs sama, a whirling dance, a kind of a physical response to the transcendental state of mind created through music. It is basically an act of devotion that takes a person to a higher level of consciousness. It is also a unification—the absorbing of the body and the music—a moment of becoming one. As Ashish Mehrishi notices, “This helps in the process of contemplating the divine force.”

In the chapter “Trance Tribes and Dance Vibes—Victor Turner and EDMC”¹⁵⁶, Graham St. John, talks about the emergence of trance in the 1980s and 90s on the beaches of Goa, India, and discusses the emergence of psychedelic trance (psytrance). I think, the point that he tries to make is that ostensibly constituting a voluntary rather than obligatory set of actions and associations typical of cultures with a complex social and economic division of labor, implying a separation of leisure and work accompanying capitalist democracies in particular, and featuring a media apparatus enabled by advanced

¹⁵⁶ Victor turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance, Graham St. John, p.149

communications technology, EDMC is a complex cluster of ‘liminoidal’ genres. According to Turner, in societies where ‘leisure’ has emerged, an experiential freedom has emerged too—the freedom from chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office, the freedom to generate new symbolic worlds, to transcend social structural limitations, to play with ideas, with fantasies, with words and with social relations. (Turner 1982a: 36f) The exhortations to surrender to the Cosmic spirit in Trance, perhaps, resounds within leisure genres enabling individual choice and experimental *freedoms*. Such work-play guarantees an acceleration of risk taking, innovation, and transformation. This is the cyclic equation that I have been aiming at between Transformation and Transcendence, between ‘form’ and ‘essence’.

A very famous track, from the band Enigma, called ‘Sadness’ still popular in the discotheques, starts with a very hypnotizing sound track, only a base synthesizer, with a very calm and composed voice over, commanding the listener to give in to the music—and ‘meditate’. The reference to the transcendental power of the music is too evident to be ignored here. If one pays attention to the names of such albums like ‘Karmic Cycle’ (Enigma) or ‘The Molecular Biology Of Organisms’, their direct relation with spiritual becomes evident. In ‘Polka’, a discotheque in Greater Kailash, I heard a beautiful piece which had a blend of Sanskrit chants with disco beats. The DJ there also showed me, and on my request, played songs from a unique album ‘Qawwali Mix’ which had a fusion of ‘sufi’ music with disco beats—a coming together of two ‘transcendental’ models of music. He mentioned the importance of this transcendental quality in disco as ‘the USP (Unique Selling Proposition) of discotheques’ and referred to club Nirvana where he has worked before as the ‘ultimate space for spiritual mix’ (Nirvana literally means ‘salvation’). From the little work I have done on the music played in Osho Ashrams, I have realized that the

fluidity that Palash had talked about, actually plays a vital role in the creation of this transcendental quality in music as it forms a ‘timeless parallel world’. How is this world really formed? ‘Maya’, a track from Rahul Sharma’s album of the same name, a popular composition which is used in trance lounges and clubs quite regularly,¹⁵⁷ opens with a slightly auto-tuned female voice announcing ‘MahaMaya—the Goddess of perplexion, the mother of all names and forms, she deludes the world with her illusion, and conjures up the magic of creation, preservation and destruction’. The Hindu philosophy of trinity is assimilated into the figure of Maya here, an illusion—a formlessness. What follows is an array of sounds, a clear leitmotif formation played on the Santoor, which later collapses into a layered space of vocals, only to come back later, with unprecedented force and loudness. As the ragas get changed, the melody acquires a more delicate turn and then through an intricate bridge, the leitmotif (and the raga) is restored, this time accompanied with the vocals, going back into the variation. This structure almost replicates the cycle of creation, preservation and destruction mentioned before—turning music into a site of the performance of spirituality. Comparing this track with a Qawwali remix, ‘Allah hoo’¹⁵⁸ from *Khuda Ke Liye* (Shoaib Mansoor, 2007), interesting readings emerge. This piece starts with a call to ‘Allah’, in a male voice, initially sounding like a note echoing in the hollowness of the aural space, suddenly joined by a ‘hoo’ and changing it into a melody, an elongated one, filling the aural space, and then transforming into a proper leitmotif, repetitive in nature. The techno sounds join it along with the sounds of claps which soon transform into the culminating bar sound on the beatbox. The song follows exactly the structure discussed earlier about melody as being the joining line, a diagonal between spaces. This structure becomes remarkably clear at around 3:00 mins in the song, when the

¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁸ Composition 24

female voice enters, filling the song with poly-phonic layers, yet working towards the same soundscape—The precise Deleuzian model that I had discussed in the beginning of this section.

The most intriguing remark about the discotheque music that I heard during my research came from a friend and a first time disco-goer who said that he feels like he is in a womb and all he can hear is a polyphonic bunch of sounds. If I take a womb as a metaphor for the space where desires and satisfaction meet, then the discotheque comes up to represent that space. This unique coming together is what creates the ‘musical abysses’ that the discotheques in Delhi have set out to offer. On this level, a homogeneous transcendental feel blankets the complete space, in a musical entity called a discotheque—where music itself is the site of the performance.

Drunk and tired as hell, I finally sit down to rest. The huge crowds in front of me, a mass of human bodies. There is a kind of cute guy sitting next to me, equally drunk. He asks me if I have a cigarette. I take out my pack and offer him one, slipping another between my own lips. Then I look for my lighter, and can’t find it. And suddenly I hear a ‘tick’ sound. He is standing in front of me, lighting my cigarette. I smile with gratitude. He pulls me towards himself. We are dancing now, in each other’s arms. The alcohol has made him all the more beautiful. He caresses my body with utmost passion, I pull him closer and place a kiss on his lips. He falls on my arms, I give him a deeper longer kiss, he caresses my cheeks and jawline, and kisses me back. We both are breathless by now... He rests his head on my chest and chants—

“Take me home...”

EPILOGUE

It was two summers ago that I came out to my parents. It was also that summer, a week later, that draconian colonial Article 377 was read down by the Delhi High Court. And a week after, I met him. It seems like an era ago now. My parents still have not accepted my sexuality and life “choices”. Government has still not moved on the High Court recommendation. And me and him are no longer together.

So perhaps, not a lot has changed since the summer of 2009. Or maybe it has.

My journey with sexuality has not been as linear as it is stereotypically assumed for diasporic South Asians. I did not find “freedom” when I moved to Canada at the age of 19. I was already (s)exposed before I came here and was more or less comfortable with myself. However, it took me 3 years of being in Canada, to come to terms with myself fully. My sexcapades were limited to the summer trips I made to Delhi. And nothing in Kingston. I felt I was more heteronormally-disciplined in Canada than in India. New and alone as I was here. Performed being straight. Hid my emotions and desires from myself. Delhi was where I could be “free”. Meet people. Have sex, with strangers, sometimes hot and sometimes boring. It was much more action than I got in Kingston.

In India, my Queer encounters were only online. Indiatimes Chat. Yahoo Messenger. Gaydar. Most guys I met would usually be married or would call themselves 'bi'. I hardly came across openly Queer guys in my online world. This world was very limiting, but much more (s)exciting!

(My encounters still remain, mostly, online. In Canada. In India. And elsewhere. And they come with their own caste, race and class dimensions/barriers. Along with those of gender. And body types. Which are not Queer/ed. Unfortunately.)

It took me five years of being in Canada to come out fully to myself and *some* of my friends. All this while I knew very few openly Queer people in India, and very few openly Queer South Asians in Canada. It was a long journey. Political. Emotional. And intellectual. From being gay to being Queer. Queer that which is not only about sexuality. Which is (potentially) transgressive, and subversive. That which also, ultimately, questions the category, the identity and the politics of Queering. Where as an “end” it Queers itself.

Before leaving for India in the summer of 2009, I had decided that I may come out to my parents during that trip or find a way to at least talk about homosexuality. I had also decided to get involved in Delhi's second Queer pride. Little did I know how my life would change during that trip.

I reached Delhi, googled pride, emailed a few people, and ended up attending pride committee meeting at Indian Coffee House in CP. The meeting was an exciting place to be at and see so many Queer people committed to Queer rights. It was indeed magical, to discover a Queer India, which I was never aware of. I went to the old Saheli office to make posters for pride. I was quite proud of my pride-full posters. I made three posters that day. One was a take on an old Manoj Kumar classic, "main ladka hoon ladkon se pyar karta hoon". Others were "keep your laws off my body" and "Queer rights are human rights". During these gatherings I met so many wonderful, brave, proud, and amazing Queer people (whose existence I was completely unaware of till then). I went around Delhi University (DU) posterizing for the event with a very Queer bunch. I was moved by how so many people were comfortable and out despite their backgrounds. This group of people very easily transcended gender, caste, class, religion, age, rural-urban, regional, linguistic boundaries, it seemed to me. There was politics. Happiness. Fear. Struggles. Support. Family. Bollywood songs. And sex!

To be clear though, while this group challenged many boundaries, Queer politics, often, still remains not-so-Queer. The nexus of caste, gender, and class still is dominant(ing). Who can access and claim to be Queer, are important questions. How easy is it to then still stay within the upper caste, urban, upper and middle-class, English-speaking (and gender-controlled?) boundaries, while being Queer? How do I question my own privilege when I wanted to wear a mask at Mumbai Queer Azaadi, and was given one, when the hijra in front of me was denied one? Or when I could fly to Mumbai to attend Pride, while I was "banned" from attending it in Delhi? While me and my partner were still denied a room in a hotel in Mumbai, since they had now stopped giving rooms to two men? An entirely new (paradoxical) development. Or when during a Delhi Pride Committee meeting, the question turned to who will talk to the young cross-dressers in Hindi, *after* 20 minutes when "we" realized that "they" did not understand "our" instructions to "them" in English? Or when Pride after-parties costed more than 500 bucks per head? And when the guidelines for the parties came with strict (gender-defined) dress codes?

Or when people, based on their elite positions, could be ignorant, on one of the Queer e-groups, as to who Ramdev was in the midst of the discussion of his statement that he could cure homosexuality by yoga(!). Or when a Times of India editorial said thanks to western capitalism, Queers in India can be liberated: a reasoning also shared by Queers with privilege.

In Canada, I used to think that I should as someone semi-diasporic, urban, and middle-class use this “privilege” to come out to my parents. Thinking that these privileges placed me at a higher advantage in relation to those to whom it was denied. Little did I realize that people across different social positionings, in India, were not only out, but many were also accepted by their families. I had no idea of this side of Queer India. It moved me deeply and Queerly.

So after my explorations of the Queer scene in Delhi, I felt I needed to come out to my parents. And so I did the day after my adventures in DU. My parents, however, to say the least, were not impressed by my proclamation. While they wanted to keep talking about my sexuality, they were not interested in acknowledging it, understanding it and accepting it. Mom refused to show *hamdardi* to me. She cried. Dad was adamant on taking me for correctional therapy. All homophobic stereotypes, like, depression issues, sex-mania, pedophilia, suicidal tendencies, psychological disorder, phase-in-life, western-influence, etc., were used by my parents. Mom blamed it on my left politics and dad blamed it on my “corrupt” left politics. They failed to see how being Queer was political for me. In one of the heated discussions, my earring was physically taken out by my father. And I was quite literally banned from attending pride that weekend. My first time that I got grounded by my parents. I wanted to be out in the scorching Delhi heat with hundreds of other proud Queers and Queer allies. But I saw my not going more as a compromise that I had to make in order to keep us talking.

I had always assumed that coming out was overrated, west-centric and not always desirable. But my experiences, quite shockingly, despite my parents' reactions, were healing and positive. This is not to advocate for coming out as a process of Queer “liberation” for everyone. For I don't subscribe to any universal notions of Queer “liberation”. For I would like to wait for the day when coming out is not even on the table, for anyone.

Pride, came and went, my parents and I hardly spoke, but the media went crazy. Especially English media. Somehow they took it upon themselves to be the champions of Queer rights in India. Through a series of articles, images and commentaries, I could see my parents getting alienated by the media. The images of the pride, which I thought were predominantly of white people, alienated even me as well. A critical approach needs to question the media (i.e. mainstream English media) support. While the support should be acknowledged, it also needs to be questioned. Why is the media so Queer happy? Why is it promoting India as a this new liberal haven for Queers? How is its response connected to the needs of the neoliberal market

and economy? Is the media happy because of all the “pink rupee”? Does it really make a difference in the lives of Queers?

In the meanwhile, my parents decided to take me to a shrink, in a very reputable, private, expensive hospital in South Delhi. The guy drove the fears in my parents' minds even further by stressing how my *disease* is a western fad, and how I would become suicidal in life.

This further aggravated my relation with my parents. I do have to acknowledge and thank my friends in Delhi, rest of India and in Canada, who were there for me, at this time. All the amazing Queer friends I made in Delhi that summer. There are too many of them to mention here, but you know who you are. I can not thank my brother enough for his support and understanding.

While my house, quite literally, was a battle-field, Delhi High Court read down Article 377. All of a sudden, my sexual desires and activities became “legal” in India. This was definitely a big moment in most Queer peoples' lives in India. And especially for the countless activists, lawyers, social workers, health workers, intellectuals, media persons, families, and friends who had been fighting the fight for a long time.

I thought the recommendation (it is by no means a judgement, since the Government needs to change the Penal code) would help me communicate with my parents more. But, somehow, it didn't. They started ignoring the newspapers and news channels. Completely isolating themselves. And so while it was a big watershed-moment for the Queer community and the movement, it was not for my Queer-self. In fact at that time it seemed detrimental to my process of coming out to my parents.

And what about the recommendation itself? What does it achieve? Who does it benefit?

Acceptance is not only a legal battle. Or merely political bereft of its personal, emotional and social dimensions. Can the court (or even the government) “open up” the society at all those levels? That which is also homophobic, heteronormative and the very institution that has marginalized Queers (pre-colonially, colonially and post-colonially).

How does it along with my parents, the media and the society “control” and “discipline” me? And others, Queers or not.

Despite the troubles at home, and the shortcomings of the High Court ruling, coming out did give me big high. It was then when I met him. It was meant to be. He was meant to be. No one else could have shared my euphoria like he did. The gay high made me high on love. He was my first “legal”.

Summer of 2009 was the most Queer I had been ever. From JNU to Ajanta Caves. From Marine Drive to Hawa Mahal. From Lal Qilla to Priya Complex. We were Queer, tharki, “non-criminal”, in love.

That was two years ago.

My parents and me are still negotiating. Every few months we exchange the same discussion that we had 2 years ago. My earrings, my dupattas, my marriage, my politics, my desires, my sexuality and my struggles (including of my “choices”) are still on the frontline.

The recommendation has not gone further away from the High Court. The government is still non-committal to it. Thanks to the recommendation I am “legal”, although there was a certain kick in being “illegal” and engaging in unlawful activities in the bedrooms, parks, washrooms, temples, outdoors and everywhere else.

Me and him are not together. Love did not die, for I love him. But we had to part ways.

And, I remain Queer.

Nishant Upadhyay

*The Dawn***A Conclusion**

As promised before, I don't come up with any answers here, but do try to present different perspectives and clarify my set of choices.

The words *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality* themselves first appeared in the English language in the 1892 translation of the Austrian sex researcher Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Bristow). This *sexual map* continued to provide the fundamental terms of study and data-collection for researchers that were to mark the popular imagination for viewing and classifying human sexual behavior. Alfred C Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948) placed male sexual experience on a 0-6 scale from *exclusive heterosexuality* (0) to *exclusive homosexuality* (6) Wherever the Kinsey report went, there went his terms and his frames of thinking. "As a one-time student of insects, Kinsey had set out to apply the 'taxonomic approach' to human beings. This involves studying a 'series of individuals' large enough to stand as 'representatives of the species.'" (*Time*: March, 1948). *Sexuality* became popular as something that could denote specific *species* of people based on their desires. His findings in both the reports were as much about how singular terms – *homosexual* or *heterosexual* – cannot exhaust, or even adequately describe, the template of sexual experiences over individual lives. The terms themselves, however, gained a popular function of classification independent of his findings and the peculiar confusions of his research team. *Sexuality*, being a simple, portable frame of understanding, travelled easily.

In the late 1960s, when the Indian photographer Sunil Gupta was about 14 or 15, he used to hang out with his sister at the ‘most notorious place in Delhi’ – The Cellar, the first nightclub in the city that was started outside a hotel (Doctor: June, 2009). Supposed to be chaperoning his sister, he recalls, he was usually ‘given a Coke and told to sit in a corner seat’ (*ibid.*). Sunil recalls hearing conversations in the club that were his first introduction to the sexual map of *gay* and *straight*. “They said, did you know that guy there is gay” (quoted in Doctor: *ibid.*). He had heard about gays from magazines brought by Berkeley students who were paying guests with his family in Delhi. “They had gay personals ads, and while the students weren't gay, I could talk with them about it.” (*ibid.*). The *sexual map* being a glib idiom travels fast and various – with Berkeley students, with magazines, with Hollywood gossip, with popular news about scientific research such as Kinsey’s or legal events such as Wolfenden’s report, and with the English-speaking postcolonial middle-classes perusing their copies of the *Time*, their newspapers’ international sections and their library books on modern medicine and psychiatry. The IPA, mentioned earlier, was already trafficking in staple ideas of psychoanalysis and participating in its international debates, and Indian authors such as Ismat Chughtai and Ramnath Lal, among others, were already engaging with the sexological and psychoanalytic ideas of *homosexuality*. The idiom of the homosexual had long been part of the imaginative horizon of several in India.

Activisms around *sexuality* have considered the narratives of the personal as worthy of much of its concern and effort. They have put together particular opportunities for voicing the personal, of writing all its unwritten parts. They have tried to remove all *obstacles* between narrators and speech. They have approached their writers and interviewees with

repeated requests for transcribing their true feelings, their innermost secrets, their most difficult troubles and life-experiences. Much like Freud's eye would have caught the body-language of his patients, and his ear their slips of tongue, as evidences of the actual matter at hand, as proof of the *real* problem of his patients, Queer activists have noticed the *most unnoticed actions* and unveiled *the most veiled writing* in a bid to understand the living reality of those they fight for, in a bid to mobilize particular sexual identities as the provisional bases of their many fights.

The personal narratives however have played around with these sexual identities and with the concept of sexuality itself. A close reading of the textual sprawl of personal narratives reveals only a tactical ordering of different identity-based subject-positions. Reading each of these narratives offers different and often conflictual ways of referencing same-sex desire and those who experience it. Instead of pointing towards some defined and naturalized *sexuality*-based subject positions, all those recounted experiences of the narratives only end up foregrounding the processes by which these positions come to be adopted, how they come to be proudly owned, flexibly changed, dropped altogether or made banal. The personal narratives evidence an implicit doubleness in the life of sexual identity. Even as the texts are triggered by and apparently made to cater to a few defining frameworks of activism, they also bring to activists a working knowledge about these frameworks, of their use and harms. They pitch a need for activism to constantly remodel itself. For activists to keep questioning their primary strategies, their pivotal concepts. Above all, the narratives detranscendentalize *sexuality*. They historicize it within a political and social everyday. They overturn and exceed Freud even as they cite him.

“[w]hat qualifies one to write for a gay anthology,’ I had asked Hoshang, during the two day interview at his house in Hyderabad. His immediate answer was ‘you need to be a gay person writing about gay experiences.’”¹⁵⁹

Who can write ‘lesbian writing’ or ‘gay writing’? With whom lies the wherewithal of writing a ‘lesbian story’? Who cannot write a ‘gay poem’? These questions are as old as those categories themselves and have been answered, mostly, without much uncertainty. When we call a piece of writing a ‘lesbian story’, what is the final clincher for us in making that call – is it the content and themes of that story, its form and language, the situations and relationships that come about within them, is it the sexuality as experienced by the specific body of the story writer, or some combination of these? Where does the buck finally stop in deciding whether a story qualifies or not as a ‘gay story’? What is the factor that matters in making this decision or that which matters the most?

It seems that ‘lesbian writing’ (or ‘gay writing’) has sourced itself so strongly from the particularized body of the writer that any other way of creating ‘lesbian writing’ seemed for long quite impossible. Only certain people, only certain kinds of bodies could write that story. It was a one to one connection between the kind of writer and the kind of writing. If you’re straight, and you write about gay experience, that is mere ‘titillation,’ not quite writing in his scheme of things, or not yet. ‘Lesbian writing’ or ‘gay writing’ is mostly conceived as copyrighted onto lesbian and gay bodies; it is their sole preserve, possible only within them. This copyright condition shares its moment of incipience with that form of writing itself.

¹⁵⁹ Katyal, Akhil, , “Playing a Double Game, Idioms of same-sex desire in India.” P.95, doctoral thesis.

French feminist activist and writer Helene Cixous' watershed essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' appeared bang in the centre of the 1970s in the journal *Signs* and asked the women 'to write. An act which would not only "realize" the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being ... it will give her back her goods,' she claimed, 'her pleasures, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal' (Cixous: *ibid.*). All of Cixous's metaphors recruit the body as the wellspring of writing. To make 'her shattering entry into history' the woman must lay bare, let her flesh speak true, write in the 'white ink' of her 'good mother's milk' (*ibid.* 880-1). The visceral metaphors condense into what seems like a common denominator of *écriture féminine*: 'a woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor - once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it...' (*ibid.* 885).

Helene Cixous, who had found all writing by women as rooted in their bodies ('[w]omen must write through their bodies'), lets her essay surprise the readers by betraying this logic quite often enough to be considered a consistent parallel track in the work (Cixous; *ibid.*: 886). This happens when she first faces the problem as to '[w]hich works, then, might be called feminine' (878) head on. Whereas she defers the question, as to 'what is pervasively feminine' in these texts, a question that she picks up later but only skittishly, she sees an immense poverty of real 'feminine' writing in her home country France. '[T]he only inscriptions of femininity that I have seen,' she says, 'are by Colette, Marguerite Duras [the ellipsis is Cixous's]...and Jean Genet' (879).¹⁶⁰ There is an odd-man-out in Cixous' list, a

¹⁶⁰ Jean Genet (1910-86) was a major French novelist, playwright, poet, film-maker and political activist. His major works include the novels *Querelle of Brest*, *The Thief's Journal*, and *Our Lady of the Flowers*, and the plays *The*

man who is incapable of living out of a woman's body but is nevertheless capable of making a 'feminine' text.

How is this possible? This is the precise doubleness of 'women's writing' that is shot through Cixous's essay and that expands its catchment area of writers to beyond those who are female bodied. Here Cixous sees femininity, not as residing in one's body, but instead in one's politics. This is a major revision of criterion of who gets into the fold. A 'feminine' text is not a text written by women. In fact Cixous 'deducts' from her list that 'species of female writers' which is an 'immense majority' and 'whose workmanship is in no way different from male writing' (878). 'Feminine' or 'masculine' here are not a body thing, they are placeholders for political viewpoints. The 'feminine' text is a text that 'cannot fail to be more than subversive', it is an essay that see 'more closely the inanity of [all] "propriety"' and it is in the hands of those writers, female or male or otherwise, 'who would go to any lengths to slip something at odds with tradition' (888, 879). The 'masculine' text, on the other hand, is tradition-bound and status-quo-esque. In this scheme of things, the 'feminine' text skirts the route of the writer's body and finally comes to sit in the writer's worldview. The condition of women's writing, being 'from and toward women', offered by Cixous herself, is kept at bay to elaborate another simultaneous way of seeing and scripting 'women's writing' (881). When Cixous tries to persuade her readers that the mythical 'dark continent' of 'womanhood' is actually not that dark or impervious at all, she tells them of a short Dantesque trip she took - '...the continent is not impenetrably dark. I've been there often. I was overjoyed one day to run into Jean Genet. It was in Pompes funebres. He had

Balcony, The Blacks, The Maids and The Screens. His reputation as a petty thief, gotten early in life, was to abide through his writing career.

come there led by his Jean. There are some men (all too few) who aren't afraid of femininity' (885).

It is this potential of writing, of experience, of music—beyond bodies, deeply rooted in a political conviction, that I want to leave this work at. Amidst all the confusion which ages of suppression and intolerance has incorporated, the 'matrix' of semiotics that ceases to manifest the real and keep us lying in a limbo—getting sucked up by a system of relations, this is the only pill which can give us a possibility of accessing reality *through* fantasy—a Hope. I leave you here with this hope.

Ankush Gupta

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*is for the changed names, all the profile names mentioned are interchanged to hide the identity of the people mentioned. Also, Interviews, Observation and Discussions have been a strong part of my methodology.