

BEYOND COMING OUT
QUEER STRUGGLES IN THE FAMILY

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I, Akanksha, hereby declare that the thesis entitled, "*Beyond Coming Out: Queer Struggles in the Family*" is my own work and submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of *Master of Philosophy* from Jawaharlal Nehru University. This thesis has not been submitted for publication or research to any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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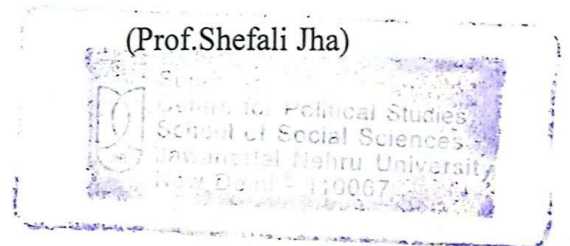
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For my teachers,

who have sustained me academically and affectively

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INTRODUCTION

I. Diversity, Resistance, Practices: Framing the Enquiry

Queer struggles in the family are an important aspect of queer lives and queer politics. The acceptance or recognition of one's sexuality, contains a high affective and moral significance, with one's "significant others" (George Herbert Mead, quoted in C. Taylor 1994, 32). Secondly, the struggle is also deemed to be trickier in the family because the possibilities of coming together "in alliance" (Butler 2015) are far less here, as compared to the other domains of queer struggles, like publics and intimate publics¹. Consequently, the material supports and solidarity networks that Judith Butler has deemed important for making a "space of appearance" are deemed lacking within the family (Butler 2015). This research wants to intervene in this significant but neglected realm of the family, with the objective to explore the alternate ways in which queer subjects imagine and conduct their negotiations in the family.

The research suggests, on the basis of academic literature that coming out is privileged mediator for understanding queer struggles in the family and the status of the subject as a queer political actor in general. Coming out, along with other aspects like "homophobia", "queer", and "closet", is identified as an important aspect of the transnational discourse or "global sexuality discourse" (Mokkil 2019). As elaborated in Chapter one, this discourse invests all the possibilities of living a fulfilled and happy queer life and political potentials in coming out.

Critiquing the hegemonic assumption of the queer movement, this research proposes that coming out is at best a partial indicator for understanding queer struggles in the family. A critical interrogation of the phenomena paves the way for evolving and theorizing alternate

¹ In emphasizing on the domain of the intimate, familial domain, this proposal draws inspiration from the conceptualizations of domains given by Axel Honneth, and Lauren Berlant. Honneth (1996) has talked about three modes of recognition – love, rights and solidarity. Rights refers to the public domain where the queer subjects struggle for their rights against the state, and within society. Solidarity can be used to refer to the domain of "intimate publics" (Berlant 2008), which refers to spaces where the participants are expected to feel a sense of commonality, a set of shared experiences and "fantasies of transcending, dissolving, or refunctioning the obstacles that shape their historical conditions" (Berlant 2008). This research shall focus on the domain of 'love', and particularly the intimate relationships in family.

modalities/ lenses through which queer struggles may be understood in their diversity. The idea is not to dismiss coming out as a way to understand queer struggles in the family and beyond. It is acknowledged that it continues to offer empowering possibilities for several subjects. However, the research points to the need for displacing the phenomena from its hegemonic position to make space for other possible concepts to understand, appreciate, further and facilitate queer resistance practices in their diversity.

At its core, thus, this project is about diversity within the queer movement, among subjects beyond categories and among practices across paradigms. Diversity has become an important consideration and the “lifeblood of struggles for democracy” (Ward 2008, 1). “Everyone wants diversity” (Ward 2008, 1), writes Jane Ward in her book *Respectably Queer: Diversity Culture in LGBT Activist Organizations*. This should not be taken to mean that the structures of power have been transformed to be sensitive to the many ways in which diversity gets continually translated into inequality. On the contrary, the appreciation of diversity, by the business leaders, politicians, media, universities, social movements etc. is on the grounds that diversity “makes sense” (Ward 2008, 1).

Consideration for diversity is caused by as well as brings about social movements, particularly since the 1960s and 1970s². Additionally, it brings about tectonic shifts in the ways activism is conducted by and within these social movements. The history of feminist movement effectively demonstrates the significance of diversity in social movements. The contribution of the first and second wave feminists notwithstanding, their standing in women’s movement has been questioned because of their alleged neglect of the issues of women from black, Dalits and other marginalized communities³. The initiatives and

² The 1960s saw an “explosive variety of collective action” (Santos 2013), which manifested in a range of social movements developing new innovative strategies and discourses in response to new demands and conditions. The class concerns which had hitherto informed the movements so far were deemed violent, and new post-material values, issues and social groups rejected hierarchies and democratised the space of social movements. Constitutive elements of this changing landscape are the student movements, anti-race movements, women’s movements, movements by environmentalists, consumers, movements against nuclear weapons, development of subcultures and alternative lifestyles. LGBT movements emerged in this context, and thus diversity is a central concern in the queer theory and movement.

³ First wave feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony focus on the political equality of women, with men, most notably through the suffrage movement. However, even though, the issues of women of colour were an important part of their work, their movement gradually came to be seen as catering to the issues and voices of white women. The debate around 15th Amendment in the USA is an apt example, whereby the black men were given the right to vote. This infuriated the suffragettes, for being denied the right to vote even as the former slaves were given political equality. “If educated women are not as fit to decide who shall be the rulers of this country, as ‘field hands,’ then where’s the use of culture, or any brain at all?” – a white woman wrote, in Stanton and Anthony’s newspaper, the Revolution. The second wave feminists though rooted in anti-

discourse of the first wave is said to be the primarily emerging out of the concerns of white, middle-class women. The third wave incorporated many differences within its primary agenda, and was receptive of the concerns of race, caste, and sexuality. However, the inclusion simultaneously raised caution regarding the manner in which diversity must be incorporated within the social movements. Nancy Fraser situated the history of feminism in relation to the history of capitalism to show that third wave's appreciation for difference, which was found lacking in first and second wave, has eclipsed the concerns of material (re)distribution within feminism. This neglect has led feminism to unwittingly ally with the neoliberal strategies of eliminating welfarism and social egalitarianism. "[I]nstead of arriving at a broader, richer paradigm that could encompass both redistribution and recognition, second-wave feminists effectively traded one truncated paradigm for another", Fraser writes (Fraser 2013, 161).

The history of feminism, has important lessons for the queer inclusion of diversity. The question for diversity is on one hand, a highly important concern for queer politics. Queer ethics sets itself apart for dismantling all kinds of hierarchies and embracing radical inclusivity. Mimi Marunacci writes that queering is not just confined to matters around sexuality, but should be defined in terms of complicating things (Marunacci 2010). Complicating things is in the nature of queer philosophy, which aims to go beyond hierarchical unity of values, and highlights the plural and fluid characteristic of things. Thus, queer theory is fundamentally anti-essential and anti-total, and seeks to create conditions for the legitimate flourishing of differences.

Despite this emphasis on inclusion, gaps remain in a theorization and redress of the continuing hierarchies within the queer movement. Firstly, the family continues to be a neglected and undertheorized site for the considerations of diversity, of subjects, practices and sexual formations⁴. The differences of practice in the other domains of publics and

racist civil rights movement and anti-capitalist movement also showed ambiguity with respect to the issues of women of colour. However, the issues of the second wave, including the "problem that has no name" (Friedan 1972) was predominantly the concerns of the white women. The struggle of white, middle-class women for the right to work outside home overlooked the fact that most black women were forced to go out for work. While white women struggled for contraception and abortions, the struggle for reproductive rights for black women often was against forced sterilization (Grady 2018).

⁴ This can be contrasted to the discussions on diversity in the other domains of public and intimate publics. In the public struggle for the rights of the queer subjects, the concern for diversity presents in the critical literature on the neoliberal impulse towards standardization. Several queer theorists have traced the significance of the class factor in understanding representation structure of the queer citizen. David Evans (1993) in his book *Sexual Citizenship* has written that in era of late capitalism, when citizenship is being actively redefined through consumer-ship, several members of gay and lesbian community too have invested

intimate publics are recognized since these differences between class, caste, gender and social background get in the way of “participatory parity” (Fraser 1990, 64) of the subjects. However, the family members commonly tend to share a social (class, caste, race) location, because of which such disparities are not deemed to enter within the family. Here the struggle of queerness, which is imagined as a struggle for recognition in all domains, is at best seen as an emotional and cultural challenge, namely that of homophobia. This creates two problems. One, to say that the problem lies in the homophobic ‘mentality’ of the people is to let the society “off the hook”. (Rao 2020, 34). Secondly, and as a corollary, it individualizes and depoliticises the solution - the queer subject must stop ‘living a lie’, and mobilize enough courage against homophobia to be able to declare their sexuality to her family and friends.

The above conceptualization has the obvious problem of, ‘individualising’ and ‘pathologising’ “a social hostility that maintains the structural maldistributions of heteronormative patriarchy” (Rao 2020, 34). It sidelines the question of diversity of practices, strategies and political actors within the family. How does diversity enter the family, and thus manifests in the diverse ways in which queer subjects conduct their struggle in the family is an important ‘gap’, that this research hopes to intervene in.

Intervention in the familial domain does not only intervene in filling in, what was ‘left out’. A critique of hegemonic struggle in the family will have wider implications for informing the questions of inclusion in the queer movement. Jane Ward has written that the considerations of diversity in queer struggles (much like the third wave of feminism), reflects the familiar danger of falling subservient to the movement’s upper middle- class, white, male dominance. Diversity, even within the queer movement, is recognized only in so far as they have “currency in a neoliberal world” and can be “easily represented, professionalized, or commodified.” (Ward 2008, 2) Ward writes in her book *Respectably Queer* that “lesbian and gay activists embrace racial, gender, socioeconomic, and sexual differences when they see them as predictable, profitable, rational, or respectable, and yet suppress these *very same* differences when they are unpredictable, unprofessional, messy, or defiant.” (Ward 2008, 2)

their incomes in the pink economy, specialized gay tourism, gay bars to make their citizenship palatable to the state and market. Similar arguments are made by scholars like Daene Clark (1993) and Michael Warner (2002) who write how queer issues and portrayals are co-opted and re-casted by capitalism as trendy and appealing. Concern for diversity has also been reflected in a critique of politics in the solidarity networks, as the works of Pat Hussain, Alok Gupta and others shows.

The research shall endeavour to draw upon this wider critique while discussing the diversity within queer struggles in the family. Within the family, much like in other spaces, the elements of “global sexuality discourse” (Mokkil 2019, 165) like closet and coming out have become hegemonic keywords for conducting queer struggles. A “respectably queer” (Ward 2008) subject, according to this discourse, is who proudly proclaims their sexual identity (out and proud), is in a long-term gay relationship rather than promiscuous relationships, which ends in marriage.

Diversity in queer practices, in this schema, can only be accounted by the incapacity and ability of the queer subjects to participate in the desired queer practices. In the domain of solidarity networks for instance, Pat Hussain writes that the working-class subjects are unable to participate in queer pride parades because of the inability to afford time and money (Hussain, 1997). Similarly, in the domain of the family, several scholars have written on how class, race and other kinds of marginalities come in the way of the subjects coming out to their families and friends. Nancy J. Mezey, in her article, *The Privilege of Coming out: Race, Class and Lesbians’ Mothering Decisions*, has written, through a focus group analysis that greater privilege by class and race translates into an easier coming out processes (Mezey 2008). Steve Seidman in his book *Beyond the Closet* has looked how a queer subject has to negotiate with their multiple subjectivities like class, gender, and race for management of their sexualities. (S. Seidman 2004) Yvette Taylor, in her work *Working Class Lesbian Life* has written of coming out as a “class act”, which is experienced differently by people in different class (Y. Taylor 2007).

The argument that not everyone can afford to come out because of lack of resources seems to suggest that they would come out, if they could. However, the concerns of “participatory parity” (Fraser 1990) still does not succeed in challenging the hegemony of coming out head on. Whereas the transnational discourse of queer struggles, including coming out, creates a politics of speaking out and visibilising one’s queerness, it simultaneously invisibilises many other forms of queer expressions. Menon has written of the stories, *Dastan- e- chouboli* and the film *Dedh Ishquia* (2014), that whereas both the stories are about same sex love, desire and longing, much of the audience goes without realizing the same (M. Menon 2015, M. Menon 2018).

An interrogation into the practices of resistance within the family, thus, has the potential to bring out an appreciation of diversity in a more substantive manner. The new theorizations

will have to be open to the possibility that people shy away from coming out not just because they cannot. The imperatives of global sexuality discourse do not make sense to queer peoples, across time and space, and its availability for use is questionable. Venkat, in conversation with the noted mathematician and the author of the book *The World of Homosexuals*, Shakuntala Devi said that he didn't feel guilty about his same- sex desires until he found that there was a name for it (Devi 1976), which shows that transnational discourse does not always help struggles. This research is an attempt to delve into existing literature, narratives and instances to come up with alternate theorizations of paradigms of sexual formations, which can understand, inform and guide these neglected expressions of queerness.

This research builds on the post- colonial literature from India. Post-colonial queer theory takes a critical approach towards the hegemonic and western 'models' of queer struggles. Scholars like Gayatri Gopinath, Ruth Vanita, Madhavi Menon, Akshay Khanna and others offer a more nuanced way of understanding the variability and diversity of queer practices within their historical and spatial context. Gayatri Gopinath speaks that many 'standard' tropes of gay subject formation like closet and coming out start looking very different when one deploys a diasporic lens to look at the non-western families. Whereas queer expressions are generally thought of as possible after being ejected from the heteronormative family, Gopinath talks of the stories of *Lihaaf* (1992) and *Fire* (1996) to highlight about how queer intimacies strained the heteronormative bounds of these families and transformed them from within (Gopinath 2021). Madhavi Menon argues that "[T]he emphasis on naming is a very Western emphasis. ...we have a history of multiple desires that flourish by not being named as separate entities. And so, to hold up that paradigm of naming uncritically, is, for me, problematic" (M. Menon 2020). As against the "paradigm of naming uncritically" (M. Menon 2020), Menon invokes the multiple forms of queer intimacies and desires in India, in cross- dressing gods and nawabs, Bollywood films and Sufi practices, among others, to argue that "India has a *lived* relation to desire that makes it much easier to speak about various desires to a wider audience" (M. Menon 2018). Akshay Khanna similarly resists this urge to name oneself through one's sexuality. "There was something wrong if whom I fucked said everything about what I was" (Khanna 2005), he insists. Sexuality as a system, through which "to understand the self" and the other (which create the imperative to name one's sexual politics), has limited relevance for understanding the non- west (Najmabadi 2006, Khanna 2005) and is the particular product of the colonial rule in India, argues Khanna.

The refusal to buy into the received notions of struggles should not be taken to mean an alliance with heteronormativity, nor to claim Indian society to be more accepting, accommodating and ‘liberal’ than the west. It shall however suggest, that regulations on sexual practices in Indian society can potentially and more accurately be viewed from an alternate paradigm that does not draw upon sexuality as a regulative field.

The post- colonial thought has certainly provided a counter to the systematic overlooking of the diversity within the global sexuality discourse. However, even as they have enriched queer studies by visibilising the diversity of queer expressions (thus challenging the dichotomy between liberated and enlightened west and the oppressive east⁵), substantial work still needs to be done in theorizing this diversity within its sexual formation.

The impact of the existing post-colonial theories remains largely confined to the historical and the cultural, and the political landscape still remains saturated with ‘models’ of queer struggles that are dictated by the west⁶. On the theorization front, it has portrayed the queer possibilities within the non- west as “merely cultural” (Butler, *Merely Cultural* 1998). This “cultural” explanation reproduces the east versus west logic, where east and west are distinctly different cultural system with distinctly different ways of approaching the queer expressions. The cultures are viewed in their reified format, which overlooks their as forever evolving, flexible and product of a dynamic dialogue, spill-overs and constant evolution. Secondly, it reverses the moralism of the global sexuality discourse. Queer strategies that rely on liberal, western LGBT vocabularies and modalities, like pride parade, are thought to be either necessary compromises (for say, securing legal rights), inadequate, or even grossly misplaced.

⁵ Post-colonial queer theory, has developed in insistent opposition to two bodies of thought on sexuality. The first is the nationalist thought, which, anxious to defend India against the colonial charge of emasculation, has sanitised ideal Indian sexuality of all the ‘perverse’ elements in favour of strictly marital, reproductive, monogamous sexual association (Gayle Rubin’s distinction between good and bad sex comes to mind (Rubin 2006)). The elements of non- normative sexuality according to this strand, are perverse influences of foreign decadence or conspiracy, seeking to mar the glorious legacy of India’s past. The second strand of thought that post- colonial queer theory takes an issue with is the queer universalism posited by the globally evolving queer LGBT movement. The trans-nationally circulating discourse of this movement has been inadequately considerate of the subjects across spatial, social and temporal locations who do not share in the vision or the ability to participate in these prescribed modalities as well as their distinct forms of struggles. As against the above given strands, the post- colonial and critical theorists have often pointed out that the neither the nationalist vision of a sanitised sexual landscape, nor the judgmental and paternalist gaze of the west- originated queer discourse capture the experiences and struggles of the east.

Finally, a cultural explanation by itself is ill- equipped to understand and explain the experiences and struggles of people, or the flaws inherent in the same. A cultural explanation locates the queer possibilities within the cultural milieu; unwittingly, it wrests away the ability of the queer subject to resist (and of the academics to read those practices of struggle). The queer possibilities, it seems to suggest, exist because of the cultural field that does not hold sexuality as a regulative field. Madhavi Menon's statement that India "is a country that is deeply homophilic even as it is often superficially homophobic" (M. Menon 2018) demonstrates such an assumption. Despite the utility of post-colonial insights around desire and queer expressions, they leave a gap in terms of their availability for the queer subjects' perusal for negotiating their desires.

What is thus required is an in-depth theorization of queer practices, in terms of its features, potentials and fault lines. What are the potentials that non-western practices of queerness contain for challenging the hegemony of the transnational queer discourse, and how can it enable us to imagine an alternative queer politics, within a given context are questions that this research shall discuss.

The research is located within the post-colonial queer theory, and builds on its impulse of challenging the hegemony and dominance of the western paradigms of thought and strategies to make queerness "normal". The post – colonial theory can provide important resources for introspecting on diversity practices within the queer movement, and undertaking a sensitive and radical inclusivity of diverse practices, subjects and sexual formations within the larger queer movement. However, this research also hopes to provide resources for a more nuanced post- colonial queer theory and practice, by bringing back resistance within its theorizations.

The second node of this research- **resistance**- will therefore be emphasized in order to counter the discourse of global sexuality discourse on one hand (which does not take a contextual analysis of resistance, but a hierarchical view) and post- colonial theory on the other, which emphasizes more on cultural milieu rather than the agency of the subject. In particular, the idea of everyday resistance strikes a chord with reading the resistance practices beyond what is considered hegemonic. What counts as struggle and what does not is a fight within the queer movement and this research intervenes in that field. In doing so, it places itself against the given and received wisdom about the desirable practices of resistance, and instead turns its gaze towards those practices which do not often look like resistance from the hegemonic lens. That is, they do not share in the insistence on vocal resistance to the

hegemonic norms, and sometimes seem to comply with it. However, their covert subversions need to be interrogated into, by which they can be included within a wider repertoire of resistance. The corpus of literature on everyday resistance⁷ informs and inspires such a lens.

The question of how these practices should be located takes us to the third node, that is, practices. The third chapter notes the hegemonic resistance tend to focus on the realm of official (legal and sociological) rules; the latter, thus, cannot come to the aid of creating a diverse inclusive and sensitive queer activism. Thus, borrowing from the “logic of practice” of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the research delves into **practices** as the more revealing indicator.

II. Chapterization

Chapter one shall locate the phenomena of coming out within a wider politics of sexuality. It argues that the dichotomy of closet and coming out has not always framed the imagination of how best to conduct sexual politics. Rather, the concepts have undergone a long etymological and conceptual journey to root its meanings in a particular sexual formation, that is confessional model of doing politics, particular to post- 17th century Europe. The partiality and sparseness of the practice, however, do not desist from the proclaimed universality of coming out, across time and space, as the self- evident ideal ways of conducting queer struggle. This, the chapter argues, takes away from the empowering potentials of the concept and landed it as a useful tool for imperial politics by which to hierarchize societies and subjects/ populace.

⁷ Everyday resistance and spectacular resistance, even though pursuant of the same objective of challenging dominance (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013) are quite different. While extraordinary resistance seeks to bring about change by causing a rupture in the hegemonic landscape, everyday resistance consists of “silent, mundane and ordinary acts”, that are “small scale” and relatively safe, “promise vital material gains” and “require little or no formal coordination” (Scott 1989, 35). While the formal politics focusses on “formal, de jure – recognition of those gains”, the everyday practices of resistance seeks “tacit, de facto gains”, This may suggest that everyday and spectacular resistance are just two ways of doing the same thing, in this case, struggling against the structural hostility against the same-sex desires. However, this research insists that the two modes of resistance are informed by widely different politics and has to be approached by different maneuvers. The global sexuality discourse, identified as an instance of spectacular resistance, insists on making one’s opposition to the heteronormativity loud and clear, by stating one’s politics. However, as the first chapter would go on to argue, it promotes a queer politics and subject, which is “not just politically conscious, but also have the cultural capital to *state her politics*” (Emphasis mine) (Chatterjee 2018, 26). In the process, it created new forms of inclusivities, exclusivities and normativities among the queer politics. (Emphasis mine) (Chatterjee 2018, 26). In such a context, when spectacular resistance excludes as much as it includes, everyday resistance *practices*, rather than the ‘loud and clear’ indicator of rules, has to be brought in to unpeel the layers of queer expressions and resistance.

Chapter two delves into the chosen site of this research, that is the family. By discussing the assumptions regarding the family in political theory and the narratives of the queer subjects, the chapter shows that the family is theorized as an unchangingly heteronormative space, and thus ‘unhomely’ for the queer subject. The dichotomization of ‘homely’ and ‘unhomely’ inform the exhortations to ‘come out’ and ‘move out’ as a way of struggling against this heteronormativity. However, the chapter goes on to argue that homely and unhomely are concepts in flux, and are not absolute givens in any space including the “chosen families” (Weston 1991). The chapter thus makes a case for shifting the focus to the practices of home-making, which can provide a better account of queer struggles.

The third chapter shall build on this logic to delve into the practices of home-making, via marriage. The aim shall be to understand how practices of marriage are “resourcefully” used by the queer subjects to negotiate their same-sex associations, and its implications for queering the queer theory as well as the institution of marriage.

The research shall delve into anthologies of narratives and interviews, of queer subjects in India and South Asia, as well as stories from secondary sources, and reported instances of same-sex struggles from the newspapers and media reports, to make its case.

CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICS OF COMING OUT: MAPPING THE FIELD

Queer politics in the familial domain is seen as pre- dominantly, if not exclusively, mediated by the phenomena of coming out. Kath Weston, in her text *Coming out to "Blood" relatives* writes of the meanings and imaginations associated with coming out, which provides the imperative and the discursive force to the phenomena. In the essay, she notes that questions like "are you out to your parents/ family" (Weston 1991, 43) are questions that inevitably arise in the process of getting to know another gay or lesbian person. ACT UP slogans on T shirts stating "I am out, therefore I am", not just does the performative work of coming out for the wearer, but also speaks of the significance of the phenomena for claiming and reclaiming one's humanity as a queer individual. Ken Plummer, in his book *Telling Sexual Stories*, writes that proclaiming one's gayness- "to self, to other, to community", is the "most momentous act in the life of any lesbian and or gay person" (K. Plummer 1995, 82).

In contrast, one is destined to lead an unhappy, unfulfilled life if they do not come out. Quora answers to the question "What happens to LGBT people who never come out of the closet" invokes claustrophobic estimations, suggesting that these people remain "emotionally dead", miserable, "emotionally quite stunted" and "slowly go insane". There is a widespread consensus that 'closeted' individuals are "living a lie" and "aren't quite as happy" (Quora n.d.). Coming out is the only route through which possibilities start manifesting for a gay self. Desma Holcomb, in her article *It all begins with coming out*, writes that the true possibilities of bringing about a queer- labour alliance is possible only when one has come out in their workplace (Holcomb 2001). One can read this exhortation on a wider scale: one becomes eligible to function as, and gets recognized as a queer political subject only when they have come out. Otherwise, you are a simply closeted homosexual, a word which has acquired negative connotations over the years. None of the personal desires, or political possibilities are likely to come alive within this closet. Contrasted with the closet, which is "dark, narrow

and it smells”⁸ (2019), coming out is deemed to be the only feasible route to live a life true to oneself, a good life, a “livable life” (Butler 2004, xv).

This chapter shall map the literature on coming out to highlight its pervasive influence on queer lives and politics. Thereafter, it shall follow with a critical reflection of the concept, and more importantly its hegemony in the space of queer resistance. The idea is, less to think about the politics of queer resistance (as in what can be the most strategic way forward), but rather to think about the politics of politics of queer resistance.

The first section shall elaborate on the pervasive influence of coming out, and how it dominates the vocabularies of resistance in queer politics. The second section shall focus on the concept of coming out, to understand how it has gained its hegemonic position within the discussions on sexuality. Its conceptual and etymological journey shall be surveyed to grasp its ascendance, in terms of its conceptual boundaries, its conjunction with other concepts like the closet and passing, as well as its foray in domains beyond sexuality.

The third section shall map coming out as a practice, and not simply as a conceptual category. Though this mapping, the text shall endeavor to show that the discourse around coming out is not matched by the same enthusiasm in practice. This observation is true of non- western societies, but also of certain western societies and communities within the west.

In the last section, the chapter shall argue, that coming out does not act as a metaphorical glue between the queer subjects, as has been suggested. Rather, it becomes a tool of categorizing, classifying and hierarchizing queer subjects between politically conscious, authentic and happy queer and miserable, cowardly queer. With the help of the critical literature on sexuality, it shall reflect on the insidious politics of the phenomena of coming out. It will show how the concept of coming out colludes with several forms of power, which rather than using the chasm to introspect on the relevance of the concept and its politics itself, uses it to hierarchize subjects and societies.

⁸ The statement has been taken from the TV show, *Skam France*, season 3. Season 3 of the popular coming-of-age show narrates the story of a closeted high-school student, Lucas, and his journey of being comfortable with his sexuality and finding love. When he is outed to his school-mates, his friend and flatmate consoles him by showing him the silver lining of the situation- a closet is “narrow, dark and it smells” and thus to be out is not to be regretted but owned up proudly. Such instances of popular media create an affective discourse in favour of coming out.

1.1 Mature, Happy and Authentic: Meanings and Significance of Coming Out

Coming out can have multiple meanings', and its meanings have shifted across time and space. A little later in the chapter, the multiple and shifting meanings of coming out shall be discussed. However, in its primary context of gay liberation, coming out is the moment of "recognizing and asserting their gayness". (Chirrey 2003) It has, thus, a dual dimension. Kath Weston writes, that over the years coming out has acquired "its current dual sense of claiming a lesbian or gay identity for oneself and communicating that identity to others" (Weston 1991, 44). The first part entails recognizing one's own sexual inclination or identity, in one's sexual desires and coming to terms with it. This can be a fairly hard process for a queer subject, for they are constantly bombarded with compulsory heterosexuality (by their family, friends, peers, media and so on), as well as with notions of homosexuality being perverse and pathological. Several scholars have written on this process of confusion (LaSala 2010, Vargo 1998, Plummer 1995, Alexander and Losh 2010); handbooks, helplines, organizations, alliances and workshops have proliferated to help people come to terms with their sexuality, or in other words. come out to themselves (Vargo 1998, 140)

Coming out to others, however, is the more common usage of the term. It consists in asserting or confessing one's sexual identity to others- family and friends are the primary and most tricky audience of this kind of coming out. Herein, there is a possibility of emotional estrangement and sometimes, the risk of material cut- off and physical retaliation, which heighten the stakes. However, the imperative of coming out continues outside of this circle- with one's colleagues, relatives, sometimes to the whole of media (Bobker 2015). This arduous process of coming out is not a onetime event, but has to be done constantly, over and over, in new situations, with new people, and in new ways. (Vargo 1998)

Despite what its rather pervasive usage might suggest, the concept did not allude to its present meaning of sexual declaration since always. Abigail Saguy and Michael Stambolis-Ruhstorfer have written that the queer communities initially borrowed the terminology of coming out from the elite debutante balls, in which young women of marriageable age "came out" to the society and thereby entered the marriage market (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014). Saguy writes that the rite of passage, by the young women became an inspiration for the gay persons to come out into gay society, most notably, into drag balls (A. Saguy 2020).

It was later that coming out got paired with concepts like the closet and became invested with positive meanings, and thus with “casting off secrecy, shame, and marginality by affirming one’s gay or lesbian identity” (Chauncey 1994, quoted in Saguy and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2014), when it got paired with closet.

This history of coming out, as a transition to adulthood, is concurrent with the connotation of coming out as a “rite of passage” (Garrick 1997). David Garrick, in his text *Ritual Self-Disclosure in the Coming-Out Process* alludes to this meaning when he writes that “[B]roadly speaking, the coming out process is a project of a person’s whole life” (Garrick 1997, 1). Coming out here is defined as a “ritual sequence of actions that typically precedes, includes, and succeeds the moment of self- disclosure of same- sex orientation” (Garrick 1997, 1). Garrick gives five reasons for why coming out can be called “rites of passage”, a concept given by Arnold van Gennep. These are, a “search for identity” (the chief theme for rites of passage); it employs similar “technique of unlearning a former system of relationship to oneself and others”, it “employs healing rites”, it “requires that the society recognizes a significant change in the individual” who has undergone the ritual; and lastly, it is a “ritual attempt to negotiate a person’s life crisis” (Garrick 1997, 2). Thus, the coming out of a gay person is a rite into sexual maturity- not just adulthood, but also from the compulsory heterosexuality to alternate sexuality.

Additionally, coming out also marks a conceptual boundary, a transition from hiding/ lying to honesty. Passing, for heterosexual, is seen to present a deep chasm between who we really are, and who are we claiming to be; between “an authentic inner self and a surface presentation directed towards an outer world” (Weston 1991, 49). Coming out bridges this chasm by bringing the inner self in unity with the external presentation to give out a “sense of wholeness” (Weston 1991, 50). Without disclosure to others, this self is doomed to remain trapped in the private, interior space known as the closet. (Weston 1991, 50)

The urge to come out puts a moral burden on the queer subject, to be and act ‘how they are’ The provocation further makes a recourse to the authentic, inner self, which demands that we do not hide such an important part of our lives to our significant others. The significance of seeking out an authentic life is brought out by Charles Taylor, in his essay *The Politics of Recognition* (C. Taylor 1994). Taylor writes, that in modern societies, external referents of morality like God and divine law have given way for inner referents. From the 18th century onwards, morality or “knowing right and wrong” (C. Taylor 1994, 28) became anchored in

one's inner feelings. In short, to be moral was to be authentic, that is, "being true to myself and my own particular way of being" (C. Taylor 1994, 28). However, this authentic self is linked, in a truly Hegelian fashion, to recognition. We need to be recognized by our significant others to be our true selves. Conversely, lack of this recognition or misrecognition can lead to distorted selves.

This urge to living authentically, the need for recognition, and the damaging consequences of misrecognition, though invoked by Taylor in justification of multicultural rights, are all replayed in the justifications of the need to come out. This centrality of authenticity to the modern self is clearly what lies behind the exhortations to the queer community to 'stop living a lie'. Kath Weston additionally notes that it is not just the authentic identity of the subject that is at stake in the coming out process, but also the authenticity of the love within our kinship bonds (explained later in the section).

Two versions of this explanation can be traced in the narratives of coming out. In the first, sexual identity and desires already forms a core of one's persona. The journey of coming out is only that of discovering, coming to terms with and expressing this essential core of one's persona; conversely the self remains distorted without having undergone this process. For instance, Marc E. Vargo in his book *Acts of Disclosure: The Coming-Out Process of Contemporary Gay Men*, sticks to this idea of essential self. He gives evidence from biological sciences to show that there is "compelling evidence" to show that "homosexuality, like heterosexuality, may be a feature that is to some degree inherited" (Vargo 1998, 2). For instance, "a man who has a gay brother has a 13 percent chance of being gay himself, whereas a man who does not have a homosexual brother stands only a 2 percent chance" (Vargo 1998, 2). By this logic, socialization has a limited role to play in the sexual self-formation of the subject, the latter already being immanent to the subject like the Aristotelian form. Socialization only facilitates or hinders the discovery and development of this form. Since the subject is socialized in a heterosexual matrix, is "typically raised in a heterosexual household by parents who treat him as if he were straight" (Vargo 1998, 7), the person in question is out of touch with his "biologically determined" (Vargo 1998, 7) sexuality. The original cause lay somewhere else, deep inside the body: soul was the go-to destination for the priests, genetics is the preferred explanation of the modern-day scientists. Popular

culture, media, self-help books and workshops, all focus on how to bring the subject in touch with their inner self, to see what is already there⁹.

The essentialist and determinist model of sexuality does not enjoy too much credence in the academic texts, with some exceptions like Marc Vargo, which can be excused on account of its publication in 20th century. Such explanations have the obvious problem of constructing homosexual individuals as one dimensional, and coming out follows from this explanation. Since all the other features of the queer individual, good and bad¹⁰, is traced back to their queerness, it automatically takes on a privileged role in the knowledge of themselves and by others. Eve Sedgwick for this reason writes of disclosing sexual identity as something of a “weighty” secret. The non-knowing of one’s sexuality is not just another thing that one might know about a person; it does not exist just a “vacuum or as the blank”. It is instead a “powerful unknowing as unknowing”, which has the potential to alter relationships between individuals, once revealed (Sedgwick 1986, 77).

Another explanation of coming out, and its role in sexual self-formation is given by those who employ some form of constructionist thought. According to this, coming out does not express an already given reality. Instead, following Judith Butler, we could arrive at a working definition of coming out as a “performative act” (Butler, *Critically Queer* 1993) (on the lines of “Mom/Dad, I am gay/ lesbian”). It seeks to, bring about a reality that it seeks to name. In other words, it is an “authoritative speech” (Butler, *Critically Queer* 1993, 225) that seeks to produce an effect in discourse, and in this case, introduce a discourse within the

⁹ Narratives on the lines of “It’s funny how it was right there in front of me all the time and I just didn’t see it” are routine in queer circles. The recurrence of this generic statement, to the extent that it is cliché, plays an important role in creating sexuality as essential (Vargo 1998).

¹⁰ Ladelle McWhorter has written about the one dimensionality that is attributed to LGBT groups. They are seldom seen as anything outside of their ‘pervert’ sexuality, and all their other aspects of personalities are interpreted as “nothing more than symptoms of your disease” (McWhorter 1999 quoted in Taylor 2017). McWhorter argued that all the attributes of a queer individual, including their achievements are often seen in the light of their perverted and deviant sexuality (Taylor 2017). Marc Vargo’s account of queerness shows one-dimensional view of homosexuality can be taken without necessarily seeing queerness as a source of deviance, and in fact seeing it as a form of virtue. Vargo writes that “studies have found...On the average, gay men are worse at spatial tasks and better at verbal tasks than straight men”. And that such difference in ability, he goes on to cite, are “almost certainly the result of dissimilarities in the way in which these men’s brains are constructed” (Vargo 1998). The imposed one dimensionality makes queer paradoxically strengthen the urge to seek recognition and come out (because, how can one possibly hide something that is so essential to all other aspects of one’s being) and simultaneously makes them more prone to misrecognition, since their attributes are not appreciated or even critiqued in their own light. McWhorter (1999) alludes to this misrecognition when she complained- “It was as though to ‘be queer’ was to be some sort of puppet whose strings were pulled by sexuality alone. Queers did nothing but perform – gaily of course. Real feelings, thoughts, assessments, decisions, dreams, hopes, and ideas were only for straight people; only straight people actually had a point of view.”

cultural domain of the family, that would also stand as a binding action. Once the sexual identity has been claimed through speech, it cannot be taken back and exists as a concrete reality that must be grappled with. Deborah A. Chirrey, takes note of this process in her writing of coming out as a “speech act” (Chirrey 2003). It has been the experience of several gay people that by speaking out loud their sexuality, they have been able to finally get out of the heterosexual scaffolding that they find themselves caught in: coming out to oneself happens simultaneously with and through the process of coming out to another. It thus becomes a way which people are “altering reality for the self and altering reality for others” (Chirrey 2003, 25).

A recourse to constructivism, by this account, does not necessarily offer a way out of the hegemony of coming out, as is the case in other debates within queer literature and politics¹¹. In fact, it might make a deliberate and explicit declaration more important. Because of the insistence on the performative force of the speech act that coming out relies on, Kath Weston writes, among other features of coming out, that “For a statement of sexual identity to be classified as coming out, a gay or lesbian subject must be its author. Discovery doesn’t count” (Weston 1991). It has been the experience of several gay people that they came out, only to be told that the listener in question, either their parents, siblings or friends/ colleagues already knew it, or at least suspected it. However, a family’s awareness of the queer desire of the identity of the person cannot be equated with coming out. This is because the force of coming out spans wider than the mere conveyance of one’s sexual identity to the other person.

Firstly, it presupposes a knowledge and coming-to-terms with one’s sexuality, before it can be confessed to others. In other words, coming out to oneself, enjoys a logical precedence, even if not always a chronological precedence in the discourse of coming out. Secondly, it involves a sense of closeness and trust that we place in the other person which pushes us, and enables us to share something as personal and important about ourselves with them. Not coming out to a loved one, could potentially question and betray the coming out to a person, in that sense, could put the closeness of, and trust in that relationship to question.

¹¹ Anamarie Jagose challenges the conception that the essentialist understandings of homosexuality are necessarily conservative, and the constructionist notions are progressive. The “nature of a political intervention is not necessarily determined by the assumption of either position”, she writes. Jagose substantiates her argument by pointing that “some people are born homosexual” is often used to secure civil rights for LGBTQ people (Jagose 1996). Conversely, the idea that homophobia can be acquired or socialized into, has contributed to anti-queer initiatives like conversion therapies and panicked hostility against homophobic recruitment of children (Rubin 2006).

Thirdly, by asking our loved ones to accept a fact which can be difficult, inconveniencing, or outrightly disgusting, coming out also becomes a test of the bonds of truth and love we hold dear. Kath Weston, in this sense says that coming out does not only involve putting one's truth out there. It also tests the "unconditional love and enduring solidarity" (Weston 1991) that is deemed to hold together a family, and hence brings out the truth of one's kinship relations. Stories of acceptance affirm the love of the blood relations, as indicated in the many versions of the "you are still my child" responses to coming out. Rejection, on the other hand, could lead to severing of ties, and questioning of the claims of love. Kath Weston succinctly captures this as following: when I tell you who I (really) am "I find out who you (Really) are to me" (Weston 1991).

These multiple aims that inform the significance of coming out can hardly be achieved, if the sexual identity of the queer subject is merely 'discovered'. Eve Sedgwick notes, while discussing the secrecy/ disclosure fracture that could be employed within a wide variety of contexts including gender, race, religion etc., the stigmatized individual must have some discretion for them to have come out (Sedgwick 1986, 75).

Coming out, changes realities, in yet another way: as a performative act, it helps one resolve the various forms of belonging which earlier existed in an awkward and conflictual relation with one another. Naisargi Dave has written of this process as one of 'commensuration'¹². One can say that queer politics is, nearly always a process of negotiating between different forms of belongings. Nearly all forms of belonging are conventionally imagined in the terms of heterosexuality of its subjects- be it belonging to a nation, or a religion, or family. These thus stand in an awkward or often hostile relationship to the queer subject. Queer politics and academics is a way of reflecting on the partiality of these seeming universal collectivities and queer¹³ them in a manner so as to be more accommodative.

¹² Naisargi Dave's critical point about commensuration is the following: moments of commensurability constitute points of rupture within the fabric of normative. They thus bring forth infinite possibilities for ethical activity, i.e., for practices which emerge as a "creative, disruptive response to normalization". However, commensuration necessarily is a process of normalization (it is a process by which the ethical impulse is made commensurate with the norms), through which the possibilities are again narrowed down to "conform to institutionally legitimized norms such as identity, community, national belonging, and the language of law and right".

¹³ The definition of queer, here and throughout the research is taken as something more expansive than accommodating queer subjects in the existing structures (a phenomena which is better captured by the concept of homo- normativity, given by Lisa Duggan) like family and nation-state. Instead, Mimi Marunacci's observation that queering is not just confined to matters around sexuality, but should be defined in terms of complicating things, informs this research (Duggan 2003, Marunacci 2010).

Naisargi Dave writes about one such incommensuration that interpellated the queer community in India: precisely that of being “Indian and Lesbian” (Dave 2012, 152). Nation-states often invest in their self-image as being sexual puritans, and any sexual deviance including homosexuality is carefully excluded from the definition of nationality, as being a result of external influence. For instance, in USA, homosexuals were charged with weakening the nation and thus siding with communists (Rubin 2006, 45). Similarly, the nationalists in India charge homosexuality as a result of foreign decadence, and a threat to the binding institutions of family- an opposition that is demonstrated in almost every instance of sexual reform, including decriminalization of sodomy and ongoing debate on same-sex marriage.

Dave writes that this incommensuration came to head, in public debate around the movie *Fire* (1996). When the movie came out, the right-wing political party Shiv Sena challenges that “perverse elements” do not have a space within the Indian state. More specifically, it claimed that lesbianism does not have a place within a nation defined as a Hindu nation: indeed, it would not have been a problem if the characters were named Shabana and Saira, as the Sena chief Bal Thackeray tellingly remarked¹⁴ (Dave 2012, 146). This incommensuration interpellated the Indian lesbian population in existence, which so far did not feel the intense need to emerge as a political group. Moreover, they resolved the conflict in belonging, through the slogan “Indian and Lesbian”. Holding the placard, one can argue, was a distinctive moment of coming out for the Indian lesbian community, through which resolved the incommensurability between the two identities. Dave writes that the sign was “was crucial in rendering the Indian lesbian a subject of national politics” (Dave 2012, 138).

Speaking out, or coming out thus becomes a way of claiming simultaneous membership to several forms of belonging, which by convention seem opposed. The presumed conflict between these forms of belonging is resolved by the very fact of the subject claiming both these forms of belongingness within their self. It is another way in which coming out, as a speech act, alters reality or brings about another reality. We can extend feature of resolving commensurabilities to be true even in the individual instances of coming out, within the

¹⁴ If the lesbianism was located within the Muslim community, it would not be considered obscene or a threat to the nationhood. In fact, it would be beneficial for the Hindu nation-building project since it would bolster the claims of Muslims being a perverse community, and thus fuel the otherness that currently drives the nation building project. Naisargi Dave and Charu Gupta, substantiate this explanation by pointing that the eagerness to show perverseness in the Indian Muslims has deep historical precedents (Dave 2012, C. Gupta 2001, 244-45).

family. One often finds the statement on the lines, “I am gay, but I am still your son/daughter”- a labored speech- act to resolve the incommensurability between being a queer and belonging to the family, imagined as heterosexual up to this point.

Arun Kumar, a queer Indian citizen teaching at University of California, article *Coming out in the Indian Context*, is an apt example of coming out as a moment of resolving incommensurabilities (A. Kumar 2017). Kumar, on the occasion of National Coming Out Day¹⁵ on 11 October, shared his account of coming out on his blog, as well as the tactics and even the PowerPoint presentation he used to come out to his family, as a resource for other subjects from India who might be planning the move with their families. What is distinctive about Arun’s coming out, is its expansiveness in covering several forms of incommensurabilities that might possibly arise. His PowerPoint had 5 sections, all of which addressed different kinds of conflicts between incommensurate belongings. It sought to show that 1) LGBT is not scientifically an aberration 2) it can be accommodated legally 3) it stands in a harmonious relation with the Hindu religion 4) it doesn’t come in the way of success 5) and finally, it is not at odds with having a happy family life (A. Kumar 2017). The commensurability with religion is an important part of Arun’s own account. Queer subjects often struggle to retain a sense of faithfulness to their religion, particularly when almost all religions seem to carry with them a hostility to same- sex associations, or any non- sanctioned love in general. Arun wrote that he had noted early on that the Hindu religion has, fundamentally no misgivings about homosexuality, unlike Christianity. His parents were surprised to see the “slides with the stories of the very Hindu deities they revered!” in a presentation on homosexuality, but it successfully conveyed to them the harmoniousness between homosexuality and religion.

In Arun’s story his family completely accepted him, and had no questions after his presentation. It is indeed the story of a successful coming out, something that cannot be representative of all coming out stories. Only recently, on October 20, 2022, a young couple from Armenia, Arsen and Tigran jumped to their deaths because their parents disapproved of their relationships (Edge Media Network 2022). Several cases of couple suicides have been

¹⁵ National Coming Out Day is celebrated every year on October 11, to support the queer subjects in coming out of the closet. Based on the premise that homophobia thrives in silence, the day “celebrates all who have come out as LGBTQ+”. The celebration first began in USA, but has now gained trans-national appeal. The internationalisation of a day which has explicitly national origins and relevance, as well as the force of transnational funding and organizational support is reflective of the hegemonic spread of the concept of coming out. (Human Rights Campaign Foundation n.d.))

reported and written about in India because of disapproval of family. However, Arun's story can be placed in the upcoming genre of coming out stories. More and more people are sharing stories of acceptance, in order to allay fears within their queer fellows that to declare one's sexuality is not to spell doom for one's emotional bonds. More importantly, it is a provocation directed to the loved one's of the queer subject: it puts the moral burden of exposing oneself to new ways of being on the parents rather than asking the queer subject themselves to negotiate the possibilities well at hand, and responsabilising them for their fate.

1.2 Ascendency of Coming Out: Tracing the Etymological and Political Journey of a Concept

The heightened significance of coming out, has been particularly felt from 1970s onwards, as scholars like Ken Plummer, Kath Weston and others have written. Starting from the 1970s, Kath Weston writes, the "Harvey Milk philosophy" has been used by activists to use coming out as an "important but limited tactic" to challenge heterosexism in one's personal sphere, and gain political power (Weston 1991, 49-50). Harvey Milk was the first openly gay person to be elected as the city supervisor in San Francisco. In 1978, he gave the slogan, "Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are" (A. Saguy 2020), adopted as the title of Abigail Saguy's book on the phenomena of coming out. The slogan was given in opposition to the Briggs initiative of the Proposition 6, which aimed to ban gay teachers from working in public schools in California. The idea behind the exhortation was that if enough gay men and lesbians come out to their friends and family, who thereby supported them, enough solidarity could be mobilized to oppose the initiative. Proposition 6 did eventually get defeated (A. Saguy 2020, 1); whether it was by the numerical support that the slogan envisaged, or by the sheer power of discourse, it is hard to say. Since then, coming out as a strategy is repeatedly invoked to fight against the trenchant heterosexism of the public institutions and culture. The narratives of "You must come out, for your own sake and for the sake of all of us", and "if every gay person comes out to their families...a hundred million (Americans) can be brought to our side" are generic exhortations (Sedgwick 1986, 71).

One can say that the decade of the 1970s, certainly possibilised, but also necessitated coming out. The changing context of the decade has played multi fold role in elevating coming out to its hegemonic positions as a tactic. It possibilised coming out because hiding one's gayness

seemed less and less necessary in the context of the intensifying queer liberation movement of 1960s and 1970s, which challenged the compulsory heterosexuality and the public and institutional hostility to homosexuality.

It necessitated coming out, because the intensive crackdown on homosexuality in 1960s and 70s, at least in west interpellated the queer community in existence. Gayle Rubin has written that 1950s and 1970s was the period of “major shifts in the organization of sexuality” (Rubin 2006, 145). Public anxieties gravitated around the figure of the “homosexual menace”, often equated to “sex offender”, and the communists and drew intense persecution and “queerbashing” (Rubin 2006). Homosexuality was attacked for “weakening the moral fiber of Americans” (Rubin 2006, 147) and making them vulnerable to communism. In 1997, in Florida, a political coalition Save Our Children, Inc. (from homosexual recruitment) which worked, successfully, to repeal the Dade County ordinance which banned discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodation on basis of one’s sexual orientation (Rubin 2006, 146).

The crackdown, from the side of law, public authorities as well as self- proclaimed moral vigilantes, interpellated the queer community as a pathological group, till they were ultimately forced to come up and speak for their rights, individually and collectively. An explicit and the most memorable event is the Stonewall riots of 1978. The Stonewall riots are considered a landmark incident in queer history, after which the queer community in general is deemed to have “come out”. Before the “riots”, the homosexual population largely conducted its endeavors underground: cruising, meeting, and even living in “gay ghettos”, or “closet economy”, away from the heterosexual gaze of the world and the institutions. Police raids on homosexual bars were common, and its patrons rarely took counter- measures, being disempowered as they were. However, in Stonewall, the bars patrons fought back, which led to a riot through the night (Armstrong and Crago 2006). The incident came to be remembered as a turning point in American queer history: “the American gay population kicked down the closet door” (Vargo 1998)¹⁶. The memory of Stonewall became an important normative force for the queer community to not hide behind the masks of secrecy anymore, come out, and organize themselves in a political collectivity. Vargo writes that till Stonewall, queer

¹⁶ Stonewall riots was not the first or the last event of queer assertion against the oppression inflicted by the institutions of the state. However, by a combination of factors, Stonewall came to have the “mnemonic capacity to create a commemorative vehicle”, and thus mark the temporal point at which the queer community came out of the closet (Armstrong and Crago 2006).

populations were forced to stay in the closet by circumstance. Guarding the secret was of foremost importance given the fear of persecution. However, since then, “this conventional code of secrecy has come under fire, with a substantial share of the gay population now finding it both outmoded and problematic” (Vargo 1998). The imperative to assert as a community was further intensified in the succeeding decade when the AIDS crisis, put the gay community in both mortal risk and in public scrutiny, and made it necessary for them to strengthen their political identity. Coming out, in this context, was both enabled and necessitated by the events of the 20th century, and became the lynchpin for the mobilization of the queer community hence.

A similar logic can be traced in coming out as an individual activity. Saguy and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer write that in the hostile environment of the 1970s, when the risks of being “outed” abound to blackmail or discredit queer subjects, coming out was strategized as a pre-emptive measure to counter the tactics employed by their opponents (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014, 811). Visibilizing sexual orientation helped empower the homosexual subjects (Armstrong and Crago 2006, Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014). Moreover, Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy note, the gay rights activists also began to see similarities between the problems of sexual minorities and those of ethnic minorities, thereby locating their concerns a part of ascendant multiculturalism and civil rights debate (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014).

Thus, the events of the 20th century have brought about a certain convergence between coming out as a personal phenomenon, and coming out as a landmark instance of public significance. It is perhaps the convergence between the private and public sphere that is demonstrated by the publicness of the coming out stories. Ken Plummer, in *Telling Sexual Stories* writes that from the 1970s, coming out has attained a certain publicness, and its significance has spilled over from its confinement within domestic and personal relations. He notes that “Whilst men and women have been coming out for over a hundred years, it is only since 1970 that...that the full cycle of private, personal, public and political tellings has become possible” (Plummer 1995, 82). The gay and lesbian subjects have started telling their stories, “to themselves”, “face to face to each other”, “in bars, in rap groups, in lesbian and gay centres”¹⁷ (Plummer 1995, 82). Moreover, they are “only too willing to tell their stories

¹⁷ Sharing experiences of oppression, in order to find solidarity shares a lot with the process of consciousness-raising. Consciousness-raising, began with the student movement and the black movement. However, it found “spectacular success” (Plummer 1995) with the women’s movement. Radical Feminists in particular relied on

to the media” (Plummer 1995, 82), choosing to share their stories in biographies, letters, interviews, films, newspapers, YouTube and other places (Alexander and Losh 2010).

The trend of coming out publicly has been noted by other scholars too. Daniella Bobker in her article *Coming Out: Closet Rhetoric and Media Publics*, writes (particularly in the context of queer celebrities) that “[T]hese days it sometimes seems as though the only legitimate way to come out as gay or lesbian, whether famous or not, is in front of a camera before an audience of millions” (Bobker 2015, 31). In the article, *A YouTube of One’s Own*, J Alexander has written that there has been a massive proliferation of coming out videos on the YouTube. On one hand, the authors say, these videos can be seen as part of “normative exhibitionism...that regulates other discourses of being “out” (in other, not specifically sexual ways)” (Alexander and Losh 2010, 24). On the other, these videos are also distinct in their impact, for they challenge the heterosexism of online systems, and make “alterative ways of understanding sex, sexuality and gender” (Alexander and Losh 2010, 24) a part of online circulations. Additionally, they attain another function: they create a community by which queer persons are able to network with other persons with common experiences and concerns. Alexander and Losh, as well as Plummer write how the genre (Cite Seresier) of the coming out stories use “use some kind of causal language, sense a linear progression, talk with unproblematic language and feel they are ‘discovering a truth’” (K. Plummer 1995, 83, Alexander and Losh 2010, 26). Their narration in terms of identifiable plot points taps into a “dominant worldview” (Plummer 1995) of being a homosexual, and thus becomes a way in which they invite other queer persons to relate their desires with these stories and thus reach a moment of recognition and acceptance. Some of these public stories, on media and otherwise, actively relate to the queer audience as their own, as they seek to guide them in their coming out journey¹⁸.

The coming out stories have another purpose: they not just help mobilize a sense of community in the present (Alexander and Losh 2010, 26). They also help mobilize a history.

the method of “collective reflection” to “name oppressive experiences”, to “disassociate themselves” from the same, and for “obtaining reliable knowledge and for correcting the distortions in patriarchal ideology” (Jaggar 1983, 365). The purchase of coming out, in part derives from this “radical feminist epistemology” (Jaggar 1983, 365).

¹⁸ This observation is demonstrated by several subjects in J Alexander’s and E. Losh’s (2010) research. For instance, a YouTuber named *GayGod* offers advice to people who are thinking of/ planning coming out in near future. Gaygod warns coming out should be planned at a time when the queer subject is able to manage by themselves, since an estrangement could lead them to be financially cut off from their family. Through these instances of offering concrete advice and emotional support, the queer stories “out” there help the queer subject find alternate affective and solidarity networks.

Plummer writes that coming out stories demythologise earlier stories, and thereby build a story of the past for the gay and lesbian subjects. Adrienne Rich in an early and influential anthology of coming out stories similarly notes: “Cultural imperialism...[is] the decision made by one group of people that another shall be cut off from their past, shall be kept from the power of memory, context, continuity” (Adrienne Rich, as quoted in Plummer 1995). It suggests that one way in which the domination of a group is maintained, in discourse and reality, is to deny them a sense of their own history. The proliferate emergence of the coming out stories seeks to remedy this sense. For this reason, coming out has not merely become an important step of resistance within the private. Additionally, the public function attributed to it, that is to counter heterosexism within the private and public domain has invested in it a certain hegemonic and compelling power.

The pairing of coming out with the closet, which also has its own etymological history, is further central to the elevating of coming out to its hegemonic status. Closet and passing are, notably, two terms which exist in simultaneous, and opposite relationship with coming out. ‘Passing’ as Yashika Dutt writes is borrowed from an “African American practice of hiding one’s (racial) identity and assuming a different (white) one to escape discrimination” (Dutt 2019). Being closeted has similar meanings of hiding or not revealing one’s sexual identity. Both these terms, make use of the compulsory heterosexuality (which makes people assume others as heterosexual by default) to escape hostility. They are thus considered, sometimes necessary but wholly negative phenomena of submitting/ complying with the heteronormative pressures. The phenomena of coming out, as opposed to these two concepts, thereby takes on a privileged role of casting off shame and directly challenging this heterosexism. How did closet and coming out come to be, in this diametrically opposite relation of signaling complacency and radicalness, apolitical and political?

Danielle Bobker has given an elaborate description of the closet, to show how its meanings and connotations have changed drastically over centuries to take on its present meaning. She writes, that the “twin tropes of the closet and coming out assumed their current, primarily homosexual, inflection in the context of gay and lesbian liberation movements in the 1960s and 70s” (Bobker 2015, 34). She traces the historical usage of the term back to the enlightenment age. She writes that closets, in early modern England used to be the “last and only locked room in an elite apartment” (Bobker 2015), and thereby a “unique space of guaranteed privacy” (Bobker 2015, 37). In addition to ensuring privacy, it used to be “at the

heart of a traditional, secretive ethos of knowledge production and exchange” (Bobker 2015, 37). The kings used to read and write in the closets, special manuals and equipment were kept in the closet by the photographers, midwives and others; kings confided in secretaries and favorites, “courtiers whose roles and status were partly defined in relation to the closet” (Bobker 2015, 37). As a zone of “privacy, secrecy and non- circulating knowledge” (Bobker 2015, 39), it enjoyed a privileged status rather than the stigma it is not associated with. The secrecy was instead a privilege, to keep knowledge and social connections to oneself. And granting someone access to the closet was one of the ways of building alliances.

When did it start acquiring its negative¹⁹ connotations, thereby necessitating coming out. Bobker answers this question in terms of closet’s significance in the knowledge economy. She writes that with enlightenment, the royal monopoly on knowledge came to be challenged. By the early 18th century, scholars like David Hume, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Johnson derided the traditional “elite intellectual culture” that the closet signified, and the phrase “out of the closet” came to have decidedly progressive connotations (Bobker 2015, 39). During the print culture, positive significance was attributed to the idea of “opening, unlocking, or disclosing” (Bobker 2015, 42).

All that is well, but certainly it doesn’t have anything to do because of the isolation of the closet from the household, it provided a discreet and safe place for erotic behavior (not necessarily)- “when a closet is mentioned in an eighteenth-century novel, more often than not, some form of sexual secrecy follows—whether flirtation, seduction, voyeurism, or sexual violence” (Bobker 2015, 40). Alan Stewart has written of the closet intimacies between the masters and their male secretaries in 17th century. Moreover, the confessions in the church regarding one’s sexual desires, are crucial to the emergence of the modern subjectivity (Bobker 2015).

Whereas closet and coming out of the closet came to be associated with each other at some juncture, now there is a decoupling. Steve Seidman have written that even in USA, where the primacy of the lenses of the coming out and closet are the most popular, the two concepts are now getting de- hyphenated (S. Seidman 2002). With the progress made in the public discourse as well as institutional approach towards queerness, less and less queer people feel

¹⁹ The negative connotation of the closet refers to the stigma that is associated with being closeted, and scholars like Ken Plummer have written that closet, as connoting sexual secrecy has negative and damaging consequences for a person. The above explanation has attempted to juxtapose and contrast this meaning of the closet with its earlier meanings as a zone of privacy, and privileged access.

the need to be in the closet. Thereby, coming out has also lost some of its compelling significance for the queer community.

The moral force of the concept, however, is not yet over. If the progress on LGBT rights have diminished the significance of the closet and coming out in the USA, the same cannot be said for the other countries. Moreover, so influential is the success of coming out as "a cultural concept and political tactic" (Saguy 2020) that it has travelled beyond gay rights activism to domains as wide as fatness, caste and immigration struggles. In discussions on sexuality, it is freely used for contexts much wider than that of sexual confession. Subhabrata Bhattacharya, in the acknowledgement of the book, *The Phobic and the Erotic wrote*, [A]lmost unbelievably, it is finally time for this volume to "come out" (Bose and Bhattacharya 2007). Ken Plummer in his book *Telling Sexual Stories* has used the term coming out, to talk about stories beyond one's sexual identity, to include those of rapes and sexual suffering (Plummer 1995). With MeToo, the world is witnessing this coming out in a dual way- the coming out of the survivor as well as outing of their accused.

The resonance of the concept does not restrict to sexual stories. In so far as coming out represents an attempt at overcoming stigma and breaking silence over an 'ashamed' experience or identity in favor of getting "self-recognized" (Saguy 2020), it has become a "master frame" (Saguy 2020) to talk about many other political struggles. In another work, *Coming out as Fat*, Abigail Saguy and Jane Ward writes of the fat women's struggle to stop passing as "on-the-way-to-thin" and come out: coming out in this instance, where the reality is not really hidden, means "mustering courage to engage in activities usually thought proper only for thin people, giving up futile diets, and rebuilding her self-esteem" (Saguy and Ward 2011).

Similarly, Yashika Dutt in her book *Coming Out as a Dalit* writes of her experience of passing, as a student and as a journalist – not disclosing her 'lower' caste identity, acquiring English education, and other elements that are considered IDs of 'upper' caste identity. However, the Rohith Vemula suicide (or more appropriately institutional murder) was a rupture: Dutt notes that "unlike me, Rohith did nothing to bury his Dalitness" (Dutt 2019, 15). [I]nstead he used it as a "shield", to demand justice for his fellow students (Dutt 2019, 15). Her book thereby became an ethical act of putting herself out there, to encourage more and more Dalits to come out with their stories of passing.

Saguy refers to several of these instances to capture the popularity of the term Coming out. A “search for the terms coming out and closet in the keywords of major papers, indexed by LexisNexis, yields examples of people coming out as asexual, celibates, male heterosexuals, Jews, Republicans, Scots, Kiwi males, witches (coming out of “broom closets”!), shopaholics, minivan aficionados, slackers, knitters, homemakers, Christian musicians, and men with erectile dysfunction”, she writes (Saguy 2020).

The spillover in vocabulary and the politics of coming out is interesting. It shows the interrelationship between movements, whereby movements come to share vocabularies and tactics. It also shows how the modalities of what constitute meaningful resistance are shared across contexts. Coming out is a specific way of conducting this resistance which relies on speaking and visibility of the subject, as a way to assert one’s political presence, one’s rights, one’s rights to have rights.

The next two sections shall aim to critically reflect on this politics of coming out. The next section shall interrogate into the practice of queer resistance, to understand how it stands up to the self- evident and universal claims of coming out. It shall be argued that there is a significant chasm between the discourse and practice of coming out. This in turn throws up several questions on the politics of the phenomena, which shall be taken up in the final section.

1.3 From Discourse to Practice: The Sparseness of Coming Out

Coming out, as a concept, as is obvious from the above description has traveled a lot. It is in this journey across time and space, to gain the significance it enjoys within queer account of resistance as well as resistance in general. However, in doing so, it has lost touch with some of the grounded-ness in its original context. That is, in being hailed as an important political strategy, it seems easy to lose sight of the fact that coming out is actually a process that takes place in a highly intimate context, between the queer person and their “significant others”. In this close association, the process often gets guided by factors and negotiations very different than an explicitly political glorification would allow for.

Even as coming out circulates as an extremely powerful and hegemonic narrative, it has not found enthusiastic takers uniformly across time and space. The difference is particularly

striking when west is juxtaposed with practices in non-west. Shuzhen Huang & Daniel C. Brouwer, have written that in China, even though there is popularity of the coming out route, coming home as an indigenous model of sexual behavior that predates the arrival of the exogenous coming out, continues to exert substantial force for foregrounding the filial piety and “reticent poetics” in their navigations of sexuality, family, and social life (Huang and Brouwer 2018).

In India, Maria Tonini’s ethnographic research with the Niral Club, a grassroots queer youth group based in Delhi found an ambiguity around the desire for recognition (Tonini 2018, Tonini 2016). The recognition that the subjects sought was less on the lines of being ‘out and proud’ and at best circumscribed, balanced very strongly with desires of normality and safety. Maya Sharma’s book *Loving women*, which chronicles ten stories of fierce struggle by working class women, in favor of their same sex love, is marked by a striking absence of the anxieties and the urge of coming out. When asked by her colleagues why she didn’t tell her of her same sex love, Sabo retorted fiercely, “This was never a topic for conversation, no one made it an issue, how could I bring it up on my own? There was no forum for anyone to talk about women who loved women. Until I came into the single women's group, and till I attended the Tirupati conference on women's rights, I had not heard the word ‘lesbian’” (Sharma 2006).

Similarly in the anthology, *Whistling in the Dark*, the interviewees demonstrated a limited engagement with the vocabularies and practices of the global queer struggles, many said they were not considering disclosing their sexual practices with their families, some showed a keenness for heterosexual marriage, and at least few showed an outright resistance to the idea of gay marriage (Sarma and Rao 2009). Shakuntala Devi, in her book *The World of Homosexuals* has interviewed queer persons. One of them, Venkata Subramaniam, suggested that even though his “sexual tendencies are decided”, he did not intend to tell his parents anytime and had even decided to enter the “commercial arrangement” that is marriage to keep everyone happy (Devi 1977).

It is not only the non- western societies which show hesitation with the concept of coming out. On the outset, it seems that coming out enjoys great currency across the west. Not just USA, but queer individuals in Canada and Germany too talk of their struggles with family and friends as “being out” (“out *sein*” in German) and “coming out” (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014, 809). Even in France, which is known for its “linguistic and cultural

protectionism from English” (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014, 809), the usage of the terminology of coming out has increased since 1990s.

A closer look however, reveals a different reality. Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy have written that coming out in France invokes very different sentiments than in USA. They found that while all Americans use the term coming out instinctively and spontaneously, French respondents are less likely to do so. This is a symptom of greater divergence in their different national political models. USA has had a history of multi-cultural assertion, which attributes positive significance to the assertion of difference. France, on the other hand, has an assimilationist political model, that highlights the French unity between different groups and downplays their differences. Coming out, in this context, can be seen as an assertion of group-based differences and is thus discouraged. In experiential terms too, French model of citizenship allows less isolation to its queer subjects: the priority given to French identity and lack of differentiation on the basis of sexuality can imply that closet is not a functional category, thereby making it less compelling for the queer subjects to come out. In connotational terms then, whereas Americans attach a positive significance to coming out, and thereby might feel forced to come out, French citizens are more ambiguous about it and thus might be forced to hide their sexual identity to emphasize similarity (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014).

In fact, as noted earlier Saguy and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer have gone on to write that the significance of the closet, as a metaphorical space and thereby coming out of it has started losing its significance even in the USA. For some sections, the need for passing has simply waned on account of progressive granting of LGBT rights (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014). However, in large part, coming out continues to remain a hard and inaccessible choice for the queer individuals. This is especially true for people of colour, and those from working class background.

Nancy Mezey conducted research among childfree lesbian and lesbian mothers, to understand “how structures of race and class shape the coming out process for childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers” (Mezey 2008). Mezey writes that black individuals are highly reliant on their families and communities for emotional and material support, against the trenchant racism of the outside world. For lesbians who want to become mothers particularly, families are important support systems. Thus, a possible estrangement from the family is highly damaging for such groups, and thus carried higher stakes. Moreover, the

decision is complicated by the probable hostility to queer desires from within the black community itself. Mezey (2008) writes that black bodies, historically have been abused and stigmatized by the white, as being deviant and hyper- sexualized. Thus, to appear normal in the eyes of mainstream society, the black community has internalized the puritan beliefs about masculinity and femininity. Lesbianism predictably runs counter to these gendered expectations and thereby is more likely to meet a hostile and disapproving response from the family and community.

Yvette Taylor (2007), draws attention to the class aspect of coming out. She uses Bourdieu's concept of habitus to talk about the sexuality. In her work *Working Class Lesbian Life*, she writes of coming out as a 'class act', which is experienced differently by people in different class locations in terms of opportunities, responses and interpretations. Elizabeth McDermott (2010) also puts an emphasis on 'stratifying sexualities', to understand the role of class positioning in differentiating the lives of LGBT members. She writes that whereas working class lesbians are more likely to adopt the narratives of being 'totally true to myself' and hence of natural and authentic self, which can provide ontological security, middle class lesbians incline to engage in narratives of "self- making and self- determination". Her question that what and whose experiences are being used to generalize the understandings of sexuality is very pertinent to understanding recognition, and discourses of coming out.

Thus, it seems that the grammar of coming out is not even adequate for societies in which the concept has emerged, let alone others²⁰. The popularization of coming out, as a concept, tactic does not capture the life experiences and contingent politics of sexuality as experienced by people across time and space.

Martin Manalansan cautions that "although there is need to take stock of what is happening to various national gay and lesbian movements, there is even greater need to be more mindful of those who fall outside those movements" (Manalansan, as quoted in Dave 2012). In so far as coming out has been pinned as an integral tactic of the queer movement across

²⁰ The discussion on what support networks can or cannot facilitate, took place in the Research and Discussion Forum, constituted by the M.Phil.- PhD batch of 2020 of Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. It was discussed how the mere existence of queer support networks cannot lay the ground for queer subjects coming out, and moving out/ away from their traditional homes, since subjects are constrained by their differential social backgrounds as well as the differential access to these support groups. Gratitude to the participants and the members for asking relevant questions and helping articulate the position that this research takes.

the world, and in some ways as a sub- movement itself, coming out includes and empowers several. But at the same time, it leaves out the lived experiences of many others. How does the queer movement respond to this exclusion that is integral to the phenomena of coming out?

It is interesting that the fact that the sparseness of the phenomena has done nothing diminish the hegemony of coming out itself as a concept, it might have increased it. Bina Fernandes and N.B. Gomathy has written in their article *Voicing the Invisible: Violence faced by Lesbian Women in India* about silence as the paradigmatic form of violence (Fernandez and Gomathy N.B 2005). Silence for the woman can exist in multiple forms, most notably as a non-acknowledgement of own desire, struggle to reconcile desire with societal prohibitions and suppressing expression to others. Their work suggests, as do several others that people refuse to be vocal about their sexuality, only because they are compelled to.

The refusal of subjects and communities to come out, has not become an entry point to self-critique and introspection. These stories and academic works do not merely the descriptive analytical point about describing the influence of the phenomena within the queer circles. They also make the moralistic and prescriptive point, in associating the phenomena with the ideals ranging from authenticity, morality, resistance and happiness²¹. The explanations of the refusal to come out that quickly transition from a paradigmatic analysis of structures to a sweeping generalization of the personhoods of the queer subjects as good queer/ bad queer. If the queer individual has not come out, it is generally presumed that the person has chosen to live a lie, is not courageous, and most importantly, is not an active participant in queer politics. Particularly in the familial domain, it is assumed that the person has given in to, or had made peace with the heteronormative institutions of the family.

Thus, coming out is used by its enthusiasts, as a marker of characterizing, categorizing and hierarchizing. The next section delves into the politics of coming out, how coming out colludes with several other forms of power to brand societies as enlightened and backward, normal and pathological, liberated and oppressive.

²¹ Sara Ahmed, in her book *Promise of Happiness*, critiques the cultural imperative to be happy and the politics behind it. Ahmed writes that the “happiness scripts” are intimately tied to morality- “If something is good, we feel good. If something is bad, we feel bad”. Job, marriage, coming out are all “happiness indicators”, and as a corollary also moral choices to make. Ahmed’s critique of the moral politics of happiness, thus also helps us critique the discourses dictate the queer individual, including the “moral pressure” to come out. Coming out is deemed to be the only feasible route for a queer individual to live a happy, livable life and by extension also a moral and authentic life. (Ahmed 2010)

1.4 Locating the Politics of Coming Out

There have been some direct critiques of the coming out phenomena, which seek to point out to the partiality of a seemingly universal phenomena. Some of that literature has been noted in the previous chapter to highlight the chasm between discourse and practice (of coming out). However, there is another more scathing set of critiques that can be read into the wider body of literature on sexuality. In the last two decades, sizeable literature has emerged from critical and post- colonial quarters that critiques the queer movement, in terms of the direction it is taking. A critique of coming out, and the politics of speaking sexuality and visibility of the queerness it underpins is implicit in these texts, and form a useful resource for us as we approach the politics of coming out.

This section shall draw out the critique of coming out, in existing literature, and its politics in three major points. One it shall refer to the contributions made by Foucault to point out to partiality of confession as a mode of doing sexual politics. Second, it shall interrogate the exclusivities that get created when a phenomenon like that of coming out, emerging from a particular formation of sexuality is sought to be transported to other contexts in a modular fashion. Third, it shall extend Foucault's point about state's investment in the body, to understand how the modern state and the capitalist market capitalize on the figure of "gay right holder" to further their agendas in respective fields.

Foucault has, undoubtedly been the most influential presence in the critical study of the regime of sexuality. Foucault's contribution is remarkable because his insights were futuristic. Made at a time when the sexual revolution, and enthusiasm for speaking sex was at its zenith, Foucault was able to grasp the short- sightedness of the investment of activist energies in the body and sexuality. His insights have started manifesting in concrete political turn of events today, and thereby remain absolutely important for any analysis on politics of sexuality.

It has been noted in the chapter that the politics of coming out builds on the politics of authenticity (Weston 1991, Vargo 1998). Be it resistance within one's home or outside, an authentic queer subject or more importantly a queer political subject supposedly comes into being, in these various narratives, when they come out. Foucault's history of sexuality helps

us understand how it is that hiding and revealing sexuality can be traced back to authentic living. This question arises since not all instances of keeping secrets is deemed to interfere with authentic living. Indeed Ken Plummer, while noting the positive dimensions of narrating one's sexual stories notes that secrets are not essentially bad. He writes that "Personally socially, secrets can perform vital functions" (Plummer 1995). Drawing from Sissela Bok, he makes the argument that the decision to give away or withhold some information about self is an important component of the exercise of autonomy; they act as a "safety valve" in our interaction with others (Sissela Bok, quoted in Plummer 1995). Correspondingly, to not have control over one's own information is to be quite vulnerable: to perception and even manipulation/ coercion at the hands of others (Plummer 1995). Modernity, in terms of elevating the values of privacy almost defines freedom in terms of being able to keep certain things private and thereby undisclosed (Constant 1819).

Things are however considered different with sexual secrets. Plummer, in *TSS* writes that sexual secrets of this kind (coming out, sexual suffering etc.) are "usually seen to be damaging, and it signposts a relative powerlessness" (Plummer 1995, 57). Keeping secrets can "isolate us from those we love", "lower our self-esteem", "contribute to sexual problems", "prevent the healing of emotional wounds" and thereby are wholly destructive (Plummer 1995, 57). How is it that speaking up, not just of one's sexuality (which is already as private as it gets) becomes important to be spoken of, in the ultra- personal domain of the family? How has the distinction between sexual and other secrets come to be so significant?

Foucault's genealogy of sexuality gives important answers for this rupture. The imperative to speak one's sexuality can be directly traced to the centrality of sexuality to modern personhood, Foucault's exposition on the *History of Sexuality* tells us. He writes that the centrality to speak of one's sexuality is justified by the conventional account of the history of sexuality as a "triple edict": (a) seventeenth-century frankness, (b) nineteenth-century repression, and (c) twenty-first-century liberation²² (Dhar 2020). The problem thereby is

²² Foucault writes that the established history of sexuality goes somewhat like this: "For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today.... At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; ... But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie.... On the subject of sex, silence became the rule" (Foucault 1978). Anup Dhar writes that this history, and as its corollary, the politics of sexuality is guided by the "dyad 'repression/oppression'– 'liberation/emancipation'" (Dhar 2020).

diagnosed as the following: the Victorian morality cast a pall of gloom on the 17th century “frankness” (Foucault 1978, 3, Dhar 2020). Since then, the “silence became the rule” (Foucault 1978, 3) in matters of sexuality. The only way to overturn this history of suppression, is then to start speaking of sex again, subversively, radically, fearlessly.

Foucault’s contribution rests on two pillars. One, he points out through his genealogy of sexuality, that the history of sexuality through the “repression, confession, and liberation” (Dhar 2020, 3) is hardly the only way to tell the story of sexuality. He writes that far from being a society which suppresses any speech about sexuality, the modern day west in fact provokes it. The incitement to discourse on sexuality, and the will to knowledge constitute important components of the modern world. The church constitutes the beginning of this journey, where every sinful thought and desire needed to be confessed. The modern-day institutions of psychiatry have taken it forward, wherein one’s sexual truth needs to be spoken out again and again. A giant institutional paraphernalia has thus emerged in the modern society which necessitates a politics of confession.

Secondly, it is through this process of sexual confession, and interpretation by which each and every component of one’s persona and conduct gets referred back and understood in terms of one’s sexual desires that sexuality came to be understood as a truth of one’s personhood. Thereby in so far as modern society makes authenticity the compass of good living, being authentic and truthful about one’s sexuality came to be important. The two trends thereby are mutually constitutive: the institutional paraphernalia including church and psychiatry are important to understand the emergence of sexuality as truth of one’s personhood. The latter, conversely, explains the provocation to come out, and share one’s sexual secrets as a matter of authentic living.

Foucault’s explanation locates the tradition of sexual confession, securely between 18- 20th century in modern day Europe. Confession, to the medical experts, psychiatrist, church, but also to one’s family, friends, colleagues can be placed within a particular formation of sexuality. Contrary to what gets written about it, it is not the self- evident and logical way of conducting one’s sexual politics, everywhere and at all times. In the light of this explanation, coming out has already started losing some of its self - evident appearance. Its claim to universal significance and purchase is questioned, by its location in 18- 20th century Europe. This leaves epistemic space to imagine other histories of sexuality which are not mediated by

speaking as a mode of doing sexual politics, as several post- colonial (Ruth Vanita, Madhavi Menon), non- western (Afsaneh Najmabadi) and critical thinkers have done.

More importantly, for our purposes, it helps us reflect on alternative modes of conducting sexual politics- politics which does not necessarily fall in the confessional models of coming out, speaking up against silence, seeking recognition against pathologizing. Anup Dhar, in his article, *Politics of Prop Roots* writes that the crucial question for Foucault, and indeed where his critical insights on the history of sexuality start gaining a lot of contemporary relevance is, that it enables us to not just reflect on the disease (that is, homophobia), but also upon the cure, in other words the politics of sexuality (Dhar 2020, 2). Speaking out as a mode of queer resistance makes sense only where sexuality is the primary marker of one's truth, and where this sexuality is deemed to be suppressed. Thus, the fuss about coming out, in families, workplace, to public, does not seem odd in say the western world. In the rest of the societies which are characterized by different formations of sexuality, some of which might not center sexuality at all, coming out seems a forced presence.

Foucault's point about positing a genealogy against the history of sexuality, is to cure even the west of the cure (Dhar 2020, 3), that consists in speaking out. He suggests that it is not just that the one needs to speak out because there has been a history of repression. The thesis about the history of repression also enjoys such currency because it gels so well with the activist trend of speaking out politics. In his words:

This discourse on modern sexual repression holds up well, owing no doubt to how easy it is to uphold.... what sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless his opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures;... this is perhaps what also explains the market value attributed not only to what is said about sexual repression, but also to the mere fact of lending an ear to those who would eliminate the effects of repression....to say that sex is not repressed, or rather that the relationship between sex and power is not characterized by repression, is to risk falling into a sterile paradox. It not only runs counter to a well-accepted argument, it goes against the whole economy and all the discursive 'interests' that underlie this argument". (Foucault 1978, 7)

In crude words, Foucault seems to be alluding to an opportunism within the transnational activist discourses, which he calls “speaker’s benefit.” The question however arises: what does this modular application of a radical practice, which traces its emergence to a particular kind of historical understanding and formation of sexuality do, and fail to do? Who does it include and who does it exclude? What does it contribute and what does it take away?

Naisargi Dave has written on this politics of speaking, and its impact on inclusivity and exclusivity with the Indian lesbian movement. Dave, in delving into an account of the emergence of the lesbian movement in India, shares the concern raised by Elizabeth Povinelli: how are the radical worlds, which are essentially fields of possibilities, “rendered unremarkable” by institutionalized practice? In her book, Dave focusses on the institutionalized practices of NGOs, transnational circulation of funding and discourse. From her account, it is possible to read off how the practice of speaking out or confessing one’s sexuality as a way of conducting resistance aims to achieve this process of commensuration and thereby the limit the queer possibilities, in accordance with the normative.

In the decade of 1990s, several lesbian organizations like Sakhi in 1991, Sappho (in 1999, Kolkata), LABIA (formerly known as Stree Sangam, 1995), Counsel Club (1993, Kolkata) came up to enable the queer women to come together (Dave 2012, Sharma 2006, Zainab 2018, Biswas, Beethi and Ghosh 2019). The emergence of lesbian politics in India was posited on the absolute non-visibility of the lesbian population in the country, a situation that these organizations set out to correct. The research by Bina Fernandes and N.B. Gomathy had talked about the silence of the queer community in India, as a paradigmatic form of violence. Arati Rege notes that in the beginning of 1990s, there was an absolute absence of lesbian representations, such that “*we (queer women) did not even know ourselves*” (Zainab 2018). They sought to, “create a visible lesbian presence and an active lesbian voice” (Dave 2012). Sakhi which was the first lesbian organization in India, wrote in its letter that most women who write to Sakhi live a “hidden sexuality”, since they thought of as ‘abnormal’ or “unnatural”. Dave writes that the letter shows how a failure to come out is “equated with a psychosexual problem to be solved”, which is further an example of a “categorical imposition related to the internationalization of gay politics” (Dave 2012).

Dave also points how the transnational politics of speaking had to contend with the concerns of culture and nation. Lesbianism was thought of as being alien to the Indian (and Hindu) culture and nation, as the Fire episode demonstrates (Dave 2012). The charge of lesbianism

being alien to the Indian contexts did not just come from the hostile right, but also from within feminism. 1990s was a momentous time for politics, and a strong anti-liberalization solidarity of which women's movement was an active part was in force. Women's poverty was all the more evident in this context, thereby pitting the lesbian concerns against 'real women's issues'²³. Incommensurability between "real women issues" of poverty and violence and queer desires, between sexuality as a threat and sexuality as desire was an important part of the lesbian emergence in India. The lesbian organizations had to grapple with this set of interpellations early on, and came up with notable two resolutions.

On one hand, it worked out a space of talking about lesbian politics within this indigenous push. Even within the indigenous push, it was not the case that the lesbian politics could not be talked of at all. Speaking out was important to lesbian politics, as seen earlier. But this speaking up was done in a specific manner, that is, making it commensurate to local problems and cultural loyalty. The politics of *Stree Sangam* is an important marker. In the first instance, the group changed its name from *Women to Women* to the more indigenous *Stree Sangam*. In the place of the westernized category of lesbian, they started referring to "women to who love women" (Dave 2012). "Many within the group advocated excluding nonresident Indians (NRIs) and otherwise foreign people from their community entirely" (Dave 2012, 57), arguing that they are prone to "aggressively taking up time and space" (Dave 2012, 57) by discussing issues that were not relevant to Indian women. The divide between the westernized and the Indian lesbians and their frivolous vs real issues became a part of the "deliberate acts of exclusion" (Dave 2012, 56).

The narrow commensuration of lesbian and Indian politics forced the Indian lesbian community to come out with a more substantial stance on lesbianism. However, they replaced the indigenous commensuration with a transnational one. Certain organizations like Jagori continued in their hesitation against westernized categories and their application to the Indian lesbians²⁴. However, for the most part, the Indian lesbian community and movement

²³ Kamla Bhasin, the Indian development feminist and social scientist, is known to posit lesbianism against real women's issues. She, in her conversation with Naisargi Dave said, "Look: class is *the* most important issue. If you don't have food on the table, you can't talk about anything else...Is talking about lesbianism the most important thing when so many women can't even think about it? This is a class issue, and lesbian activists are on the wrong side of it." (Dave 2012,121-122)

²⁴ As preparations were underway for the Beijing conference, a lesbian feminist from Jagori, Mita Radhakrishnan, wrote an impassioned letter to local women's group insisting that the "human rights" approach does not challenge heterosexuality to an adequate extent and thus Beijing stage should be used to commit to radicalism and draw connections between issues of neoliberalism, Structural Adjustment programs, increased religious fundamentalism, (Dave 2012) and compulsory heterosexuality in all its aspects.

has been shaped by the discourse of human rights, particularly after the Beijing Conference. In Beijing, the lesbian feminists of India gained a sense of collectivity and connection, and hope of overcoming the “conservative cultural isolationism of the postcolonial nation-state” only by buying into the global sexuality discourse, which would significantly shift the Indian lesbian politics for decades to come. In so far that the lesbian community had to speak up in its own right, without referring to the local concerns, it had to take recourse to the transnational language of human rights, on the back of transnational funding and NGOs. "Lesbian" became the identity under which people came together and Human rights became the umbrella term under which the queer concerns of Indian lesbian community were united²⁵.

Sakhi's example is a demonstration of the former's limits. As opposed to this 'hidden' sexuality (Dave 2012 53), Sakhi wanted to insurrect the lesbian politics in India. As articulated earlier, a queer subject is deemed to apparate at the moment they come out. In making this assumption, Sakhi took an explicitly “identity- political approach” (Dave 2012, 71). It sought to do so through encouraging dialogue and political activity around lesbianism. Sakhi's problematic has the assumption that unless the queer subject comes out, it is difficult to imagine them as queer. Through this speaking up, Sakhi wanted to bring the lesbian women and their voices in some sort of political alliance with each other, whereby they could come closer to the participation in the global queer movement.

However, the letters written to Sakhi were anti- climactic. Several women wrote to Sakhi in search for lesbian collective through which they could find access to more women interested in a sexual relation with them. These women were not interested in taking part in lesbian politics itself. Sakhi's response to such letters is hesitant, and it tells us a great deal about the limits of coming out as a resistance method. “If Sakhi's goal was to bring India a few steps closer to participation in a global march—a movement characterized by lesbian visibility, voice, and politics—they would have to contend with another set of realities: in the ostensibly heterosexual but homosocial spaces that women occupied in the everyday, lesbianism already

²⁵ Maya Sharma titled her landmark work on sexuality and class, which bring together the struggles of women who love women under the rubric of "lesbian". This was despite the fact that most women whose stories have been documented did not refer to themselves as lesbian. Indeed, many of them did not even expressly talk about a sexual relationship to another woman. However, Maya Sharma (2006) deliberately put the word lesbian in the title as a political project to confer visibility where it is systematically obscured, by the homophobes as well as feminist movement itself. Naisargi Dave (2012) also wrote in favor of the queer persons, coming out to claim the term lesbian.

thrived, and in ways that did not necessarily require insurrection” (Dave 2012, 49), Dave writes. Sakhi separates dialogue from desires and intimacy and thereby an important way in which the lesbian community was already seeking out to each other.

The labelling on speaking out as an explicit political act whereas denying the others this status, the organization limited its own scope and possibilities. Many people started feeling alienated from the group because of an early elitism²⁶. This was the elitism, not of economic class, but of discourse and “cultural capital”. It was “centered on the ascendance of “dialogue” as the most salient marker of lesbian community belonging” (Dave 2012). In Dave's words, they find the "road from dimlight dancing to compulsory political dialogue a long and demanding one" (Dave 2012). Thus, she argues that without claiming that lesbian itself is a westernized category, "range of women who feel and have felt called by the term lesbian cannot always abide by the norms that variously emerge for what lesbian requires".

The politics of NGOs have led us to what is called the revolt of the sexual body against say the repression by the state. Such a revolt, when conducted in terms of repression- and resistance or stimulus- response, includes some but excludes many. Those who are included are rendered political subjects, the good gay subject, with “social conscience” (Vargo 1998). Those who are not are frivolous, destined to remain miserable.

However even the inclusion by some would hardly count even as a partial victory. Foucault has pointed this out. When asked about the recuperation of the body, in terms of the activists talking about desires, via pornography, advertising etc., he unambiguously negated the talk about recuperation. Rather he said, what we can see, and what is to be looked out for “is the usual strategic development of a struggle” (Foucault 1972, 56). By his own example, body has become the “object of analysis and concern, surveillance and control” (Foucault 1972, 56). Intensification of desire of each individual over their body is a part of this. It became a site of conflict between the subject and those in power. The power does not continue to enforce its hostility against sexuality; instead, it capitalizes on this investment in the body by the subjects to its own usage. What we find is a “new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation”

²⁶ Cath, one of Sakhi’s former members complained about this elitism in Sakhi- “Sakhi was *never* going to be the space we needed. People didn’t feel *safe* going there. It wasn’t a community space. It was a space for foreigners. . . . Sakhi couldn’t change anybody’s lives.” Recognising the limits of the organization, Cath and other members started the organization Sangini, which strove for greater proximity to the lived experiences of the women. (Dave 2012)

(Foucault 1978, 57). There is an indefiniteness to this mode of power, which must be realized rather than simply seeing it in the form of repression- speaking out, stimulus- resistance. in the section that follows, we shall see the investment and capitalization of the state and the market on the investment in sexuality.

One readily sees this co-option of the queer subject in the global consumerism, which thereby makes their status as equal citizens palatable and desirable to the neo- liberal state (Evans 1993). The queer childless couple, with immense disposable income have become the target for the market, and bathhouse, gay bars and specialized gay tourism are different ways in which the market taps into these untapped profits. David Evans, in his book *Sexual Citizenship* has pointed out how sexualization of modern societies has taken place within the political, economic and social context of late capitalism. In a period where citizenship is being actively redefined through consumer-ship, many members of gay and lesbian community are spending significant portion of their incomes in pursuit of queer lifestyles, and thereby buy their way into citizenship. However, this new space of consumer citizenship as simultaneously one that depoliticizes the gay individual, also marks a parallel moral loss for the queer movement (Evans 1993). Queer thus ceases to become a radical transformative force, and becomes an instrument of what Lisa Duggan calls homo- normativity. Duggan defines homonormativity as following: “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2003).

A similar capitalization on the investment in sexuality and sexual rights can be seen in the domain of inter- state relations, whereby the figure of the “gay rights holder” (Weber, Weber, Cynthia. *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to knowledge* 2016) is actively used by the western states to pink- wash²⁷ their human rights violations and neo- imperial interventions in other countries. This critique of the “gay rights as human Rights” (Weber 2016, 9) is critiqued by several scholars as hiding ulterior motives, and captured through diverse terminologies like homo- nationalism (Puar), homo-internationalism (Nath), homo- colonialism (Momin Rahman), repro- normative, and of course homo- normativism (Duggan).

²⁷ Pink-washing, in queer theory and community is used to refer to the appropriation of the queer movements and its issues to further the corporate or political agenda.

Regarding the collusion between regimes of sexuality and state power, the scholars of Inter-state relations have made major contributions. Weber, in her book *Queer International Relations* investigates how queer practices and subjectivities are “disciplined, normalized, or capitalized upon” (Weber 2014, 597) by states, and non-state actors, and how they can be resisted and critiqued in the interest of preserving wider queer potentials. Weber writes that the modern state presents its sovereign foundations through the figure of the “phantastical yet presumed-to-be-factual ‘sovereign man’” (Weber 2016). This ideal type of ‘sovereign man’ must be—as a necessarily singular, either normal or perverse figure who authorizes (or opposes) a specific binary arrangement of order versus anarchy.

For a long time, the heterosexual was the proper and normal subject of state politics, and the homosexual was the pervert (Weber 2016, Hoad 2018). Visibility of diverse sexuality in this case worked to the disadvantage of societies who often found themselves to be at the receiving end of the moral and political intervention of the west. Since then, however, things have changed. Thanks to the spirited movements by the LGBT groups, sexual diversity has gained greater acceptance, and the states have come under intense scrutiny for their hostility to LGBT rights. Democratic states have found it less feasible to continue their opposition to LGBT rights, and they have been forced to concede to full citizenship, or in Arendtian language “right to have rights” of the queer community. The homosexual, thereby, no longer stands as the other in the normal/ perverse dichotomy on which statecraft builds on.

However, this does mean that states have abandoned the mode of sexualized governance and have accommodated sexual diversity in all forms. Far from it. The inclusion of LGBT issues in statecraft happens through the construction and co- option of the figure of the “normal homosexual” or the “gay rights holder”, who is included in the either/ or logic of statecraft, increasingly used to legitimize the authority of the state. A normal homosexual is a functionally defined category: a normal homosexual thereby is one who complies with the existing norms²⁸. In the inter- state politics, the normal homosexual is coopted by the parent state to further their power politics and soft power influence.

Countries like USA and UK has consistently used its support for the gay rights holder as signaling its greater moral and epistemic superiority vis-à-vis other states which still continue to hold on to its, mind it, colonial era laws on criminalization of homosexuality. USA former

²⁸ The preference of the term ‘normal homosexual’ over normal queer, is to also highlight how the latter would be a contradiction in terms.

president Barack Obama, for instance, directed his foreign assistance regime and diplomacy to seemingly ensuring the human rights of LGBT people in other countries, a process through which he gained undue advantage in guiding the development and material politics in other countries. His opposition to the Uganda's enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act for instance made him take drastic measures in the bilateral relationship with the country. Accordingly, he took various steps like restricting entry to specific Uganda nationals, discontinuing funds for several development- related agenda in Uganda like the Uganda Police Force community-policing program, health infrastructure etc. Thus, USA and other western countries are being extremely short- sighted and perhaps even manipulative in hindering the development process in third world, a process which would have been perhaps more effective in bringing about awareness of rights in another country. This, further is an example through which how USA and other countries, through their superior material and soft power, as well as through their control on institutions of global finance unduly dictate the balance of countries by deciding which countries are progressive enough, and what fate do they deserve (Harris and Pomper 2014). Shraddha Chatterjee has written that many strands of queer movement in India have been influenced by the western 'rights based' agenda and transnational funding, thus becoming a part of "straight line of developmentality that flows from the first world to the third world" (Chatterjee, *Queer Politics in India: Towards Sexual Subaltern Subjects* 2018, 23). In the process, it created new forms of inclusivities, exclusivities and normativities that among many other things, promoted a queer subject which are "not just politically conscious, but also have the cultural capital to *state her politics*". (Emphasis mine) (Chatterjee 2018, 26).

The moral discourse of sexual autonomy here is being used to cast an oriental gaze by the West which on one hand projects an amnesic self-image of itself as enlightened, egalitarian and emancipated while portraying the non-west as incurably gendered (Dhawan 2016). Firstly, there is a historical amnesia regarding the role of the west, as erstwhile colonies in instituting the criminalization and suppression of sexual diversity in much of today's third world, a process which they show little responsibility or remorse for²⁹. Secondly, these western countries have not historically been friends of the LGBT community till very

²⁹ David Cameron linked countries LGBT records to UK foreign aid conditionality. However, this deliberately overlooks the fact that as a colonial power, Britain has been central in instituting homophobia in several countries, in law and public discourse. Madhavi Menon has written, with respect to India, that Britain was simply horrified by the display of sexual diversity in India, and sought to clampdown on it through several statues. section 377 in IPC is just one of the provisions. criminalization of hijra. (M. Menon 2020)

recently. As Gayle Rubin writes, USA which now projects itself as a pioneer of the LGBT rights has one of the most severe histories of state- sponsored homophobia (Rubin 2006). And lastly, the political leaders who have emerged as a champion of gay human rights, and by that virtue have gathered massive moral clout so as to make neo- imperial interventions in other countries have, through their political career, shared an ambiguous relation with the LGBT community and their rights. For instance, Obama's views (since we talked about his enthusiastic interventions in Uganda) on same- sex marriage have undergone complete 180 degree³⁰ in his political career, and he is known to have called same-sex marriage strategic, against his religious beliefs, and something that should be in the hands of churches rather than government (Powers 2012). Similar strategic changes can be witnessed in the politics of Hilary Clinton too (Sherman 2015).

The positive change in the political leaders shows the power of democratic politics, and the momentous efforts by the queer community to change the public discourse so as to make it politically feasible. However, once on the right side of history, these leaders do not shy away from understanding the issue contextually, and building public discourse in favor of LGBT rights. Instead, they claim epistemic and moral superiority and thereby use their material and political advantage to drive the politics of (under)development elsewhere.

How does coming out contribute to this process of neo colonialism? In several ways. First, the countries' support for LGBT community is measured in terms of their toleration and acceptance of the queer community spoken and visible presence, and the country's tolerance of other kind of covert and sexual politics is neglected. The liberation is recognized in fixed ways. states which focus on the rights of the LGBT community often recognize the liberation of the queer individuals in fixed ways. Visibility and speakability of the queer politics is an essential feature of this liberation. Conversely, those states which do not encourage or support such a politics of visibility are considered to be regressive with respect to their gender politics. Coming out thereby becomes the only form of "meaningful resistance". Cynthia Weber, talks of this process as a form of homo- normativity:

³⁰ Obama was initially in favor of same- sex marriage (at least in 1996), before he became unsure of it³⁰ and negative about it. in 2004, he extended qualified support for the rights of the community: he supported domestic-partnership and civil-union laws, but not for gay marriage. His reasons were strategic: since marriage for voters tends to have a religious connotation, support for gay marriage could have gone against his political prospects.

Homonormativities reproduce *either/or* logics of power because they appear to know in advance what does and what does not count as meaningful resistance. Meaningful resistance is always antinormative, and antinormativities are understood in these discourses to be (part and parcel of) what it means to be 'queer' (Wiegman and Wilson 2015). What this means is that at the heart of contemporary constructions of homonormativity is an antinormative-versus-normative binary logic that reproduces the very antinormative-versus-normative binary logic that theorists of these homonormativities investigate (Weber 2016).

Even in USA, the restriction on speaking of one's sexuality, was considered to the hallmark of the state's homophobia, reflected in military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Human rights council in its piece writes of 1994 policy, "The rule was discrimination in its purest form and prevented service members from being openly queer without threat of being discharged" (Human Rights Council n.d.). Organizations like HRC made the repeal of the law a top priority. They, alongside the queer movement achieved success when the law was repealed in 2011. The discrimination against the LGBT persons in military or USA in general are by no means over. However, this one act of repeal has allowed the state to go on from being branded as a homophobic state to claiming a gay-affirmative status for itself³¹.

Similarly, the countries which do not support this right continue to be seen as places which cannot afford a very good life to the queer individual. Rahul Rao has written of reports and productions by international bodies, which assess the level of gay affirmation a particular country allows for. The ILGA report for instance assesses countries for their "State Sponsored Homophobia" (Rao 2020). In doing so, it takes a progressive linear view of rights: decriminalization- protection- recognition. Most countries that find themselves coded in an alarming red (mostly from the global south) are deemed to have barely passed the landmark of decriminalization; their performance in furnishing recognition (which is where coming out comes into the picture) is unthinkable. The queer subjects are "out there"³² somewhere in these societies, but not "out" yet- a fact that automatically speaks for their suppression. The

³¹ The repeal of "Don't ask, don't tell" was a victory for the USA queer community. However, with this, the USA government claims to have redeemed itself as a messiah of LGBT rights. LGBT rights has become a point of contention in the political fight for power and legitimacy and President Obama somehow became a most important actor in the LGBT victory. This is reflected in a piece on Whitehouse site which asks former service members to reflect on what it is watch Obama sign the repeal. (Raghavan 2011)

³² *Out There* is a title of a documentary, which Rahul Rao has mentioned alongside *The World's Worst Place to Be Gay*, both of which explore "what it means to be gay in 'difficult' places". It is predictable, seeing the hierarchical logic of the move, that the difficult places are concentrated in non-west regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America. (Rao 2020, 39)

seemingly objective analysis performs an affective labour: by placing all countries on a linear timescale followed by the west, it maps onto them a “temporalisation of space” (Rao 2020, 37) and “spatialisation of time” (Rao 2020, 38). The countries coded in red are primitive, backward pasts of the futuristic west. Thereby the latter also have the vantage, an epistemic and moral privilege to guide the non- west in their journey towards more progressive law- it creates a dream for the countries which are the “worst place to be gay” to be more like “gay haven”. When India had not yet decriminalized sodomy, some of these maps were used for advocacy, asking the question: “Only the Countries colored in orange continue to criminalize sodomy. To which world must India belong?” As if by merely decriminalization-protection-recognition does not follow a neo- colonial move.

A second way in which coming out facilitates a depoliticized, hierarchical and neo- liberal consumerist citizenship for queer people is that it creates a recognizable target for the state and global capitalism. One only needs to see how the state ropes in the “talent and leadership of LGBTQ+ veterans” (Raghavan, 10 Years Later: Looking Back at the Repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” 2021) to speak in favor of its policies. The Whitehouse site for instance conducted an interview with a gay, former Air Force officer who was dismissed under the policy, when he came out to the authorities, dictated by integrity he said. The officer served in the Iran war and is very clearly complicit in the human rights violations that USA has committed through its interventions. However, he continues to speak enthusiastically about how as a first generation American, and he is delighted to have the opportunity to serve the state. And that even when he was dismissed, he said, “it didn’t mean I was going to stop serving my country. It was just a matter of how I was going to serve” (Raghavan 2021) If their coming out was earlier a liability for the state, it has now become an asset. It elevates them to the figure of a “gay patriot” (Weber 2016), who might be actively relied upon to uphold the democratic image of the country while pink washing its other violations.

A similar process happens in the market. Coming Out has a direct impact here in terms of creating a recognizable target for the advertising agencies. Danae Clark, in her article *Commodity Lesbianism*, writes that for a particular group to be targeted by the market, they should be “knowable”; that is, be “(1) identifiable, (2) accessible, (3) measurable, and (4) profitable” (Clark 1993). For a long time thus, lesbian were not targeted since they did not tick any of these boxes. However, with the trend in coming out, things have changed. Lesbian women are not now using fashion to assert their personal freedom as well as political choices.

Thereby, they become profitable target for the capitalist brands which capitalize on this urge to wear one's sexual politics, out and proud. Moreover, the link goes the other way round too. A certain kind of attire is often advertised to appeal to the lesbian eyes, which can accomplish the task of coming out without necessarily being spoken out. Thereby "lesbian verisimilitude" or the representation of body language, facial expression, and general appearance that can be claimed and coded as "lesbian" according to current standards of style within lesbian communities, often becomes an advertising gimmick which can get queer buyers without inviting the risk of homophobic backlash (Clark 1993, Dave 2012).

And lastly, coming out is rarely a one-off process which ends in sexual declaration to one's loved ones. As elaborated in chapter two, coming out follows a spatial logic. It more often than not, includes the moving out of the family and gravitating towards identifiable gay neighborhoods, gay public spaces, bars etc. in search of alternate families. The spaces then offer flourishing opportunities for the rise of "domesticated gay couples" and nuclear childless families, who have immense disposable income to spend on consumer lifestyle. Thereby coming out, becomes a medium through which the distinction between the normal heterosexual and perverse homosexual has been dismantled; in the same sweep, it also increases the gap between the "acceptable homosexuality" and unacceptable homosexuality, a phenomenon which Lisa Duggan terms "Equality, Inc." (Duggan 2003).

The next chapter shall extend the critical reflection on coming out as a differentially accessible route to conducting queer resistance. Whereas this chapter has discussed the phenomena of coming out; the next shall interrogate the site, that is, the family. It shall seek to understand family as an institution, which create it as an unchangingly heteronormative institutions and thereby necessitate coming out as a resistance. it shall understand how coming out, as a process relates to the idea of family and home at different junctures. And lastly, it shall critically reflect on this journey, by viewing home- making as a material process.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF HOME AND FAMILY: INTERROGATING THE SITE

In the last chapter, the research located the phenomena of coming out in its wider politics of speaking and naming one's sexuality. The chapter insisted that even though coming out has empowering potentials for queer subjects in certain formations of sexuality, the universality attributed to it allies it to imperialist impulse of western hegemony. This chapter shall further the critique of coming out, from the lens of what and who it includes/ excludes, by engaging with the theories of family and home (the chosen site for this research). The chapter shall argue that the notions of home and homeliness drive the queer struggles within the family-unhomeliness attributed to the traditional family motivates the queer subject to 'come out' as a way of struggling against the heteronormative family, and move out/ away to "chosen families" (Weston 1991). The chapter shall take a critical analysis of the dichotomy between homely and unhomely, to pave the way for enquiring into alternate ways of struggling in the family.

Section one shall engage with the feminist and queer critiques of the family, to survey the ground from where the conversation on queer struggle in the family begins. Section two, attempts to understand how these theoretical forays into family support predominant modalities in which conducting queer struggles in the home is prescribed. The section shall use three popular modes of thinking of struggles in the family: non-engagement, building alternate queer families and kinship networks, and coming out, to make two broad arguments. One, the struggles in the family are informed and dictated by fantasies and aspirations of what a home must be, and what it is to be at home. Second, building on the queer-feminist critiques of the family, the struggle of queer subject often constructs and visibilises those struggle practices which can be portrayed through the modality of leaving the childhood home. This impulse to move out and away from the childhood families is a constitutive part of the coming out narratives. In that sense, the queer struggle for good life is often thought to be mediated by movement away from the original childhood family towards new relationships of belonging.

Section three shall mull over the critiques of the essential and essentialized movement from family to new homes, on three broad fronts. First, the dichotomy between homely and unhomely spaces shall be brought into question. Secondly, the privilege associated with

choosing to leave home and build new affective networks, in terms of symbolic and material resources shall be discussed. And lastly, it shall be discussed as how the dominant modes of conducting queer struggles privilege certain stories by affirming their status as struggles, while others get invisibilized and inferiorised as cowardice, passivity or incapability.

1.1 Queer Critique of the Family

Family has come under severe and passionate critique by the feminist theories and movements, and the queer perspective generally share in their skepticism of the same. The two set of theories have a lot in common, including their critical approach to the institutions of sexuality, gender, and that of productive and reproductive institutions, all of which go into the making and holding together of the affective and functional unit of the family.

Feminism, through its various strands, debates whether the family as an institution is a source of patriarchy, or is a site of resistance against the same. The broad understanding, at the risk of overlooking nuance, is that family, at least in its current form, oppresses, dominates and exploits women. Two major feminist strands of thinking are helpful for understanding the essential forms and functions of the family, which in essentialising family as a heterosexual institution also feed into the queer skepticism of the institution.

Firstly, the family executes the sexual division of labour that is integral to the prevailing social order. Several scholars have written about the social need for a family, which makes women responsible for the reproductive, child care and socialising functions. Sociologists like Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales have written that in the era of market specialization, institutions and people must take up the jobs in which they have a comparative advantage (Parsons and Bales 1955). Role of family, in this regard, is the socialization of children and stabilization of adult personalities. Women occupying the home are best suited for this job given their comparative advantage in child rearing, and especially their “exclusive ability to breastfeed” (Budig 2004, 419). To their credit, some structural functionalists argued for a parity between familial responsibilities (of child rearing and socialization) of the women as and the productive employment of the man. Since the economic principle of comparative advantage in production and exchange is at play, men are obliged to share their earnings in the workplace, just as women are expected to share their products of labour at home – that is, well brought up children. Becker, a sociologist who justified the sexual division of labour,

was one of the first scholars to write of reproductive and child rearing as productive work, a point that feminists put much emphasis on³³ (Budig 2004).

From the feminist point of view, the power dimensions are inherent in the gendered arrangement of work. If the gendered arrangement of the family, were to be just a division of labour engaged in a relation of equal exchange, the woman would have the agency to decide whether to provide the labour of rearing and bringing up children. However, no such choice exists, given the essential function of the family is required by the social order to provide free reproductive, physical, emotional and care-giving labour, and the essential role of the woman in providing the same. To argue that women are equal participants in the process of exchange is to mask their un- remunerated labour that is, in fact, essential to the market economy. Women's domestic and care – giving work, as several socialist feminists would argue, goes towards the reproduction of labour power of labouring class men, for no cost, which in turn allows the capital- owning classes to keep the wages depressed and to increase their profits³⁴.

The argument that gendered hierarchies in the family is directly linked to its essential social functions, is brought out in the works of certain political theorists. Carole Pateman, while critiquing the contractarian theorists (often male) has pointed that the family in its current

³³ Marxist feminists, in particular, have talked about the role of family within the capitalist system of production. Challenging the notion that “women’s work” is unproductive as compared to work in the public sphere dominated by men, they write that domestic and care work rendered by women forms an indispensable part of production. Certain scholars like Margaret Benson (1969) have taken a restrictive view of this production. Benson writes that “women are a group which works outside the money economy”, since their services within the family is produced for use rather than exchange. However, other scholars like Mariarosa Dalla Costa (1972) argue that “domestic work not only produces use value but is an essential function in the production of surplus value”. This is because care work provided by the women within the family, facilitates the “reproduction of labor-power”. Since the service is given without wage, it masks the productive nature of the women’s work. Additionally, the free reproduction of labor power also enables the capitalism to depress the wages, thereby making women’s labour an indispensable part of the productive capitalist economy (Holmstrom 1981).

³⁴ The fact that women find themselves confined to the non- productive domain of family and household work because of some “natural” abilities, spurs the discussion regarding what is the root of oppression of women. Women like Shulamith Firestone (2015) and Simone de Beauvoir (2015) believe that it is the biology of the woman which is the axis of her oppression. Beauvoir writes how reproductive roles of the woman tie her to immanence, whereas men are free to pursue activities that can achieve transcendence. Firestone has written against the tyranny of biology and biological family, and urges to free the women’s means of reproduction through artificial reproduction. There is some affinity here to liberal feminism which argues that confining women to family because of their reproductive functions, because it does not allow them to use their entire range of rational faculties, a factor that is the unique capacity of human beings. As opposed to these strands of thought which pin the root of oppression to women’s biology, certain radical thinkers like Adrienne Rich have written that motherhood, and by extension women’s biological capacities are not inherently the root of oppression. Instead, she distinguishes between motherhood as an institution and motherhood (Rich 1977) as an experience, insisting that it is the patriarchal control of women’s reproduction that makes motherhood oppressive. Institutions like compulsory heterosexuality, family, and institutional births have taken over the women’s control over their own biology. Thus, there is a need to free and revalue women’s work.

hierarchical form, forms the theoretical premise basis of the current social-political order (Pateman 1988). In her work, *The Sexual Contract*, she writes that the parties to the social contract invoked by several theorists (barring Hobbes) to explain the origins of the modern state, are not individuals, but family units headed by men. This assumption is implicit in the social contractarians, as recent as Rawls who insists that the parties behind the veil of ignorance are male head of households (Nussbaum 2006).

The formation of family, so easily assumed by the contractarians to exist in the state of nature, in turn, has a sexual contract implicit in it. She writes, “The original contract is not merely a social contract; it is a sexual contract which constitutes men’s patriarchal rights over women” (Pateman 1988, 178). Whereas the social contract gives rise to a civil order marked by civil freedom and equal rights between the parties concerned, the latter contract is characterised by subordination. The state of nature, contrary to what is portrayed, is not marked by equality of all, but by a “natural” sexual difference. The women (are deemed to) naturally lack the capacities of reasoning that makes an individual in the liberal tradition. Through the sexual contract the natural superiority of men is transformed into a civil patriarchal right, by which they offer protection in return for the subordination of women (Pateman 1988). Iris Marion Young too, in her article on *Logic of Masculinist Protection*, while attributing a benign instinct to the patriarchal control of the male head of the household as well as state, sees the family constituted by an unequal control, whereby protection and material sustenance is provided in return for obedience, but deviance is punished (Young 2003).

The insights by Pateman and Young reveal subordination of women in the family. However, they also reveal the unambiguous heterosexual and hetero-normative character of the assumed family unit. The social contract theorists as well as the state, are clearly working with the imagination of a family unit composed of man, woman and child. As Pateman says, it is believed that “sexual relations between men and women, marriage and the family already exist in the state of nature” (Pateman 1988, 12).

The above discussion elaborates how the social order requires a certain kind of family, constituted by man, woman and child, for it to reproduce itself. This raises important questions about what kind of sexuality can be permitted within the family. Feminists like Adrienne Rich have written that family is based on “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich 1980) which serves to control and exploit women, through men’s control of women’s

sexuality and reproduction. In her discussion of modern, post-war, welfarist state, Pateman further elaborates on this hetero-patriarchal nature of the family. She argues that several provisions of this state like family wage, living wage, or child endowment, were dependent on the assumption of standard family unit being constituted by a husband, wife and children. Pateman, thus exposes the patriarchal and indirectly the heterosexist assumptions of family that such supposedly 'benign' and egalitarian practices of the state build on, and reproduces. (Pateman 1988)

Another point is important about the queer theorization on family, and particularly the queer struggles in the family. We have noted how sociologists and political theorists have deemed family to be an important institution, for its role in socializing children into stable adult personalities. John Rawls, has also written about the importance of family in the same vein. Rawls, in his *Theory of Justice* assumed that "the basic structure of a well-ordered society includes the family in some form" (Rawls 1971, 405). Family at the centre of rearing children is so central to Rawls schema of things, that he believed "the monogamous family" to be a part of society's basic structure³⁵ (Rawls 1971, 6). If the family envisioned is already a heterosexual family, it is an important question from the lens of queer struggle for affirmation of one's sexual subjectivity as to what kind of socialisation can such a unit provide. Since the family as an institution operates on the basis of, and actively enforces compulsory heterosexuality, it is the logical next step to argue that alternate sexual expressions do not find encouragement or acceptance by the family.

Theoretically, this point has been made by Judith Butler, in her psycho-analytic discussion of formation of "heterosexual melancholy" (Butler 1990, 95). Borrowing from Freud, Butler uses the concept of 'melancholy' as a response to real or imagined loss, whereby the loss is dealt with not by getting over it, but by identifying with the lost object through its introjection into the ego. Butler applies this analysis to the development of sexuality, to point out that heterosexual sexuality is in fact founded on the melancholic introjection of a desire for one's parent of the same sex, which is unrealizable because of the taboo against homosexuality (Butler 1990, Salih 2002).

³⁵ The function of caregiving and bringing up children remained central to his schema of things, even when his definition of family became wider. In *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, he wrote that "[N]o particular form of the family (monogamous, heterosexual, or otherwise) is required" so long as it performs the task of caring for children and thus reproducing society stably over time and does not run afoul of other political values.

Empirically, the reality of families being non- accepting of alternative sexualities has been found in the narratives of the queer subjects. Jonathan Alexander and Elizabeth Losh, in their article *A Youtube of One's Own* explore the trend of coming out through YouTube “vlogging” (Alexander and Losh 2010). They write that these narratives follow a certain pattern, with some key and frequently reproduced elements: “young gay person discovers his/her difference, or the ‘truth’ about him/herself at an early age, struggles with telling close friends and family, finds various levels of acceptance and rejection, accommodates accordingly, and learns to love his/her life” (Alexander and Losh 2010, 26). The very fact that coming to terms with one’s sexual desires is experienced in terms of “discovering a truth” (K. Plummer 1995) rather than moving seamlessly into exploring and expressing sexual desires, suggests that families and societies readily provide socialization into heterosexual desires while shunning the non- heterosexual ones. Plummer, while laying out the features of the “genre of coming out”, mentions casual linear progression adopted, while *Telling Sexual Stories* of one’s alternate desires:

Childhood is usually seen as an unhappy time, often the source of being gay or lesbian. There is often a strong sense of difference: ‘I never felt as if I fit in. I don’t know why for sure. I felt different. I thought it was because I was more sensitive.’ A deterministic tale suggests that something happens at birth or childhood which sets up this ‘difference’. (Plummer 1995, 93)

Given that the family is envisioned and structured as unequivocally heterosexual, the institution, not surprisingly has received a lot of flak from the queer- feminist circles for their non- accommodation of alternate forms of desires and sexual subjectivity. The strategies that are typically offered through popular channels, including social media, support networks, and personal word-of-mouth, and even transnational channels of queer movements build on these critiques. The next section shall explore these strategies, and attempt to arrive at some broad observations regarding the prescribed modality of queer struggle.

1.2 Modalities of Queer Struggle in the Family

Modalities of queer struggle, in popular circulation generally concern themselves with queer recognition. Recognition, by the state, family, friends has become the sine qua non of queer recognition, and who to struggle it with and how much to struggle for are primary questions

for queer community³⁶. This section shall elaborate on three primary ways in which queer struggles within the family have been envisaged. The idea is not to suggest autonomous and self-sufficient models to understand, classify and execute the queer struggle in neat ways. Instead, there are models only in the cursory sense that they allow us to trace and engage the most common justification given for the position.

The first response to the question *What modality of struggle should a queer subject follow in the family?*, could be to say that the queer subject should not engage in any struggle with(in) the family. This position could arise from the detached position that the response from the family, whether it be outright hostility or reluctant acceptance or even warm affirmation, is a futile matter for the well-being of the queer subject. Either way, the heterosexual family can provide only so much scope for queer flourishing, and hence the subject should focus on other aspects of their social-political and personal development rather than engage with the family on this matter at all.

This position can be derived from the Lauren Berlant's exposition of *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 2011). Berlant's stance on attachments and optimism being cruel is being invoked in the context of neo-liberal fantasies of good life, and the gap in their actualization³⁷. Berlant's lens of cruel optimism renders the pursuits/struggles for recognition suspect. She writes,

Projects of compassionate recognition have enabled a habit of political obfuscation of the differences between emotional and material (legal, economic, and institutional) kinds of social reciprocity. Self-transforming compassionate recognition and its cognate forms of solidarity *are* necessary for making political movements thrive contentiously against all sorts of privilege, but they have also provided a means for making minor structural adjustments seem like major events, because the theatre of compassion is emotionally intense. Recognition all too often becomes an experiential end

³⁶ The struggle for 'more' and correct forms of recognition has been named by Paddy McQueen as the "deficit model of recognition". He critiques the scholars of recognition like Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth of advocating this, "in which the solution to problems of identity and social injustice lies in the expanding or altering of recognition relations" (McQueen 2014). Coming out, in this sense, can be said to have a deficit model of recognition as its premise.

³⁷ Berlant describes cruel optimism as "as a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *impossible*, sheer fantasy, or *too possible*, and toxic". These relations can be cruel because it "attends to practices of self-interruption, self-suspension, and self-abeyance." (Berlant 2011).

in itself, an emotional event that protects what is unconscious, impersonal, and unrelated to anyone's intentions about maintaining political privilege. (Berlant 2011, 182)

Berlant's theory has been invoked in matters of queer recognition by Maria Tonini, while explaining the ambiguity in recognition in young queer members of the Niral club in Delhi (Tonini 2016, Tonini 2018). She quotes Berlant to say that "to achieve some form of intimate acknowledgment or acceptance (by peers, family members, state) would itself be tantamount to being recognised; the prospect of being able to experience that emotional event rendered all other claims, and specifically those of a political nature secondary or even irrelevant" (Tonini 2016, 57). Berlant's aim, here, is not to dismiss pursuits of good life (as irrational), but only to understand as to "Why do people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies – say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work – when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds" (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 2011, 2) However, her analysis help us see that recognition, whether with respect to the state or family, can be a way of holding to attachments, promises and norms that ultimately disadvantage the subject.

The second position on queer struggles in the family has been much talked about, and manifests in the form of queer families formed with other queer subjects, with similar experiences, as an alternate to families formed "by blood and by marriage". Kath Weston has written an important work titled *Families We Choose* (Weston 1991), elaborating on the emergent phenomena of alternate kinships and chosen families. The exploration of alternate families, Weston writes, was a response to the risk gay people earlier faced between either leading their gay lives in secrecy or disclosing their sexual preferences and shocking their family members into alienation. Exploring alternate affective associations with those who share the queer mode of living, destabilised the idea of kinship associations as something permanent and the only source of emotional companionship. The queer kinships were rarely chosen freely, and were constrained by race, caste, access to money etc. However, the adage, '[B]lood is thicker than water' stands no longer true, as "Kinship began to seem more like an effort and a choice than a permanent, unshakable bond or a birthright" (Weston 1991, 16) (cite Kath Weston, xv). Naisargi Dave, refers to Weston's idea of "chosen family" (Dave 2012, 4) to describe her experience where accessibility and "exceptional hospitality" (Dave 2012, 4) offered by a lesbian couple to those marginalised for their desires. Dave writes of

this home as an “exceptional place”, “something of a queer halfway house and cooperative” (Dave 2012, 4), where friends and strangers came seeking solace from heartache, marriage pressure, abusive and unwelcoming families, loneliness, and in the process found “queer parents, brothers, sisters and daily companions” (Dave 2012, 4).

Lastly, **coming out**, more than any other form of struggle, has been talked of as essential component of the queer struggle for self- affirmation and seeking recognition with others, be it one’s family, friends or the institutions of the state and civil society.

Kath Weston writes that as the lesbian and gay movement gathered strength in the 1970s in America, it called upon the “everyday queers” (Weston 1991, xv) to disclose their sexual identity, at least to parents and other close association. “To come out or not to come out” (Weston 1991, xv) became the question of the day and remains so even today. In the essay *Coming out to “Blood” relatives*, Weston notes that questions like “are you out to your parents/ family” (Weston 1991, 43) are questions that inevitably arise in the process of getting to know another gay or lesbian person.

Notably coming out as “an established genre of self-narrative and self-identification” (Fortier 2003), has to be performed not only within one’s personal and close circles, but also is a strategy for struggling with the state and civil society institutions. The chapter shall refrain from discussing this aspect of the queer struggle given the focus on the struggle within the family. However, it helps us labour the point that coming out is considered to be the very first step for any queer struggle, as Desma Holocomb’s article proclaims directly in her article *It All Begins with Coming Out*. It is testifying to this popular purchase of coming out that scores of self- help books, articles and support groups have come up encouraging, supporting and advising the queer subjects regarding the best plan of action in the matter.

It is the argument of this chapter that the several modes of engagement mentioned above follow some broad narratives. First, all these modalities, in some way, prescribes for the queer subject to move away from the childhood family, physically and /or affectively. The suggestion is to find support structures, as well as sources of material sustenance outside of the family, since the conventional family cannot be definitely expected to provide either very successfully or unconditionally to those falling outside its bounds of normativity- in this case, the queer individual.

The prescription to build alternate affective structures, in the form of gay families and queer kinship networks does so directly. It builds on the idea that the prospects of being shunned from original childhood families have pushed several queer subjects to repress their alternate sexual desires or to conduct them via a double life. The distinction between intimate private domain, and “intimate publics” (Berlant 2008) has been blurred, as gay and queer collectives and subcultures have replaced childhood families as “true” families offering familiarity of experience and comfort, acceptance to the queer subject.

Berlant’s position suggests queer subject to move away from attachments to prospects of affective recognition. If all recognition is a “misrecognition you can bear, a transaction that affirms you without, again, necessarily feeling good or being accurate” (Berlant 2011, 26), then struggle for recognition are necessarily disorienting, misleading or futile. Thus, to hold on to expectations of acceptance and affective sustenance for one’s queer self, shall be to keep the self and the various modes of its development (that is, larger social and political changes) in abeyance. Berlant’s position, thus can be used to argue for moving away from the family as a site of familiarity, and comfort, irrespective of whether one moves away physically or not.

The prescription for coming out, is more complicated. Unlike the previous two strands of thought, when considered alone, it recognises that that the self of the queer subject is an inter-subjective self. Charles Taylor has written about the significance of recognition for an individual from their “significant others”, whereby misrecognition by the latter can distort the self of the individual (George Herbert Mead, quoted in C. Taylor 1994, 32). Coming out, however, moves away from the idea of the childhood home as an affective space for queer potentials, even as it prescribes a particular kind of engagement.

Michael Brown, in his book, *Closet Space* writes that coming out can be, and often has been in the narratives of queer individuals, equated with “moving out” (Brown 2000, 49) of one’s familial homes. In his book, Brown argues that while closet has been largely seen as a metaphorical concept, seen to signify oppression, it can also be seen as a spatial concept. Queer individuals occupy the closet as a material space “of different sizes and shapes” (Brown 2000, 44), ranging from disciplining their own body language and comportment to inhabiting specific sites of the city and even “national closets” (Brown 2000, 88). From this argument, Brown extrapolates, if inhabiting the closet can be spatialized, so can “coming out” of it. Physical mobility, and migration in particular, becomes the means through which

coming out has to be spatially experienced. “It wasn’t enough just to open the closet door; one had to leave its interior for a different location” (Brown 2000, 48), Brown writes. He quotes John Preston, from his book *A Member of the Family*, “I had to leave my family to be gay” (Michael brown).

Moving out, or at least moving away also becomes clear when we look at the narratives of coming out. The plot-points in these narratives are telling sites from which one can glean and recreate the assumptions and imagery of the childhood family. The struggle to understand one’s own desires, as well as the pressing need to state it to people around, once discovered suggests that there is a fundamental incommensurability between the surroundings and the queer subject. It is this incommensurability that makes the alternate sexuality of the queer subject a weighty matter, which needs to be spoken out before it can form a reality even for the subject, in a way that heterosexually inclined young people do not need to.

Another feature of coming out is to offer practical advice, to help the other queer subjects to go through the expected moments of queer struggle. A user by the name Gaygod, in the Q&A section of his videos answers the question “When is the best time to come out” (Alexander and Losh 2010): “Okay so the best time to come out is when you are a little older and independent and on your own, because when you are dependent on your parents they can take away privileges” (Alexander and Losh 2010). All these “popular” and supportive material on coming out can be seen to be doing three things. The availability of such practical advice, through online channels and proliferate production of self- help booklets for queer subjects and their parents, support group meetings etc undertake crucial affective labour. It fixes one’s fluid and confusing desires into a stable identity. It creates recognisable ways of expressing and performing certain identities, or more accurately, recognisable ways of performing certain desires as identities.

Lastly, and importantly for the purpose of this chapter, the coming out, even as it is directly focused on the story of oneself and one’s own struggles, also tells a lateral story. It tells a story of being situated, within one’s original family, before the subject is able to come to a point of determination about changing their situation through an event. The advice regarding mobilising one’s resources before ‘acting’ to assert one’s sexual identity as well as the narratives indicating that “It all begins with coming out” (Holcomb 2001), suggests that till now, the subject has kept any expression of their sexuality in abeyance, and have not been acting on it in the familial space at all. Thus, coming out tells a story of being situated in

pathos, in silence, in a passive state devoid of agency and resistance, biding one's time before they can finally act. As Michael Brown writes, "By being placed figuratively 'into a closet', gay men and lesbians are marginalised; by coming out, they are liberated" (Brown 2000, 2). And if one follows the spatialization move of Brown, one could say that to stay at one's original heterosexual home is marginalization, to get out is liberation.

The next section shall delve into the other part of the set of observations made from the various modalities of conducting queer struggle: that is, struggles in the family, prescribed in these forms are frequently and almost consistently guided by conceptions of home and homely. In other words, it shall portray the movement outside of one's original family as a movement from unhomely to the homely, as well as provide critiques of the same.

1.3 Coming Out/ Moving Out

Sara Ahmed's exposition about the movement between homes can give us an entry point into a much-needed critical enquiry into the prescribed movement away from original families, to new queer homes. Ahmed writes about "being at home" and "leaving home" (Ahmed 2000) in the context of transnational journeys. These movements, she writes, raises several questions. They raise questions of what home means, both for the narrative of being at home and leaving home. They also push us to think about what movements are possible? In her book, *Strange Encounters*, she writes

What movements are possible and, moreover, what movements are impossible? Who has a passport and can move *there*? Who does not have a passport, and yet moves? These provocative questions echo Avtar Brah's, when she asks: 'The question is not simply about who travels, but when, how, and under what circumstances (Ahmed 2000, 80).

The context of transnational journeys aside, some of these questions become important to raise, even in the context of normative journeys of queer subjects from original familial homes to liberatory queer homes. Who can move, and who cannot move, and what does it mean for them in the sense of homing is a question that these normative prescriptions do not consider except through the moralistic dichotomies.

Let us begin with the question of what home means, for those “at home” (Ahmed 2000, 88) and for those “leaving home” (Ahmed 2000, 91). For our purpose, being “at-home” shall refer to the subjects who are still, emotionally and spatially associated with their childhood, familial homes. They have not moved away, in the sense of detaching themselves emotionally from their families. Leaving home here would mean the subjects who have built affective and material networks for their sustenance, outside of and autonomous from their childhood families.

The existing literature already contains some indicative answers to the said question. Theorists of home agree that home embodies many meanings. However, one of the most dominant narratives about the home is “[H]ome is where the heart is”³⁸. In popular discourse, the distinctions between house and home are frequently heard. House is supposed to be the physical structure in which one dwells, home is much more. This popular culture reference reverberates in the work of academicians working on the concept. Roberta Rubenstein (2001) writes- home is “not merely a physical structure or a geographical location but always an emotional space” (Rubenstein 2011, quoted in Dowling and Blunt). Nikos Papastergiadis writes that it is where “where personal and social meanings are grounded” (Papastergiadis 1998, quoted in Blunt and Dowling 2006)

Dowling and Blunt, build on this duality to understand home to be not one or the other; it cannot but be a relational entity between the physical and emotional, the material and the imaginative:

[W]e insist that one of the defining features of home is that it is both material and imaginative, a site and a set of meanings/ emotions. Home is a material dwelling and it is also an affective space, shaped by emotions and feelings of belonging. As geographers, we understand home as a relation between material and imaginative realms and processes (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 22).

Home as a relation between material and imaginative/ affective realms and processes makes a space where an individual can find material sustenance, as well as emotional comfort, familiarity and acceptance. Home being the site of familiarity, comfort and security (Fortier

³⁸ This narrative is generated by several sources including popular media. Elvis Presley’s song *Home is where the heart is*, and the Asian Paints programme *Where the Heart is* (that captures the homes of celebrities for viewers) are two examples of narratives which create the discourse of home as a haven of material comfort, and emotional sustenance).

2003), “being-at-home” (Ahmed 2000) and “not being-at-home” (Ahmed 2000, 84) are powerful metaphors which have come to dictate the modality of queer struggle with(in) the family. “‘Being home’ refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; ‘not being home’ is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself” (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 21).

The experiences of most queer subjects, as well as theoretical critique of the traditional heterosexual families by queer- feminists shows it to be structured, materially and affectively, on the basis of compulsory heterosexuality. Most queer subjects do not find themselves to be at home in such a space. The heterosexual family networks may not have the knowledge or experience to provide support to the queer individual, irrespective of the degree of acceptance that they offer. Queer subject who finds themselves unable to confirm, or at the margins of the values that hold together a family will find themselves to be not “at home” (Martin and Mohanty 1986, 198). An oft-cited and apt illustration occurs in the N Minnie Bruce Pratt’s essay ‘Identity: Skin Blood Heart’, she writes, wherein her identity as a white, middle class lesbian woman places her at the “edge” (Martin and Mohanty 1986, 197) or the fringes of what it is to be home.

Being at the edge of home, in one’s traditional family has by no means reduced the significance of home for the queer individual, and in fact might have intensified the desire. David Eng has written that queer migration is necessitated by a ‘traumatic displacement from the lost heterosexual “origin”’ (Eng 1997). However, despite this, Eng also writes that, “despite frequent and trenchant queer dismissals of home and its discontents, it would be a mistake to underestimate enduring queer affiliations to this concept” (Eng 1997, 32). It is a sign of this enduring affiliation, that migrations to a new home are seen to constitute the possibility, and in some ways, essential condition of emancipation.

Fortier similarly writes about the queer homing desires, which taking from Avtar Brah, the originator of this phrase, desires to feel at home achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration (Fortier 2003). Alan Sinfield, apart from insisting on the migration between “not home” and “home”, draws attention to “the diasporic sense of separation and loss” (Alan Sinfield, quoted in Fortier 2003, 135) experienced by the queer subjects when they feel cut off from the “heterosexual culture” (Alan Sinfield, quoted in Fortier 2003, 117) of their

childhood homes. In the event of migration, or exile, how-so-ever one chooses to describe the movement away from families, creates the “longing to belong” (Fortier 2003, 127). Home in this condition, becomes an aspiration, even as the site of homing shifts, Sinfield writes: “most of us are born and/or socialized into (presumably) heterosexual families. We have to move away from them, at least to some degree; and into, if we are lucky, the culture of a minority community” (Alan Sinfield, quoted in Fortier 2003, 117).

All this suggests that for the queer subject, home is presented to be the destination, and not the origin. The queer subjects are already strangers in the heterosexual cultures, which becomes the epitome of loss/absence of home and unhomely-ness. Estrangement then becomes the push factor, rather than the consequence of moving out, just as homing is something that is gained rather than lost in this movement. To fulfil the void then, queer subjects’ migration. Sinfield writes that lesbians and gays do not disperse from a shared home but, rather, “assemble” in the new home (Fortier 2003).

The desire to leave unhomely spaces, and move into new homely surroundings is then what informs the queer struggles within the family. However, the insights gained from several scholars help us interrogate into the biases, prejudices and exclusivities that the presumption of such a movement propagates.

Anne Fortier, after detailing the normative logics behind the prescription to move out, presents an important critique of the same. She writes that the assumed dichotomy between unhomely and homely spaces is in fact errant. Putting the rhetorical question- can the journey from ‘not home’ to ‘home’ ever be completed- she insists that homing desires are “quasi-mythical” (Fortier 2003, 119) fantasies that are always suspended. David Eng also expresses his apprehension about the moment of final arrival, about finally feeling at home: The queer subject, according to Eng, is “suspended between an ‘in’ and an ‘out’ . . . between origin and destination, and between private and public – queer entitlements to home . . . remain doubtful” (Eng 1997, 32).

One reason for this doubt, Sinfield argues, is that homecoming of the queer individual is always deferred, given the larger heteronormative context in which we live. Since the world operates on presumption of heterosexuality, the queer subject has to keep coming out again and again, almost indefinitely, before they can be completely be at ease even in their new home. To the extent that the aim of the given movement is to “move beyond the framework

of normative heterosexism” (Fortier 2003), the misrecognition takes away the feeling of ever being completely at home.

Secondly, the distinction between homely and unhomely does not hold because all spaces, including those of queer sub- cultures are constituted by incommensurability and inequalities. Several scholars have written about the emergent queer subcultures are far from being completely egalitarian. Alok Gupta in his article *Englishpur ki Kothi*, has written of class-based divisions that tend to dissect queer collectives on the line of political vs. social. He argues that while the political imperatives demand a cross class inclusivity in the movement, it doesn't go very far in terms of making durable companionship since people tend to hang out 'with their own' (class members) in the realm of social (Gupta 2005). Pat Hussain in the context of USA (Hussain, 1997) and Antra Sharma, Anhad Hundal and Aparna Bhaumik in the context of India (Sharma, Hundal , & Bhaumik, 2017) have written how despite the intent to address the intersectionality in LGBTQ+ community, participation and agenda of most queer community activities remains limited to a certain class. Other scholars have pointed to the disparities in the inclusivity extended by the queer movement, along the lines of caste, race, and even gender and sexuality.

Just as queer and gay subcultures do not necessarily guarantee the actualization of the fantasy of home, the unequivocal denouncing of the childhood original families as unhomely non-heterosexual desires needs questioning. Dowling and Blunt in their book *home* have dismantled the dichotomy between homely and unhomely by stating that the “apparently homely places might be unhomely and places that are assumed to be unhomely are rendered homely” (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 26).

Rather than focusing on places as homogenously unhomely (and oppressive) and homogenously homely (happy, liberated and flourishing), focus must be on 'home-making' which allows us to recognize the elements of both belonging and alienation. More importantly, a focus on home- making shall also allow us to interrogate the practices and material context in which shifts between homes takes place. It enables us to see the act of moving out and moving away from one's original family not merely as a courageous act of struggle towards emancipation. Rather it helps us to see it as “supported action” (Butler 2015), to borrow from Judith Butler's theory of appearance. Anne Fortier writes:

A striking feature of the discourse of migration-as-homecoming is how 'home' is devoid of individual bodies or, rather, how it is assumed that any (gay and lesbian) body will feel at home in its hub. Likewise, the very materiality of 'making home' is obscured: the economic capital, the laws of consumer capitalism, the daily labour of maintenance and of 'servicing' the clientele, the struggles to create and maintain 'safe' spaces in the face of adversity, and so on. In this respect, 'home' becomes a fetish by virtue of this double process of concealment and projection (Fortier 2003, 119).

Sara Ahmed in her work, *Strange Encounters* similarly, critically engages with Rosa Braidotti on the question of resources and capability. Braidotti writes of movement, which she terms nomadism as "the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour...It is the subversion of conventions that define the nomadic state, not the literal act of travelling" (Braidotti 2011 quoted in Ahmed 2000, 82).

We have already seen the hint of this thought earlier through the chapter, wherein movement is equated as the condition of emancipation. Sara Ahmed is critical of Braidotti's position. Her earlier question of who has the passport to move becomes valid here. She writes, "Indeed, what is at stake here is a certain kind of Western subject, the subject of and in theory, as a subject who is free to move" (Ahmed 2000). The value of choice is emphasized by Braidotti too, who writes- "Homelessness as a chosen condition, also expresses the *choice* of a situated form of heterogeneity" (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* 2000). Ahmed writes,

What is offered here is a liberal narrative of a subject who has autonomy and is free to choose, even if what is chosen is a refusal of the kind of subjectivity we might recognise as classically liberal (Ahmed 2000).

Ahmed says that if a subject is free to leave a home, indeed to choose homelessness over any home, then it is perhaps because the world is his home. Choosing homelessness over already being homeless suggests a privileged subject, whose privilege (material or symbolic) "does not affect its ability to occupy a given space".

Indeed, as we now think of the proliferation of the queer discourses urging and “supporting” its community members to come out, and move away and out of their given familial homes, one needs to think of all the material supports that work towards allowing such an appearance. What allows queer subjects to move out of their “double- lives” of closet economies, and build new families and kinship relations in new settings called homes? Could this be a result of neo- liberalism, which through its appendages of real estate industry, housing markets, pink economy and new restaurant-pubs-bars chains have created where the queer subjects could move into without a sense of incommensurability, and thus feel “at home”?

Such questions bring up back to the questions of passports. Who has the passports to move, and who does not? And what happens to those who cannot move? The queer movement and theory, at least in its transnationally circulating, western originated discourses, have adopted a dismissive, almost pitying view of such subjects. There is a widespread consensus that ‘closeted’ individuals are “living a lie” and “aren’t quite as happy” (Quora n.d.). It is not difficult to understand that those unable to, or not choosing to move away and out of their families are thought to be doomed to a life of passivity, unhomeliness, unhappiness and consequently a cowardly, and morally questionable life.

However, if the home is about home- making practices, then it is possible to argue that home-making practices, resting on a set of very different supports can indeed create homeliness within the most unhomely of spaces, within the most homophobic of families. Just as it is important to suggest and support queer practices to enable the subjects to find liberation in new ways, to “move out”, it is equally important to recognise and look for queer potentials in the erstwhile spaces and subjects who continue to inhabit them. The next chapter, in this spirit, shall look at the families and kinship networks in the Indian families, to understand the potentials for queer belonging that may exist thereon.

CHAPTER 3

ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES OF QUEER HOMEMAKING:

LOCATING CONJUGALITY AT THE HEART OF QUEER STRUGGLES IN THE FAMILY

Introduction

The last chapter concluded with the insistence that since not all subjects have the resources or the passports, to seek out alternative families and kinship, by moving out of their traditional homes, practices of homemaking must to be explored to understand queer possibilities within the family. This chapter will seek to explore how the practices of queer home-making and queer struggles unfold in the traditional families.

Marriage is certainly not the only conduit through which queer presence or queer resistance in the family persists. Two other conduits- sex change³⁹, and queer friendships⁴⁰ have been much elaborated in discussions of queerness in the Indian society. However, marriage has been singled out in this analysis for its centrality to home-making and family life in general. TN Madan has written that family is considered to be a “grouping of households of agnatically related men, their wives and unmarried sisters and daughters” (Madan 1993), thus identifying marriage and birth as important elements of a family. In the modern times, even though ideas about what constitutes a family is expanding, marriage and children remain common elements in how we imagine a family (Pathak 2022).

This chapter will build on this centrality of marriage to family and home, to understand how it figures in the queer struggles within the family. If marriage is central to home-

³⁹ Sex change as a way of imagining queer possibilities is seen abundantly in popular (mythological and historical) narratives, which form the commonsense on social relations and what counts as legitimate and illegitimate. For instance, a queer association is imagined between Shiva and Vishnu, wherein Vishnu took the form of the beautiful seductress Mohini and thus seduced shiva. Sometimes, shiva himself assumes the form of a woman to conduct his love plays with Parvati. (Vanita and Kidwai 2000). Madhavi Menon (2018) and Ruth Vanita (2000) have written about queer possibilities within the tradition of devotion in India. The sex of the devotee is often thought of as feminine irrespective of their social gender, in relation to God who is masculine. The chapter shall discuss contemporary examples of sex-change instances for queer purposes.

⁴⁰ Queer potentials in and through friendships has been explored. Hoshang Merchant's edited book *Yaarana* (1999), and Giti Thadani's organization for lesbian women, named Sakhi and her book *Sakhiyani* (1996) (alluding to female friendships), speaks of the popularity of friendship as a trope in queer theory and praxis. Similarly, Dibyajyoti Sarma and R. Raj Rao have written of *yaari* to say that “*yaar* embodies elements of both a friend and a lover” (Sarma and Rao 2009, xxi), which makes it an apt concept for queer relationships. Additionally, they write, it plays an important role in queer negotiations, since it provides a “buffer zone” by allowing for single-sex spaces.

homemaking, how can it be understood to intervene in the practices of home-making for the queer struggle within families— shall be the primary enquiry of this chapter. Building on marriage as a central axis of defining and creating a home, the possibilities of queer struggles shall be located in the different, subversive, counter-intuitive exercise of marital practices. For interrogating this case, the chapter shall delve into narratives, from secondary literature, anthology of interviews, case stories and newspaper reports.

The first section shall delve into a discussion on the institution of marriage in the sociological accounts, to understand whether a seemingly and predominantly heteronormative institution like marriage can even allow for queer possibilities. In setting up this enquiry, the section shall borrow from Bourdieu's 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu 1977) to introduce a distinction between the activism for changing marriage 'rules' to recognize queer marriages, and queer conjugal 'practices' that work around these rules. A critical analysis of the former shall be undertaken in favour of seeing, reading and understanding the marital practices and their ability to create queer potentials within marriage.

The next four sections shall identify specific practices of marriage, which are creatively and subversively engaged with, to carve out subversive possibilities. The practices identified are— same-sex unions, marriages other than one's own, double life and marriages of convenience, and finally, the avoidance of heterosexual marriage.

3.1 From 'Opus Operatum' to 'Modus Operandi': Practicing Queerness via Marriage

Marriage, in most societies, is the most important institution which holds together a family. This is true particularly in case of India where the imperative to marry is seen as one of the most important imperatives of an individual. Alliance theorists represented by Louis Dumont maintain that, "the institution of Hindu marriage is the veritable key to understanding Indian social structure" (Uberoi, Foreword 2018). Similarly, Nigam Sahaya, the author of the book "*The Shaadi Story: Behind the Scenes of the Big Fat Indian Wedding*" writes that "We are weaned on the idea of getting married to somebody or the other...All forms of culture, familial culture, religiosity- all these talk about marriage as a part of an adult's destiny" (Sahaya 2020).

The importance of marriage is evident from it being considered both an event and a structure. As a structure, it is considered an important institution which structures social life, and well as anchors political life. As an event, it shapes the life of the woman as well as her conjugal and natal homes. It marks, in other words, what Veena Das calls a “critical event”, for the parties involved, and particularly the woman (Das 1995).

Geetika Bapna’s work, *Marriage, Language and Time: Towards an Ethnography of “nibhana”* on marriage substantiates Das’s observation (Bapna 2012). Bapna writes that marriage denotes a transformative event for the woman. Even though a woman’s time and sexuality are strictly controlled before and after the marriage, the time ‘before’ marriage time is characterized by freedom, lack of worry, enjoying oneself, by “*ghumna-phirna, khana-peena*” (Bapna 2012, 112) etc. The ‘after’, on the other hand, is defined in this temporalization, through the idioms of “*fikr*” (anxiety) and “*chinta*” (worry) (Bapna 2012, 111). This does not mean that singlehood is seen in positive terms; instead, it is considered as an empty time, marred by the “suspect intentions” and “non- acceptance” from the society. The “ontologization” of the after, as against the “deontologization” of the ‘before’ is clearly evident (Bapna 2012, 111).

Bapna’s conception of “nibhana” additionally reveals marriage to be a set of practices. It offers an insight into the “inner life of marriage” (Bapna 2012, 109), whereby marriage is not a stable entity, but is constantly in flux through the varying enactments which make up the moral world of marriage. The centrality of the vocabulary of “nibhana” to the imagination of married women suggests, not a resignation of the hardships of married life, but an active and intended participation in conjugal practices to make the marriage work (Bapna 2012, 117).

If practices form the institution of marriage, then how are these practices practiced form the content of the institution, which is otherwise an empty signifier. Practicing them differently, in that sense could reveal subversive possibilities within marriage. The choice of whether to marry or refuse marriage, who to marry, through what rituals, and whether and what requirements of the married life should be exercised, by this logic, create space for different repertoires of home- making practices. This chapter makes this reasoning the basis of its interrogation of queer possibilities, via conjugal practices, in an otherwise, traditionally heteronormative institution.

The enquiry, thereby hopes to draw on and intervene in sociological literature in order to evaluate the current practices of conjugal home-making in the family, and look for cues for a critical way forwards. The predominant sociological literature on marriage characterizes it, rightfully, as a heteronormative institution. This analysis is based on the sociological rules of heteronormativity, patrilineality, patrilocality as well as the legal provisions which forbid alliances between same-sex couples. In India, as in several other countries, marriage between the individuals of same-sex is not yet legalized. Because of this lack of recognition, many spousal benefits like medical care, inheritance, guardianship and bank nominee provisions do not recognize one's same-sex partner.

The patrilocal and patrilineal bias of the property laws leaves out homosexual couples and families as a valid subject. Adoption laws in India, even after the decriminalization of same sex associations, debar the 'inferior couples' like the LGBTQIA+ community from adopting children together –demonstrating that homosexual couples still aren't equal before the law (Awasthi 2019). Noor, an equal rights activist said that it a couple spends their entire life in a “domestic partnership”, and yet the “same-sex spouse cannot enjoy the extension of their rights and benefits to their partner because the law doesn't recognise the union as constitutional”. (Shrivastava 2021).

It is in this context that queer activists are trying to intervene in family and marriage laws, and challenge the dominance and pervasiveness of heterosexual marriage. Particularly after the decriminalization of sodomy under Section 377 of IPC in 2018, several couples have come out, have married, and are now seeking legal recognition for their alliance, under the special marriage act (Pathak 2022). Nikesh Usha Pushkaran and Sonu M S, from Kochi got married in 2018 at the Guruvayur temple in the presence of their close friends and family. They made their marriage public after the 2018 *Navtej Johar* verdict, and are the first gay couple to move the court for recognizing their same-sex marriage. A similar story is that of Supriyo Chakraborty and Abhay Dang. Chakraborty and Dang have been living together since 2013 and got married in 2021, in a “big fat Indian wedding” (Sahaya 2020, Pathak 2022).

These developments are paralleled by a tussle in the state institutions regarding the legitimacy and legalization of queer marriages. In April 2022, NCP leader Supriya Sule brought a private member bill, seeking to amend the *Special Marriage Act* to give equal rights of marriage to the LGBT community (The Indian Express 2022). On November 25,

2022, a Supreme Court panel consisting of the Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud gave a notice to the center, on the petitions for recognition of marriage by two couples- Supriyo Chakraborty and Abhay Dang, and Parth Phiroze Mehrotra and Uday Raj Anand. The panel also pointed out that several petitions for legalization of gay marriage are pending before Delhi and Kerala High Courts (The Indian Express 2022). Several of these cases are taken by the lawyers, Maneka Guruswamy and Arundhati Katju, who rose to national fame after successfully fighting the legal battle for decriminalization of sodomy under Section 377. They, through their 'Marriage Project' have taken up the mantle to legalize gay marriages as the next landmark aim in their legal activism (Latest Laws 2020).

Apart from the practical benefits that marriage confers, a second reason for demanding the reform of marriage laws has been the modern hyphenation of marriage and love. Anthony Giddens, in his book *Transformation of Intimacy* has written about the shift towards "pure relations" (Giddens 1992, 58), and its impact on several kinds of intimacy including marriage. Pure relationships refer to those which are entered on the basis of emotional quality of relationship, "rewarding sex life" (Giddens 1992, 12) and the mutual benefits to both parties, rather than familial choices and status ranking. The hyphenation of marriage with love and desire is instrumental for this "conservative institution" to "break free from its oppressive past" (Grossi 2014, 83) and has helped bring about social and legal acceptance of inter- caste and inter religious marriages, easy divorce, singlehood etc.

Renata Grossi, in her work *Looking for Love in the Legal Discourse of Marriage* has particularly highlights that consideration for love is driving the demand for marriage reforms in favor of same- sex couples (Grossi 2014). In the Australian legal reforms, for instance, it was pointed out how same- sex marriage is "about recognizing love and commitment — and isn't that the very definition of the marital ideal, of what marriage, of what civil union is fundamentally about; love and commitment" (Grossi 2014). In India too, apart from the more practical considerations for demanding recognition, ideals of romantic love play an important role. Maneka Guruswamy's defense of marriage project reflects this ideal:

In India, inter-caste couples continue to face social stigma even though such relationships are constitutionally legal. Hence, the very act of policing love, seems to have been an integral part of our collective legal history. We are not a country that recognises girlfriend or boyfriend or dating. We are a country that sanctifies one kind of relationship & that is marriage. (Latest Laws 2020)

The demand for legal recognition for same- sex marriages is certainly one way in which marriage has figured in the same- sex negotiations within the family. However, even though these attempts deserve appreciation and further discussion, it is not in this form that this chapter has argued for centring marriage as a mode of queer struggle. The activism around legal recognition for marriage and thereby to change marital laws, official and sociological, runs against same difficulties associated with the primacy of coming out, as pointed in the first chapter.

Firstly, demand for same-sex marriage rights as a strategy of queer negotiation implies that until queer marriages are legalised, queer struggle within the family is postponed for another time and place. A ‘here and now’ account of struggle within the family is not possible. For instance, Noora and Adhila, a Chennai-based lesbian couple pointed out, that since “[I]n India, even now, same-sex couples cannot get married”, they “plan to migrate to another country, where LGBTQIA+ people have equal rights” to get married (Krishna P S 2022). Nikesh and Sonu, a gay couple who got married, write that they know several couples like them, who have migrated to countries like Canada and the Netherlands. “They go there, get married and settle there”, adds Nikesh. (Krishna P S 2022)

Secondly, even when queer marriages are in the picture, they cannot but exist in a sequential relation with coming out. Bindumadhav Khire, the president of the *Samapathik Trust*, Pune, in an interview for *Whistling in the Dark* says that his idea of a ‘gay utopia’ is where LGBT people have equal right, including the “right to marry any human being, work in any profession and have/adopt children” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 264). Incidentally, in this utopia the queer goals are organized in a linear fashion. Khire said: “If you are straight, help us achieve our utopia. If you are gay, first become comfortable with your sexuality, then come out and help fight for LGBTQI rights” (Sarma and Rao, 264).

Queer marriages in this sense hardly marks an alternative to the hegemony of coming out, and in fact partakes many of the critiques of the coming out phenomena mentioned in chapter one. Judith Butler has pointed to the exclusionary effects of making same- sex marriage as the new axis for queer recognition. “[T]he proposition that marriage should become the only way to sanction or legitimate sexuality is unacceptably conservative ... What does this do to the community of the non married, the single, the divorced, the uninterested, the non- monogamous, and how does the sexual field become reduced, in its very legibility, once we extend marriage as a norm?”, she writes (Butler 2002). Michael

Warner argues that the demand for recognition of same-sex marriages replicates and privileges heterosexuality, and writes back into the power of the state to recognise or dismiss intimate relationships. It “authorizes the state to make one form of life — already normative — even more privileged”, he notes (Warner 1999).

Dibyajyoti Sharma and R Raj Rao, have drawn on the works of these critical scholars to caution against the capitalist co-option of the desire for gay marriage. They note how the ideology of monogamous love, the emerging reproductive technologies and panic around HIV/ AIDS is used to generate enthusiasm around gay marriage and gay family, which can then be capitalized on by the consumerist forces.

It is well known that queer men and women have higher disposable incomes than heterosexuals, and now the market forces want that money, which can only be had by brainwashing queer people into spending on consumer durables and the like. One of the dubious ways in which this is achieved is by co-opting queers into heteronormativity, so that they live under the perpetual illusion that they are a family, and even start spending like a heteropatriarchal family. (Sarma and Rao 2009, 264)

This chapter shall try a different maneuver. Rather than focusing on marriage ‘rules’, these chapter shall make marital ‘practices’ its point of enquiry. The distinction between kinship ‘rules’ and kinship ‘practices’ has been borrowed here from the works of the noted French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu, in his ‘theory of practice’, has prescribed a shift from rules to practice, from “opus operatum” to “modus operandi” (Bourdieu 1977, 72). In studying the Kabyle community, Bourdieu departs from structuralist Levi Strauss to make the distinction between official kinship and practical kinship, treating the latter as an explanatory category. It is not so much that official kinship is a falsity and the practical kinship constitutes the truth of the matter; rather both exist for different functions. He writes, “representational kinship is nothing other than the group's self-representation and the almost theatrical presentation it gives of itself when acting in accordance with that self-image. By contrast, practical groups exist only through and for the particular functions in pursuance of which they have been effectively mobilized; and they continue to exist only because they have been kept in working order by their very use and by maintenance work” (Bourdieu 1977, 35). Here we find Bourdieu’s methodological critique of objectivism and rational choice theory which informs the anthropological gaze and keeps it confined to the

“hospitable notion” (Bourdieu 1977, 22) of the rule rather than rocky terrain of what is “continuously practiced, kept up, and cultivated” (Bourdieu 1977, 37).

Bourdieu’s critique of anthropology remains relevant to the disciplines of Indian sociology and anthropology. Patricia Uberoi has written that the sociology of marriage in India is a field that is rather high on theory and relatively low on evidence and “in-depth ethnographic studies of changing aspects of Indian marriage across the range of Indian communities are rather few and far between” (Uberoi 2018, x). She writes, “Despite the proliferation of theoretical literature and public discourse on the state of Indian conjugality, it is remarkable how inadequately theory is put to empirical test or the shibboleths of public discourse challenged in the light of facts on the ground”. In her edited works, she notes that “the reluctance to address the subject of the Indian family stems not from the unimportance and marginality of the field, but rather from its importance and sensitivity” (Uberoi 1993, 1).

Unfortunately, even those studies which have conducted empirical data to access these practices are often blind to queer possibilities within marriage. Pushpesh Kumar, in his article *Queering Indian Sociology* has written that apart from a few works by the likes of Maya Sharma, Sanjay Srivastava, A Revathi etc., feminist sociology tends to overlook the voices of “sexual outcasts” and reproduces the gender binary (P. Kumar 2014). Nivedita Menon’s account of *Sexualities* discusses only the sexualities of cis-heterosexual women (N. Menon 2007). Shalini Grover has done exemplary work in decoding the practices of marriage, kinship and love in the working-class locality of Mohini Nagar in Delhi (Grover 2018). However, despite her insistence on shifting the focus “[F]rom Formal Marriage Rules to Everyday Practices” (Grover 2018. 1), her deep interrogation of conjugal intimacies in Mohini Nagar is blind to the possibilities of same- sex intimacies, and speaks only of heterosexual bonds and relationships.

This chapter shall be a groundwork for bridging this lacuna in the theories of the family, by identifying queer possibilities within the institution of marriage. The post- colonial thinkers, Ruth Vanita, Maya Sharma, Madhavi Menon and others have done rigorous works pointing out how queerness exists in the family. Ruth Vanita has written, “Puritanical forces would like to imagine that same-sex relations exist only in seamy underworlds outside of respectable society; they cannot endure the revelation that same-sex love is everywhere, including in the heart of the family” (Vanita 2005, 162). This chapter will narrow down on

the institution of marriage, and interrogate how this institution in particular figures in the queer presence in the family.

3.2 Same- Sex Unions

The most obvious and direct way in which queerness interacts with marriage, is by tweaking and working around marriage practices to claim a married status for one's same sex associations. Perveen Mody, in her study of love marriages in Delhi and violence it invokes has talked about four kind of love marriages: love marriage, court marriage, love-cum-arranged marriage and elopement (Mody 2008). Except court marriage, and certainly not on account of trying, almost all kinds of love marriages can be observed in the narratives of queer subjects.

The anthology of queer interviews, *Whistling in the Dark* consists of one couple interview, Christopher Benniger and Ram Naidu. They had moved in together in 1993, and considered themselves married. We “actually went to the *Chaturshrunji* temple in Pune and got a priest to marry us” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 50), they said. The couple disagreed on the use of the word marriage for their relationship, perhaps because of their cultural backgrounds. Ram Naidu had been brought up in a family and culture where marriage is indispensable for stability and security and a lifelong commitment. In that sense, marriage as a way of expressing intimacy, trumped all others. Naidu wrote, “Yes, I love him too, but it's a commitment deeper than love. It's a commitment never to leave him as long as he is alive” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 52). However, Benniger was more clued in to the transnational critical discourse on marriage, and was opposed to the term. He felt that marriage is “an institution created by heterosexuals”, a “Christian–European idea brought to India by foreigners” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 51-52) He seemed to be aware of the hegemonic implications of this fact and thereby resisted the term for their relationship. Despite the naming, the shared lives of the couple are not contrary to the vision of a marriage.

There are many features of marriage in general, and marriages in India in particular which enable one to see queer relationships like Naidu's and Benniger's like a marriage. Ruth Vanita sex-neutral characterization of marriage as including joint decision about life, being primary caregivers to each other etc. is fully demonstrated in Benniger and Naidu's

relationship. Moreover, their business partnership, in Benniger's words effectively brought together a legal marriage, which will legitimately possible for Naidu to inherit Benniger's property if he passes away. As the interviewers pointed out, "since same-sex marriage is not recognized in India", this was some kind of "loophole" to bring an effective marriage about (Sarma and Rao 2009, 52).

Secondly, they got married in accordance with social and religious sanction, thus pointing to another feature of marital unions in India which comes to the service of queer couples. Vanita writes that legal sanction is not indispensable to considering a union as a marriage, since in India, marriages are only tangentially regulated by the state. Most people are married according to the religious rites, and never seek a marriage certificate. Several marriage ceremonies are conducted according to very different criteria than the sex of the parties, including the consent⁴¹ of the parties and the approval of the respective families and communities. Since religious rituals are the primary sanctifying authority for most marriages in the country, same- sex couples who are able to get married by these religious rituals actually stand on the same par as the heterosexual couples. Even the secular law, the Special Marriage Act states that "marriage between any two persons may be solemnized under this Act", and thus provides scope, in principle, for queer individuals to seek recognition under this act (Special Marriage Act, Act No. 43 of 1954, Section 4) (Vanita 2022).

The state sanction also becomes irrelevant in these situations, because conjugal benefits including recognition and welfare are actually provided by the community and the approval of the community, should it be secured is able to count for an adequate marriage. "Communities sometimes recognize marriages that governments refuse to recognize"⁴² (Vanita 2005, 50), Vanita writes.

Naidu and Benniger had the approval of their families, as do several others couples mentioned in section one, including Abhay and Supriy (Pathak 2022). This brings to the fore

⁴¹ In Muslim marriages, the marriage is complete when the two individuals consent to the marriage. In Hindu religion arranged marriage is generally the norm. However, a particular kind of marriage, that is *gandharv vivah*, is considered legitimate by the consent of the two parties. Neither the sanction of the state nor the sanction of the society and family is required in this case.

⁴² Community here emerges as an ambiguous actor which stands against the transgression of the social norms, but also whose heterogeneity create spaces for resistance against the established conventions. In this sense, community comes up as an important "political actor" (Das 1995) and must be explored, as a resource for impersonal dehumanizing structure of the modern state. Das writes that "the community can become a revitalizing force within India's public culture only if it recognizes its own paradoxical links of confirmation and antagonism with its members". The research, by focusing on the negotiations of the queer subject, makes a case for the revitalization of the community, as well as critiques its paradoxical politics to inform this revitalization.

some conception of love-cum-arranged marriage in queer relationship. Naidu said that the relationship was a bit difficult for them to understand in the beginning, but they “weren’t judgemental” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 59) and came around to accepting Benniger as a son-in-law. Naidu said, “My father, especially, realised that sexuality is not the only thing in life, and too much mustn’t be made of it. There are other, more pressing concerns...maybe our family is the exception rather than the rule” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 59) .

Even without the approval of the families, marriages have been envisioned in the religious traditions and the queer couples are known to take recourse to these practices to negotiate their marriage. Geeta Patel, in her article *Homely Housewives run Amon: Lesbians in Marital fixes* narrates the story of two police constables, Urmila Shrivastava and Leela Namdeo, whose was the first documented lesbian marriage in India (Patel 2004). In 1987, the couple married, with the “with the consent of their families” (Patel 2004, 147). While discussing Leela and Urmila’s case, their neighbor Sushila, uses religious and customary language to defend their marriage- “After all, what is a marriage? A wedding of two souls. Where in the scriptures is it said that it has to be between a man and a woman” (Patel 2004, 151).

The couple, is said to have conducted a *gandharv vivah* (benegal 2022). *Gandharv Vivah* is one of the eight theories, according to which marriage can be conducted in the Indian society: namely, *Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Paisacha and Rakshasa*. In seven of these, marriage is arranged by elderly and men. Only in the Ghandarva form of marriage, are women allowed to select their marriage partner (Maharajh and Amin 2015). In *gandharv* marriages, only the consent of the two parties is required, and thereby it becomes an appealing route for queer couples to sanctify their marriages even in absence of familial and societal approval.

Similar narratives of same-sex marriage (or marriage-like relationships) have been documented by Maya Sharma in her anthology *Loving Women*. Manjula and Meeta’s is one such story which highlights that marriages are a preferred conduit for expressing same- sex intimacy in India. Manjula and Meeta always lived together, and preferred to stay together in their professional duties at the Home Guard. Their joint lives were given a conjugal tinge by their nickname as the “miyan- bibi jodi” (Sharma 2006). Sudhir Kakar has written about the indissolubility of the *jodi* (Kakar 1991, Grover 2018). Even though his conclusions have been contested (Grover 2018, Haider 1998) his insight about the significance of *jodi* as a marker of conjugality is fully demonstrated in the relationship between Manjula and Meeta. Their co-

workers told Sharma that they “always manage to get assigned to duties together...They don't report for work if they are given separate shifts” (Sharma 2006). Once when Manjula was assigned the night shift, Meeta also stayed with throughout the night every single night. Shobha, who had introduced the couple to the author said that Manjula and Meeta often accompany each other to their villages.

Apart from the obvious fact that Manjula and Meeta preferred to share their lives in all aspects, a sense of conjugality also tends to arise from how the two partners mimic the masculine and feminine roles, as in a heterosexual relation. It was said that Meeta used to love over Manjula “like a jealous lover” (Sharma 2006). In the story of Sheila and Manju, Sheila seemingly assumed the masculine role and asked the petite girl to make tea for the guests, a role which is all too familiar for a homemaker wife in a heterosexual relation.

In certain examples, heterosexuality actually figures in queer marriages. Lucinda Ramberg has written of gender fluidity and its queer consequences in the case of Yellamma. In her text *Troubling Kinship: Sacred marriage and gender configuration in South India*, she writes that women or devadasis are given to the goddess in a marriage, which creates difficulties for the “charting of kinship” and “family normalization” (Ramberg 2013, 661). The marriage relationship, apart from invoking queer imaginations, also queer the kinship relationships the woman is embedded in. The woman is thereon considered as a man, “whose lineage position and entitlements within the kin network are reckoned as a son's are” (Ramberg 2013, 661). The gender fluidity figures in contemporary queer marriages, explicitly via a technological intervention. A recent report, in November 2022, came from Rajasthan, where a school teacher changed her gender to marry her female student (The Economic Times 2022).

The mimicking of heterosexual roles, can be at once a sign of queer failures and creating queer possibilities. It could mean that the heterosexual codes of conduct have invaded the queer relations so deeply that an intimacy cannot be otherwise imagined. However, it could also be a way in which queer subjects envisage their own gender fluidity. This is demonstrated by Hasina and Fatima's case, who lived as a family in a one room house. Their relationship of living together, earning together is not unlike of a married couple's. Hasina here seemed to assume a feminine role, and referred to Fatima sometimes as he and at others as she. “He came for me disguised as a woman and cast on me a magical spell I cannot explain. I cannot live without her” (Sharma 2006), she said.

More importantly, it could also be a way in which the queer couples operationalize queer possibilities via imitating the heterosexual codes of marriage. In other words, mimicking the heterosexual roles is a way in which the queer subjects signal ‘togetherness’ as a couple, something which tends to be either undermined or mocked in female companionships. This aspect is seen in Rekha and Dolly’s relationships. Sharma writes that the national Hindi daily Navbharat Times, on 8 November 2001, carried the story of two women who ‘eloped’ reportedly got married. Named Rekha and Dolly, they took shelter in a religious shelter house for unmarried women, from where they were ‘restored’ by the police to their families. The story brings out the ambiguous status of the two women. The women considered themselves married, but in absence of institutions which could recognize their self-proclaimed marriage, they were forced to return to status of unmarried women to seek shelter.

Rekha and Dolly’s story brings out several instances of queer negotiations via marriage. The elopement of the couple is a testimony to the fierce and absolutely subversive ways in which queer struggles can be conducted without resorting to coming out. Dolly and Rekha’s relationship was not revealed to their family before their elopement. The anger at their relationship, exists in a hindsight- “I gave many warnings, that so much contact between girls is not good” (Sharma 2006).

A visit by Sharma to Dolly’s place revealed that “having had their privacy and autonomy violated and censored by kin, by the media, the police and other authorities” (Sharma 2006) pushed back the women into “the realm of silence” (Sharma 2006). However, the story ended with some kind of hope when Sharma learnt that the Indore subdivisional officer had dismissed the case, saying that since they were legally adults, the families could not restrict their meetings. Thus, the girls’ struggles against their family were tedious, and was fought on very few resources. However, even when the power of the state and society were pitted against the couple, the narrative points to the limited reach in controlling marriage like relationship, save its ultimate move of withholding recognition from such marriages.

This limited reach is seen in the recent case of Noora and Adhila. Adhila and Noora, a lesbian couple from Chennai similarly petitioned in courts to recognize their relationship. They featured in the news headlines in June, when their parents had forcibly kept Noora captive and separated from her partner, after they had come out. The Kerala High Court, gave an order allowing the couple to live together (Hindu 2022). Now the couple lives in Chennai and work in the same office. Even though the couple has shown no hurry to marriage, they

recently featured in news again for doing a wedding shootout, including a frame of garlanding each other. Further, a recent court decision, where it ruled that long cohabitation “presumes in favor of marriage (and not in a state of concubinage)” can have queer potentials for the institution of marriage, as well as reading conjugality in queer practices (The Hindu Legal Correspondant 2022).

3.3 Creative Subversions: Marriages Other Than One’s Own

The last section delved into those practices where the queer subjects proclaim conjugality, by recourse to one or several practices that constitute marriage. This chapter will delve into those practices, wherein the queer subjects themselves do not marry. Instead, the institution of marriage is creatively deployed to bind two individuals in a conjugal union such that the same- sex couple are bound in a relationship of kins.

One way in which this can be envisaged is through the institution of co-wifhood. Ruth Vanita has written of co- wifhood as one of the ways in which “same-sex relationships exist in the traditional family” (Vanita 2005. 165)⁴³. Co- wifhood, is generally seen as a misfortune, for it divides the attention of the husband and with it, the power that women can access from their closeness to the patriarch. The word for co-wife, is *saut* and generally carries with it rivalrous connotations. However, there are instances, where women are keen on co- wifhood, to be able to stay close to their friends and lovers.

Madhavi Menon has written of the *dastangoi*⁴⁴ *Dastan-e-Chouboli*, where queer intimacies via co- wifhood is actively perceived. Princess Chouboli has issued a notice that a man who is able to coax her to speak her four times will marry her. The challenge is achieved by none, except a woman dressed up as man, who had gone to rescue her husband taken captive in the same challenge. The attraction between the two women is apparent from the start. Since women cannot marry, Chouboli married her husband, not without first establishing that the

⁴³ Several stories can be located within Hindu mythology to locate co-wifhood or marriages other than one’s own, is used for queer negotiations. Ruth Vanita has written of the story of princess Mahallia, who persuades her husband to marry her twelve friends, for her sake. She insists on co- wifhood, because she did not want to feel isolated in her husband’s household. Similarly, Arjun and Krishna’s relationship, in so far as it can be viewed through a queer lens, was strengthened by the marriage between Krishna’s sister, Subhadra and Arjun. Though they were already tied in kinship bonds, the relationship as brother-in-laws, can be said to accord legitimacy to their closeness (Vanita 2000)

⁴⁴ *Dastangoi* is a Persian word, constituted by the words *dastan* and *goi*, literally meaning the telling of tales. It is a medieval Persian art of storytelling that came to India in the sixteenth century. (M. Menon 2015)

wife and Chouboli will actually be living together, and the thakur is kept only as their “scarecrow” (M. Menon 2015). The narrative is to act as a mockery of the heterosexual marriage, as much as it acts as an implicit narrative of same-sex love, even though audience rarely hears it as such.

In 2004, similarly, there was news of a “bizarre arrangement” (Surendran 2005). According to the reports, a 40-year-old auto driver was persuaded by his wife Mangala to marry her longtime lover, Ramlath. Mangala wanted Ramlath to live with them, and since it was illegal for a person to live with a married couple, she played the matchmaker and the witness. They got married at the Guruvayur temple (Surendran 2005).

Sabo and Razia’s story present a similar case, even though they did not pursue the path of co-wifery. Sabo and Razia lived near each other and fell in love. They tried to resist marrying, but were forcibly married off (See 3.5). Since they were determined to live together, Razia tried to persuade her husband to share their space with Sabo. He, however, disagreed and she started living separately from him. When Sabo got married, she was able to convince her husband for an unconventional “arrangement to live as a threesome”, whereby all three used to earn and share the responsibilities. However, their desire to share a socially legitimate bond had not yet been fulfilled. Sabo said, “I had a dream that our children would marry one another, our families would stay connected, we could continue our relationship” (Sharma 2006)

The tactic of getting kins married to establish close kinship bonds has been used by heterosexual couples too. Radha, a resident of Mohini Nagar was married off to a man not on the basis of love, or material and other criteria that a marriage generally seeks to attain. She narrated that her father and mother-in-law fell in love, and thereby married off their children to “keep their own affair going” (Grover 2018, 125).

Thus, marriage has served subversive bonds by tying the individuals in a close bond, via unions not just of their own. The particular structure of Indian families makes this possible. It was thought that with the “modernization of Indian society, it was presumed that arranged marriages would be undermined both by encouraging an individualistic ethos and by subverting the rules of endogamy” (Grover 2018, 32). The joint families were supposed to be replaced by nuclear units, and individual choices and romantic ideal was supposed to dominate in bringing into being “pure relationships” (Giddens 1992, 58). However, this

expectation has only partially succeeded. TN Madan notes that even though census data has created the “fog of the disintegration of joint family” (Madan 1993, 419), family in the Indian context is “kind that is identified as the extended family in sociological literature” (Madan 1993, 419)⁴⁵. Since family is an expansive concept, it is not just the bond between husband-wife- children which permits an intimate bond. The kinship relations beyond this unit continue to share close and intricately connected bonds, and this creates spaces for same- sex intimacy even beyond same- sex marriage.

3.4 Queerness in Disguise: Double Lives and Lavender Marriages

Pursuing same- sex intimacies within heterosexual marriages, paradoxically, has been one of the most common ways in which queerness is negotiated is by using marriage. In Indian society, marriage is believed to be one’s destiny. However, what happens within and after marriage is not stringently scrutinized, especially for men. This allows for subversive practices of intimacy, though in varying degrees across class, caste, and gender, within the institution of heterosexual marriage.

The presence of same-sex intimacies within ‘traditional’ heterosexual marriages can be thought of along two axes primarily. First is through what is commonly, and often derogatorily referred to as ‘double lives’. The second axis is the “marriage of convenience” or “lavender weddings”, wherein one or both the parties are homosexual and are aware of it, and get into marriage to ward off the constant parental and societal scrutiny over their intimacies and to marry.

Double life (or down low marriages in African- American tradition) are used to refer to those negotiations of queerness whereby the queer subjects get into heterosexual marriages and portray themselves as consistent with the heteronormative requirements of marriage, but actively seek sexual relations with others outside of marriage and often in secret. Vanita’s

⁴⁵ TN Madan gives an expansive definition of the family, by defining at four different levels: “1) as a household; 2) as a grouping of households constituting a property group; 3) as a still wider grouping of households incorporating the coparcenary which defines the outer limits for allodial and obligatory ritual purposes; 4) as an all encompassing dispersed grouping defined genealogically rather than in terms of active interaction.”(Madan 1993, 421). The expansive definition transforms the strategies and struggle practices that the site enables. On one hand, it makes coming out even more difficult for the queer subject since opinions and judgment of the entire kin network structures the acceptance by parents. On the other, several other associations become available for negotiating intimacies, as this research demonstrates.

comment is pertinent to such marriages, “Perhaps the best-kept secret about homosexuality is that as many if not more homosexually inclined people worldwide live in traditional heterosexual marriages as in same-sex couples” (Vanita 2006, 161).

The incentive for pursuing a double life comes from the fact that marriages continue to be arranged by the families and communities, in accordance with the rules of caste endogamy, class parity, age, profession, skills, and certainly heteronormative ideals. These have not yet modernized in accordance with the values of love, desire, and compatibility that intimate associations such as marriage between two *individuals* are deemed to be based on. The strong societal demand for getting into a heterosexual marriage makes double life an attractive option.

Furthermore, some subjects, unmarried and married, who cruise for sexual partners in public washrooms, bus stops and other spaces outside of home, otherwise see themselves quite well suited to a heterosexual marriage. Several interviews in the anthology *Whistling in the Dark* reveal the worldviews of gay subjects whereby they do not posit any compulsory relationship between their desire for men, and marriage. Some of them were in fact quite comfortable in their roles as husbands and fathers, or were even looking forward to it. Satish Ranadive, for instance, writes, “Oh, I’ll get married too. One hundred per cent. I’ve already seen over twenty girls. Some of these proposals came via the family, others I found out on my own. If I’m still unmarried, it’s only because I haven’t found the perfect match yet” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 69). A similar enthusiasm is seen in the case of Venkata, interviewed by Shakuntala Devi in the book *The World of Homosexuals*. Venkata, to the shock of Devi, casually informed her of his wedding, “I’ve been on the marriage market for the last two years and I’m going to be married next month” (Devi 1977, 6)

Double marriages are often criticized for comprising one’s desires, choosing a life of suppression, and not courageously opting for living openly with one’s partner. However, it can alternatively also be understood as putting marriage into different formations of sexuality, which de-hyphenates marriage from love and desire. In the pure marriages of the modern world, marriages are held up to the lofty ideals of romantic love. This formation could be described as being characterized by the “deployment of sexuality” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 1978), since sexual identity here is deemed to be a primary identity and thus guide all the actions of the individual, especially marriage. However, in several societies including India, marriages are actively pursued for considerations other than sexual attraction

and romantic love. This latter formation, which is more proximate to what Foucault calls the “deployment of alliance” has its problematic features. However, it also has liberating features, since it does not center sexuality as a regulatory force in society. Akshay Khanna similarly resists this urge to name oneself through one’s sexuality, as product of the colonial rule in India. He argues, “There was something wrong if whom I fucked said everything about what I was” (Khanna 2005). This freedom is concretely translated in Venkat’s interview. When Shakuntala Devi pointed out that she did not understand how he can get married and how he will succeed in his marriage being a homosexual, he accused her of “talking like a foreigner” (Devi 1977, 6).

Having said that, a part of this exercise is to look at the practices of queer resistance in the narratives of queer subjects from the Indian subcontinent is also to look at the power structures that circumscribe it, and thereby to look at alternate/ queering possibilities as well as fault lines, critique and creative energies as mutual. In this particular case, the narratives of double life often are based on paradoxical premises. On one hand, the decision to marry while preferring same-sex company leaves open a field where the queer negotiations don’t fall subservient to the interconnected regimes of sexuality, state and capital. On the other hand, the structures of masculinity and gender, continue to circumscribe these practices along the discriminatory, gendered and hetero- patriarchal premise of the institution of marriage.

Venkat in response to the question as to how could he get married despite being disgusted by women and preferring men’s body and company, said that marriages in India are supposed to be a “commercial arrangement” (Devi 1977, 6). They are expected to bring a hefty dowry, which can further be used by their parents to give dowry and marry his sisters. Similarly, Narendra Binner wrote of the centrality of marriage to middle-class households:

If I had my way, if I had so much education as to be able to think for myself and not be governed by society’s rules, maybe I would never have got married at all...But as you know, in middle-class Indian society, marriage is compulsory, more so for people like me without parents. Wives are needed to cook food, keep the house, etc. There isn’t much romance in the marriage. That’s one of the main reasons I married early (Sarma and Rao 2009, 98).

The editors of the anthology mimic this sentiment regarding marriage while interviewing Manish Pawar, “[Y]ou say you plan to stay single. But in India men marry for reasons of

social security. A man also needs a wife to cook and keep house for him, and he needs kids to look after him in old age” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 34).

Secondly, the operation of double life relies on the deliberate deception of the other partner in marriage, often women, with scant regard for their sexual and conjugal desires. Venkat noted that since the woman will receive stability in marriage with him, there is no reason for her to feel cheated on account of his homosexuality (even though he was disgusted of women) (Devi 1977). Manohar Shitole married and had children as an experiment to ‘cure’ him of his desire to have sex with men. Moreover, he said that when his wife demands sex, he often tries “to avoid it by giving excuses” or does it like a duty. “I never get emotionally involved in the act. It tends to be mechanical from my side” (Sarma and Rao 2009 77), he said. Even though some people said that they will not have a problem if the wife also has a relationship with another woman, their permissiveness did not quite extend to enable the woman to have a heterosexual relationship elsewhere.

Avinash Gaitonde was crassly frank with his acceptance of gender differences and its implications for negotiation of sexuality. He boasted, “We’re men, not women. Men can do whatever they please. It’s only when it comes to women that society disapproves of certain actions” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 159). He told the editors that even though sleeping with women disgusted him, he still had a girlfriend and was open to marrying her if he got a job. When asked whether it would be unfair to the woman he married, he took recourse to the cultural liberties and restrictions which place men in a superior position to be able to negotiate their desires- “Girls have to accept the husbands that fate gives them. Moreover, I didn’t say I don’t like having sex with girls. For me, a hole is a hole, whether it belongs to a boy or a girl” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 159)⁴⁶.

In many instances, the patriarchal privilege available to men, is consciously deployed to keep the woman in a deceptive relationship. Several respondents in the anthology *Whistling in the Dark*, like Sushil Patil, Manhor Shitole and Satish Ranadive writes that they will not tell their wives about their gay life (Sarma and Rao, 2009). Moreover, Patil noted that he does not think that his wife will leave him even if she finds about his gay life. He writes, “After all, we’re Indians. We tend to have kids soon after marriage, and kids cement the relationship”.

⁴⁶ The masculine stance is not merely used by queer subjects to negotiate their same-sex desires in practice, it is also actively deployed by them to justify their queerness to themselves and others, the interviews in the anthology show.

The implication of the observation is that a child coming into being immobilizes the woman further- nobody will marry her if she has been married before and has had a child. As a result of poor investment in her education and career, entering and continuing in the marriage is often the only route to getting some material stability. The observation, is shockingly used by Ganesh holey to plot his double life. He said, “I’m sure I’ll be able to carry on without letting her (the wife) know (about his sexuality). In villages and small towns, people don’t give their wives the freedom that women have in cities... I’ll obviously marry a woman who’s not very sophisticated, so it’s highly unlikely that she’ll find out about my gay life” (Sharma and Rao 2009, 178-9).

The problem of deception raises questions about the informed consent of the person, to sexual relations and marriage in general. It sometimes also raises particularly dangerous implications for the other party. For instance, Narendra Binner had AIDS from a liaison he had with stranger army men. His wife, who was aware of it had to make peace with sexless marriage (to the relief of Binner), and additionally was at the risk of accidental contraction of the disease.

Deception poses a serious ethical dilemma in same- sex negotiation, as well as remains untenable option. The queer subjects have, however, evolved a way by which to keep the spouse in the loop about one’s sexual orientation, while having them “complicit in a public deception to hide their homosexuality” (Chaturvedi 2022). Known as Marriage of convenience, or increasingly Lavender Weddings, these marriages are those in which one or both the parties are homosexual and are well aware of this fact, and thus get into a marital contract for reasons apart from marital and sexual intimacy.

In certain cases, where both the parties are homosexual, Lavender weddings are a way of getting the society off one’s case, while also being truthful to one’s married partner. The phenomena is portrayed in the recent movie *Badhai Do* (2022), where a policeman, Shardul (Rajkummar Rao) and a physical instructor Sumi Singh (Bhumi Pednekar) get married to appease their families, who are forcing them to get married soon. Amidst apprehensions of “What will society say, and mummy-papa will die if the truth comes out” (S. Gupta 2022), lavender weddings seem a hassle- free of balancing between parental and societal pressure, as well as seeking love and intimacy and companionship on one’s own terms. In other cases, a marriage of convenience could be based on the exchange of promise of friendship, companionship, and/or material benefits. This concept was briefly invoked in the film

Fashion (2008), in which the famous gay fashion designer Rahul Aurora (Samir Soni) married his childhood friend Janet Sequeira (Mugdha Godse) as a way of being free of his mother's and her friends' constant scrutiny of his sexuality, in return for catapulting her to the top of the modeling industry.

Even though these marriages of convenience come with immense possibilities for the queer subject, they are intensely critiqued. This can be seen in the discussions around *Badhai Do*, which made clear that modern India does not have the space for this reality. The reviews for the movie *Badhai Do*, write, "But in the 21st century, with Section 377 being struck down and vocal support for the LGBTQIA community, isn't exploring this concept a bit regressive" (Chaturvedi 2022)? At a time when so many couples are "courageously" fighting for getting their marriages recognized, the society and queer activism takes a dim view of these instances which cannot but be counted in deception and cowardliness, or unfortunate compulsions. The movie *Shubh Mangal Zyada Savdhan*(2020) also toys with the idea of a marriage of convenience, only to shoot it down as a cowardly way of settling and confirming.

Critiques apart, the marriage of convenience is a preferred route of negotiations for the queer subjects. Satish Ranadive, said that in absence of an option for same- sex marriage, he would be happy for his marriage to be turned into, a marriage of convenience. He said,

This may sound strange, but if my wife says she would like to have sex with other women, I'll allow it. I might even welcome it. I'm even on the lookout for a lesbian woman with whom I can have a marriage of convenience. But she should be interested in community work. She should be willing to work with me for the welfare of the gay community, and even help me to set up a gay support group. (Sarma and Rao 2009, 70)

The concepts of double life and lavender weddings are example whereby space for queer resistance is created within the heterosexual marriages, without imposing many of the sexual or conjugal responsibilities that come with it. However, the decision to opt in and out of these modes of resistance is variously accessible to subjects according to their gender, class, caste and other backgrounds. For a middle-class person like Narendra Binner, leading a double life was an undesired compulsion. He said that "if I had so much education as to be able to think for myself and not be governed by society's rules, maybe I would never have got married at all" (Sarma and Rao 2009, 98). However, in middle class life, "marriage is compulsory"

(Sarma and Rao 2009, 98) and “divorce is not an option” (Sarma and Rao 2009, 105). Manish Pawar, the ward boy from Maharashtra on the other hand, thought that he didn’t have much to lose by leaving his job and moving to either Bombay or Pune, for education, which kept the multiple queer potentials alive. (Sharma and Rao 2009) This ‘diasporic’ freedom is however less true of middle-class subjects, who through marriage, jobs, and norms of respectability are locked in space, and thus get limited leeway for acting on their queer desires.

Whereas norms of respectability force men into double life, the same norms restrict women from having access to such a choice within heterosexual marriage. The known instances of women getting into same- sex relationships post marriage are much fewer (Vanita 2005, 173). Since women tend to be confined to the boundaries of the household, they tend to find partners within the house. The desire and intimacy they find with and in each other, is both a resistance to patriarchal entrapment of women into loveless confines of their marriage, as well as a challenge to the conventional imaginations of heterosexual desires.

A famous narrative for women pursuing love with other women, in heterosexual marriages is the movie *Fire*. Two sister-in-laws, Sita and Radha find themselves in married relationship devoid of love and romance, get drawn to each other in a bond of sexual attraction and tender attachment. The movie shows how familial space is not homogenously heterosexual. It opens up into a world of all women companionship, where women who experience oppression together can also find companionship and love in the same spaces. Charu Gupta has written that the movie is a homo- erotic twist in the conventional anxieties around *devar-bhabhi* relationships (C. Gupta 2001). The latter raises anxiety, because one, it muddles up the patrilineal control over women’s sexuality. Secondly, it also threatens to reveal the “imagined and felt inadequacies of the enforced Hindu conjugal order—the neglectful and distant husband; the lonely and wanting wife; and the absence of joy, fulfillment, and companionship” (Dave 2012, 145). The same- sex intimacies within the home and occasionally outside, threaten the same disclosure, as *Fire* shows.

However, this should not mean that same- sex desires of married women can only be traced to a lack or dissatisfaction in their heterosexual marriages. Women who love and desire women often find themselves in heterosexual marriages, often out of compulsion than choice. In these instances, how do they find ways to subvert the hetero-patriarchal demands of

marriage and make space for same-sex intimacy is an important question for this project. Some possible ways, apart from heterosexual disguise shall be made in the next sections.

3.5 Avoidance/ Escape

The previous section discussed how queer subjects often get into traditional heterosexual marriages, either out of societal compulsion, or out of choice in order to secure a cover for their homosexual liaisons. This section shall discuss an opposing trend, whereby queer subjects actively oppose or escape heterosexual marriages in consideration of their heterosexual desires. This section shall discuss three forms which avoidance of marriages typically take- refusing marriage, non- exercise of spousal obligations and thirdly, pursuing divorce. While the story of double marriage and passive disguise is often dominated by the stories of gay men, the stories of other ways of subverting marriage is often dominated by women⁴⁷.

Ruth Vanita has written of many such instances where subjects in mythologies, both men and women escape marriage in order to escape the compulsions of heterosexual life. Many of these lives are lived as celibate, and not in exploring alternate form of sexuality. However, they can still be counted in the queer alternative to compulsory heterosexuality, since “in societies where marriage and parenthood were near universal and were arranged by families for young people, a religious vow of celibacy was almost the only way a person could refuse heterosexuality and choose to live in a same-sex community” (Vanita and Kidwai 2000, 96). Vanita discusses, among other narratives from the literary history of India, the stories of celibacy of Manimekalai and Vavar.

The story of Manimekalai, the protagonist refuses her suitors and dedicated herself to the “pursuit of charity and knowledge” (Vanita 2000, 21). Even when she knew that she was prince’s Udaykumara’s former wife, she refuses to act the faithful spouse. Vanita writes that brought up in the “matrilineal kinship of the courtesan”, and being a woman nun, “she is aided in this endeavor by many different women, and the relationships among these women frame the story” (Vanita 2000, 21).

⁴⁷ A clarification is in order: The limited observation of bringing a distinction between men and women queer subjects is this: whereas men tend to find it easier to get married and carry on their homosexual relationships outside, the structure of hetero- patriarchal family makes this alternative more difficult for women, though not unthinkable. Thus, women tend to be more subversive and oppositional to heterosexual marriage. On the whole however, strategies of struggle cannot be neatly divided between queer men and women, as will be clear from the discussions in the chapter.

Similarly, Vanita has looked at the celibacy of the deity Ayappa from a queer lens (Vanita 2000, 95-96). Ayappa, said to be born to two men⁴⁸, took the vow of celibacy when approached by the deity Leela for marriage. Wanting to escape the conjugal bonds, he vowed to be celibate till his devotees keep visiting him at Sabrimala. This escape from conjugal heterosexual bonds is matched by a desire for all men companionship. The all-male pilgrimage gathering is the most discussed, and controversial aspect example⁴⁹. Another instance is the presence of his friend and companion, Vavar, alongside Ayappa. Vavar has an important place in the Ayappa temple (represented as a sword) as well as the rituals around the pilgrimage (Vanita 2000). Both being protective figures, Ayappa and Vavar seem well suited to each other.

In the contemporary times too, queer subjects⁵⁰, especially women, are intensely resistant to marriage. This is more so among women, for a specific reason. Whereas conjugality tends to free men from scrutiny on their sexuality, with women marriage brings an intensification of the gaze. Shalini Grover's ethnography in the slums of Mohini Nagar shows that the demands of productive and care work, intense scrutiny on women's sexuality, and insistence on residence within the conjugal home leaves the married women with little freedom and mobility to be able to indulge in extra marital intimacies (Grover 2018). This is particularly

⁴⁸ In conventional understanding, Ayappa is the son of Shiva and Parvati. However, certain south Indian medieval elaborations of the story emphasize him the son of two males, which feeds into a queer reading of Ayappa's story (Vanita 2005).

⁴⁹ The women devotees of reproductive age (notably from age 10- 50) are restricted from the Sabrimala pilgrimage, given Ayappa's vow of celibacy. However, the taboo against menstruation that this tradition directly or indirectly brings about, has fed into women-hating tendencies in men, especially gay men. Venkat, in his conversation with Shakuntala Devi, said that his same-sex intimacy is also based on the fact that he thought of women as "very dirty creatures" and "unclean, impure people", since his grandmother used to make her mother sit in isolated and tattered maps (Devi 1977). Similarly, in *Whistling in the dark*, Avinash Gaitonde has spoken of women a disgusting- "I find it a bit disgusting to sleep with women...No hassles. That's what I love about gay love. In any case, I hardly understand women." This shows that queerness is not just a progressive force and women – hating becomes an important of the negotiations and justifications of a gay man. The gay activists are not free of this bias. Ashok Row Kavi talks of female genitals as "a sort of wound", and repulsive. "How could anybody in his right mind think that it was juicy?", he asks (Merchant 2010). However, even though Ayappa's example could be, from one angle, be seen as a repulsion from woman, another angle clears things out. Ayappa's shrine houses the deity, Leela, who is an important axis of the pilgrimage. Vanita writes that the "[F]emale presence is incorporated in the tradition in a nonconjugal way through the shrine of the goddess leela who also took a vow of celibacy after Ayyappa refused her proposal of marriage." This demonstrates that Ayappa's celibacy is better interpreted as a challenge to compulsory heterosexuality, than a repulsion of women.

⁵⁰ Gautam Bhan recently, in a lecture-cum-exhibition (Exhibition on 'Queerness and Desire in Delhi and New York', curated by Sunil Gupta and introduced by Gautam Bhan, on 20 August 2022, at Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi) said that it is more difficult to find gay men who have not married in the previous generation, and this choice of not getting in a heterosexual marriage seems more accessible to the younger generation of men. This chapter, in contrast, shows that the evasion of marriages for queer negotiations is not as recent.

true of upper class and upper caste women, who are held up to the ideals of 'pativrata'⁵¹ (Searle-Chatterjee 1994, Grover 2018).

Sociological literature can further direct to the implications of the pattern of kinship. Iravati Karve in this regard has distinguished between kinship patterns of north and south India. She argues that whereas in southern India, marriages are preferred between close-kins in nearby locations, there is a marked preference for long- distance marriages in north India (Grover 2018). The sum total of the above factors ensure that marriage almost surely brings about an end to the pre- marital intimacies whether with one's family, friend and lovers.

Avoidance of marriage thus, is actively pursued as a strategy by women, as can be seen in the stories of Guddi and Aasu, and Sabo and Razia, documented by Maya Sharma (Sharma 2006). Guddi and Aasu, were neighbors and fell in love. Marriage came in their way of their companionship, and thus they were resistant to the idea. Similarly, Sabo and Razia noted that possibilities of coming out were not available to them, and one possible way in which they could think of negotiating their love was by not marrying. Sabo said, "We had no idea that our friendship represented the possibility of living differently, living with each other. All we knew was that we did not want to leave each other, and that we did not want to marry...As children we girls lived, slept, ate, worked together. We had dreams of remaining single, being together. But fate was against it." (Sharma 2006).

However, as also clear from the melancholy note of these narratives, women who envision their same- sex relationship via resisting marriage are often unsuccessful. Guddi after being forcibly married said, "We would be living together openly today, had my mother not interfered" (Sharma 2006). In heterosexual marriages, women often don't have the choice of conducting their resistance through a double life, being a "a good husband, father, brother and son" (Sarma and Rao 2009, 24), given the demanding expectations from married women. Full- fledged resistance against norms of dutiful wifedom remains the only way for these female intimacies.

⁵¹ Working class and lower caste women enjoy greater mobility outside of homes on account of the imperative to work and earn that their caste and class imposes them with. Mary Searle-Chatterjee, in her study of Benares sweepers reveals a more egalitarian gender division than high caste, middle and upper-class households generally allow for. Shalini Grover has similarly, in her ethnographic account of slums in Mohini Nagar writes that Scheduled caste communities shows greater equality among men and women. "[T]hey go to work, meet other men and women, know the region, etc. This situation contrasts with that of high-caste women, who only leave their houses once a fortnight, or even less, when their husbands decide to take them to a film or to some relative's", she writes. (Searle-Chatterjee 1994, Grover 2018)

Guddi resisted ferociously against the sexual responsibilities of a wife, and returned to her home after three months when her meetings with Aasu were curtailed post marriage. Shalini Grover writes that once married, the wife is expected to be available for sex at all times, and often multiple times a day. Law is also complicit in creating the sexual availability of women, within marriage, by refusing to criminalize, or even recognize marital rape. Guddi's resistance against sexual activity is, thus, a way of resisting the idea of heterosexual marriage and its compulsions, and positing against it one's own sexual desire and autonomous control of one's body. She warned her husband on the very first night, "Until I give my consent do not try to initiate any physical relationship with me. If you try to force me, I will retaliate forcefully" (Sharma 2006). In Sabo and Razia's case, Sabo called herself an independent/single woman and actively resisted the notion of 'providing husband' or male breadwinner that is so important to an arranged marriage (cite Grover). "I have set up this shop in my *jhuggi*, and this *jhuggi*, is also of my own making. My husband has not given me a paisa. I am single too, I support myself and my children" (Sharma 2006), she insisted.

Another way in which marriages can be thought of as intruding in the same- sex negotiations is the way in which it intrudes in the divorce procedures. Saumya Saxena said, during the launch of her book *Divorce and Democracy*, that democracy, historically has loved a divorce because it brings several democratic institutions in conversation. The engagement of same-sex marriages with divorce becomes one way in which the practices engage both with the institution of marriage as well as democracy (Saxena 2022).

Newspaper articles bring reports for how queerness and divorce are entangled, even though academic work on this field is scant. For instance, it was reported that in Kochi family courts, people increasing number of cases refer to women seeking divorce on the grounds that their husbands are gay (Sreemol 2018). The Madras High Court, while hearing matrimonial discord cases involving one queer partner noted that homosexuality should be considered as a ground for divorce, and the central government should amend the marriage laws to this end. The judge noted that a lack of statutory recognition and protection for LGBT people had started affecting the very social institution of marriage (Hindustan Times, Why can't homosexuality be a ground for divorce, suggests Madras HC 2016).

Whereas this is to be expected, given the renegotiation of the marriage contracts to align it with love and desire, some unexpected cases occur regarding how same- sex negotiations are occurring through the institution of divorce. In 2016, two men separated from their wives, to

start a separate family. The wives, also sisters approached the local court interim relief in form of maintenance and shelter and later under Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Since there was no violation of law except evasion of duty to maintain family on part of men, police expressed their helplessness (Khan 2016).

In a similar case in January 2019, two women who fell in love during college and were earlier separated by forced marriages for six years divorced their husbands. They got married in a temple in UP by garlanding each other and saying their vows in front of their lawyer and friends. The registrar did not agree to recognise the marriage, since there was no such provision and not “an online proforma for it.”. However, that hardly takes away from the personal significance of this step for the women, who are living as a married couple- “Our lawyer has told us that since the Supreme Court has done away with Section 377, we can stay together. No one can trouble us” (Hindustan Times, 2 UP women marry after divorcing husbands; they can’t get it registered 2019) .

The fact that queer subjects are keen on evading marriages, to be able to live their same- sex intimacy is undisputed. However, the discussion also raises a conceptual question that goes to the heart of resistance studies- can avoidance or escape from marriage be accounted as a form of subverting the heterosexual marriage in favor of queer potential? Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson have written, drawing from other scholars of resistance that “If resistance is about ways of acting that might undermine power, then the question is if avoidance can also be resistance; i.e. the act of not engaging with the space, time or relation where power is exercised” (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013). Avoidance of heterosexual marriage in that sense is the refusal to allow the heteronormative structures to operate on oneself.

Divorce as a form of escaping heterosexual marriage has an additional significance for centering marriage in the same- sex intimacies. It creates a space within which greater freedom regarding marriage and marriage- like unions is permitted. Louis Dumont, in his study of marriage systems of north and south India has written about secondary unions as unions and remarriages after the first or primary marriage breaks down (Dumont 1964, Grover 2018). Whereas the primary marriages are dictated by the regulatory norms of kinship like caste endogamy, the secondary marriages are conducted more freely. Seeking divorce in that sense, allows women to conduct their alliances more freely and by one’s choice and thereby live in marriage- like unions with their same- sex partners.

3.6 Conclusion

In pointing to how conjugal practices yield to queer usages, the aim of this chapter is not to glorify the practices of marriage in the Indian cultures. Many practices in fact are severely circumscribed by the discriminatory structures of class, caste and gender. The point of shifting the focus from rules to practice, thus, has been to find some running threads through the diverse practices of queer resistance, which can throw up clues for rescuing queer theory and politics from its transnational hegemonic frame and suggest a way forward for conducting same- sex resistance.

It does so, by reading in many of the instances of marital innovation, a certain 'resourcefulness' in the queer subjects. The queer subjects, in the above narratives and several others, are resourceful in the sense that they create queer possibilities out of institutions which are not by design, and are in fact hostile to all things queer. Resourcefulness is a useful lens to 'see', understand and read the queer struggles in their diversity. The question of resources is already important in queer theory. Queer theorists have written, as mentioned in chapter one, how the inter- sectional location of subjects and the kind of resources they afford, enable different repertoires and varying degrees of struggles. The first chapter discussed this particularly, in the case of coming out - the argument that not everyone can afford to come out because of lack of resources seems to suggest that they would come out, if they could. Thus, this chapter, in order to read into the diversity of practices used the approach of, what can be in hindsight called the approach of 'resourcefulness'. Using Bourdieu's notion of practical kinship, the idea was to interrogate into marital practices to see how queer subjects 'get things done' or 'make things work' with the familiar institutions of home- making.

This approach helps us make two contributions to the existing works on the queer struggles in the family. One, rather than measuring the struggles of queer subjects against a set yardstick of 'ideal' struggle practices, it approaches queerness and queer resistances from the vantage of the subject. Secondly, in doing so, it is able to delve into the blind spots in a queer analysis, by turning our critical gaze towards the possibilities as well as fault lines in their practices. The chapter has pointed to the various discriminatory structures that frame the queer conjugal practices, and steps must be taken by queer theory and politics to intervene in these domains.

Apart from these, the analysis can give several suggestions, which may be developed for the future of queer activism in India, particularly with regards to the struggle within the family? First, it reveals that marriage as an institution falls only tangentially within the purview of the state. The autonomy of the institution, from the neo-liberal state and the capitalist market, has enabled the queer subjects to rally its struggles via the institution of marriage, with the mobilization of the community in many instances, and but in some cases without. The contemporary struggles for recognition of queer marriages are well intentioned and much required. However, they should proceed with utmost caution, for the ‘normalization’ of queer alliances that they seek, act as ‘excluder devices’ for particularly marginalized queer subjects.

Secondly, even though the conjugal practices are based on discriminatory structures, there is another side to the story. The intense opposition to the compulsory heterosexual marriages, divorces, recourse to secondary unions, are ways in which queer conjugal practices to democratize the institution of marriage in general. The weakening hold of caste endogamy over marriages is another such implication. This is not to say that queer persons cannot be casteist. **Vimalesh**, in Maya Sharma’s anthology, challenged the binary division of male and female, consistently throughout his/her life. (S)he refused to feminize her/his appearance and to marry. However, the struggle against heteronormativity or gender binary did not extend to an empathy with other marginalized groups. As a Brahmin, s/he continued to hold an attitude of “suspicion, scrutiny and phobia” (Sharma 2006) towards the lower caste harijans and chamars of her area. They resisted powerlessness in one area while choosing to hold on to power in another (Sharma 2006, Akanksha 2022). However, when it comes to negotiating queer marriages, patrilineality as the ground on which caste endogamy stands is cut off from below. In the case of women, patrilineality translates to women having no caste at all. Shalini Grover, in her ethnography of marriage in slums of Delhi noted that the residents firmly believed that “women do not have a caste identity (*aurat ki to jat hoti hi nahi*)” (Grover 2018, 95) and women are expected to assimilate themselves in her husband’s family. Because of this reason, although problematic, caste endogamy is often rendered irrelevant when women get into a marital or marriage-like union.

There is a final reason how the queer conjugal innovations have subversive and democratic implications for the institution of marriage. It was observed in the previous sections that queer couples often seem to imitate the heterosexual codes of masculinity and femininity. However, a closer look reveals far more mutuality than a heterosexual relation allows for. In

Manjula and Meeta's relationship, for instance, the author noted that Manjula was only outwardly the meek partner. She made important decision, including what and how much is said about their relationship. Shobha, who introduced them to the author also commented on this aspect of homosexual relations:

This is a good thing between two women, I mean a relationship like that between husband and wife. Two women can support each other physically, emotionally, financially. If there were more such relationships, men would not know what to do! In a relationship between women, one will not eat after the other has eaten, or get up early to do chores and go to sleep late finishing chores, or meekly obey the other without question, as it is in man woman relationships" (Sharma 2006, Akanksha 2000).

In the stories documented by Sharma, the women who were often opposed to the lesbian relationships in the beginning gradually warmed to it, by relating to their own experiences and observations of compulsory heterosexuality. Pushpa related her own story, about she doesn't want to marry. She said,

First of all, I will not marry. And if I live with someone, my companion will be a woman. I have an intimate friend, she is married but we meet, join each other in times of happiness and sorrow. Truly, we women survive through maintaining relationships with our chosen ones, with our parents, our communities, even with plants and trees, living creatures, mountains and rivers. We keep our bonds with all of nature, that is our enduring strength and our special skill. (Sharma 2006)

In Guddi and Aasu's case, Shalini, narrated another story where two women who loved each other successfully resisted in their marriages, and eventually lived together throughout their lives. She added, "If Guddi and Aasu show similar courage, let me know whenever they are in need, they have my support" (Sharma 2006). Juhi's is another such story. Having gone through an abusive marriage, Juhi spared no efforts to familiarise and in fact, orient her daughters towards the sexual alternative of being a lesbian. "[A]ll my daughters are lesbians" and in fact, "It is better and far wiser to be this way than to marry men" (Sharma 2006), she said. She hinted that she will reluctantly support her daughters if they want to be with men, but "does not like the prospect much" (Sharma 2006). While talking about her experiences she remarked "[Y]ou know what? I think every woman is a lesbian at heart. What does it

mean when women say, [T]his is my best friend? Indirectly they are expressing their love for women. This is my personal opinion. Women love one another” (Sharma 2006).

This chapter has hopefully argued that queer conjugality enables queer negotiations and struggles in the family, and thereby democratize the domain of families, kinship and marriage. The conclusion to this dissertation shall elaborate on some kind of research desiderata for this project, and chart out possible ways in which the research on queer marital practices, and struggles in family can be studied.

CONCLUSION

This research has been motivated by, as the introduction highlighted, the question of heading and accommodating diversity within the practices of queer struggles, particularly in the family. Coming out was chosen as a particularly useful device to frame the enquiry, because of its privileged position in evaluating the status of a person's queer struggle within the family. Whether a person has come out or not becomes the yardstick for understanding whether they are in fact, politically active or complacent. Additionally, the significance of coming out is not confined to interrogating the practices of struggle within the family. Throughout the dissertation, coming out was seen as demonstrative of a wider politics of sexuality. Chapter one located the phenomena within its wider politics of sexuality, to show how through a critique of coming out, this dissertation locates itself within the wider critiques of imperial and neoliberal politics that have seeped in queer politics "known precisely for its emphasis on difference and nonnormativity" (Ward 2008).

In this endeavor to recognize and appreciate diversity, the dissertation challenges the prevalent presumption of not coming out as complacency to heteronormativity and 'not doing anything'. The objection to the idea that those who don't come out are in fact conforming of heteronormative ideals, takes the dissertation to a search for ways in which alternative practices of queer negotiations can be visibilized and theorized. Chapter two builds the theoretical ground for such an enquiry. By delving into the literature on family and home, it shows that queer belonging is always a fraught exercise. It is not disputed that families as heteronormatively structured are not the most conducive of spaces for queer subjects. However, the inclusiveness of the "chosen families" is also suspect, given belonging here is mediated by several indicators like class, caste, race and several other unmeasurable attributes that constitute a "respectably queer" (Ward, *Respectably queer : Diversity Culture in LGBT Activist Organizations* 2008) subject. Since home and homeliness, as a space for affective belonging, are always in flux, it is the phenomenon of home- making that should be the object of study to understand how one belongs, be it in one's traditional families, or chosen families. A focus on home- making practices will also be able to include subjects who do not have the resources or the "passports" to make a radical move by coming out and moving out.

Chapter three, furthers this inquiry by building on the accounts of queer individuals. It seeks to understand how the queer subjects negotiate the hostility of the family and community and creatively work around the practices of home-making. The narratives make it evident that coming out is a clumsy concept to capture the resistance practices of several subjects. Coming out, routinely, fails to be the only form of knowing, conveying and negotiating queerness. Ankit, working in a multi-national agency and was well clued into the transnational queer vocabulary, demonstrates this. When he “came out” to his colleagues, they “had deadpan expressions on their faces, as if what I was saying was totally incomprehensible to them...they don’t know the difference between a homosexual man and a eunuch” (Sharma 2006). Moreover, when he told of her sexuality to her mother, giving her a “detailed explanation of words like homo, hetero, etc.” (Sharma 2006) she instantly disapproved, thinking that he was possessed. In a society, where thinking in terms of sexual identities is an alien idea, and people have trouble making out one sexual identity from the next, coming out ceases to enjoy purchase.

The research has narrowed down on the practice of marriage, as an alternative way to ‘see’ and understand queer struggle practices. Marriage has been chosen for given its centrality in home-making within the Indian society, and beyond. Delving into the narratives of the queer subjects reveals that queer subjects commonly negotiate their same-sex relations around and via the practices of marriage. Besides providing a route for channelizing same-sex associations, the paradigm of marriage also frames the subjects’ knowledge of themselves and others as queer subjects. In several stories explored through the research, the queer subjects realized they are different from the rest is when they were faced with impending and compulsory marriage.

In some ways, additionally, practices of marriage became a way of making what was so far a covert strategy of negotiation, quite overt- of coming out. In Maya Sharma’s anthology, Rekha and Dolly’s relationship came on the radar of the family after they eloped and got married- “It violates our family honour when women run away” (Sharma 2006) ‘Honour’ is invoked repeatedly through the narratives documented by Maya Sharma, for instances when the women eloped to live together, as in the cases of Maneka and Payal and Sheila and Lali (Sharma 2006). The invocation of honour demonstrates how even without coming out, as lesbian and bisexual, the queer couples routinely battle the heteronormative structures of the family and society. The invocation of honour, however, also means that there is already some

acknowledgment of the seriousness of the relationship between the two women. Thus, it constitutes progress from a stage where same-sex relationships are best considered temporary friendships, which will end sooner or later with marriage, particularly for women.

Secondly, marriage, in addition to other tropes like friendships and *yaari*, steers this research to look at queerness relationally and situationally. The research has taken an anti-identarian position to suggest that we must stop looking for queerness within people as an essential attribute. The latter is precisely what makes coming out so imperative and appealing as a queer strategy. However, this research suggests that queerness is a potentially far more expansive field. To say that queerness emerges relationally is also to challenge the given idea that only innate impulses, manifesting in non-heterosexual sexual desires and sexual relationships bring about queerness. Several narratives in this research do not reveal an explicit sexual relationship between the subjects, even though it was certainly a possibility.

To get into the debate whether sex is a part of a relationship to call it queer is quite futile, not to mention intrusive. The research thus insists that relationships are queer when they subvert the heterosexual assumption about a heterosexual relationship being the most important for a woman. In several narratives dealt with in this research, Maya Sharma writes that “sex/sexuality are generally understood only in relation to a heterosexual paradigm of oppositional duality, which prescribes gender roles and gendered social codes” (Sharma 2006). The heterosexual intimacy is deemed to be the most important relationship for a person, under this dual schema. What rescues sexuality from this heterosexual duality, and this includes same-sex friendships, is deemed queer for this research.

The language of marriage has wielded to this imperative, the research insists, of rescuing intimacies from compulsory heterosexuality and hence restore desire to the queer subjects. The institution, which constantly ensnares us all, is creatively used by the queer subjects to give expressions to their queer negotiations and desires. The fierceness with which they conduct this struggle, should leave no apprehensions regarding the alleged complacency of the queer subject. Secondly, it also provides us with clues with regards the theorization of the queer *movements*, beyond the official, transnational queer movement. The introduction noted that merely visibilising queer practices without a systematic study of its features, potentials and gaps, render the practices as the “other” of the hegemonic discourse. Post-colonial theories seem more invested in showing that queer possibilities are not absent in India, as

alleged by global transnational discourse (Rao 2020), and have left the field of post-colonial queer underdeveloped.

The research has made a nascent attempt to theorize queer possibilities in India, through the lens of marriage. Towards the end, it also proposes another lens for such a theorization-resourcefulness. Resourcefulness here refers to the creative and subversive use of elements, here institutions and practices, for purposes other than and counter to the purpose they are intended for. The research showed how marriage, which structures and is structured to enforce compulsory heterosexuality, is worked around creatively, subversively, resourcefully, by the queer subjects to negotiate and resist latter's hold. Resourcefulness, if developed, has the potential to take into account the contextual social milieu of the subject as well as restore agency to the subject. Additionally, rather than letting the queer struggles fall into an unproductive east- west dichotomy and their respective arguments for superiority, it shall be able to perceive the various combinations in which queer subjects employ the resources available to them, both western and indigenous⁵².

⁵² An analysis of the struggles of queer subjects demonstrates flexibility in their tactics and strategies in negotiating their homophobia, which might change from one situation to the other, making use of the different forms of resources accessible to the subject. This phenomenon, termed here as resourcefulness can be seen, among other things, in the terminologies used by the queer subjects to refer to their desires. An apt observation comes from a reading of the interviews collected in the anthology *Whistling in the Dark*, wherein the subjects moved from one vocabulary to another. The figure of gay, hijra, *ardhanareshwar* (one of the avatars of Lord Shiva, where he assumes the form of half-man, half-woman), as well as the naturalized categories of man and woman (sometimes as a "womanly man", "a woman trapped in a man's body", "50 per cent woman and 50 per cent man") were all used; one subject moved from one terminology to another with unthinking ease. Different intellectual categories, thus enable the subject to be able to understand and talk about their experiences in its multiple forms and in multiple contexts. Thus, when the dissertation moves between the term queer and gay-lesbian and homosexual, it is not in ignorance of the different implications of these terms. Instead, it is using a freedom which the queer practices themselves afford to us- fluidity of the use of the terminologies in the queer subjects themselves in accordance with the matter and audience.

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