Disco *Jalebi*: An Ethnographic Exploration Of Gay Bombay

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Submitted to the Program in Comparative Media Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Comparative Media Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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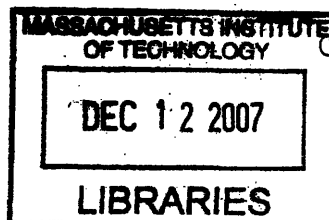
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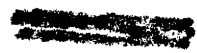Professor and Director
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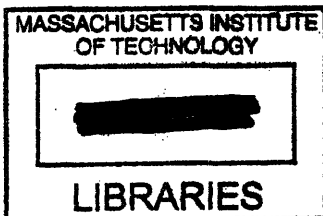
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Abstract

Gay Bombay is an online-offline community (comprising a website, a newsgroup and physical events in Bombay city), that was formed as a result of the intersection of certain historical conjectures with the disjunctures caused via the flows of the radically shifting ethnoscape, financescape, politiscape, mediascape, technoscape and ideoscape of urban India in the 1990. Within this thesis, using a combination of multi-sited ethnography, textual analysis, historical documentation analysis and memoir writing, I attempt to provide various macro and micro perspectives on what it means to be a gay man located in Gay Bombay at a particular point of time. Specifically, I explore what being gay means to the members of Gay Bombay and how they negotiate locality and globalization, their sense of identity as well as a feeling of community within its online/offline world. On a broader level, I critically examine the formulation and reconfiguration of contemporary Indian gayness in the light of its emergent cultural, media and political alliances. I realize that Gay Bombay is a community that is imagined and fluid; identity here is both fixed and negotiated, and to be gay in Gay Bombay signifies being 'glocal' – it is not just gayness but *Indianized* gayness. I further realize that within the various struggles in and around Gay Bombay, what is being negotiated is the very stability of the idea of Indianness. I conclude with a *modus vivendi* – my draft manifesto for the larger queer movement that I believe Gay Bombay is an integral part of, and a sincere hope that as the struggle for queer rights enters its exciting new phase, groups like Gay Bombay might be able to co-operate with other queer groups in the country, and march on the path to progress, together.

Thesis Supervisor: Henry Jenkins III
Title: Professor and Director of Comparative Media Studies

To my *nani* and *nanu,* and Riyad Wadia.
And to Bombay: muse, nemesis, savior, home.

For Junri Shimada.

Kabhii kabhii mere ∂il me.n khayaal aata hai
Ki jaise tujhko banaaya gaya hai mere li'e
Tuu ab se pahale sitaaro.n me.n bas raha tha kahii.n
Tujhe zamiin pe bulaaya gaya hai mere li'e...
Kabhii kabhii mere ∂il me.n khayaal aata hai...
Ki yeh ba∂an ye nigaahe.n merii amaanat hai.n...
Ye gesuu'o.n kii ghanii chha.nv hai.n merii khaatir
Ye ho.nth aur ye baahe.n merii amaanat hai.n...
Kabhii kabhii mere ∂il me.n khayaal aata hai
Ki jaise bajtii hai shahanaa'iyaa.n sii raaho.n me.n...
Suhaag raat hai ghuu.nghat uthaa rahaa huu.n mai.n...
Simat raha hai tuu sharmaake merii baaho.n me.n...
Kabhii kabhii mere ∂il me.n khayaal aata hai
Ki jaise tuu mujhe chaahega umra bhar yuu.n hii
Uthegii merii taraf pyaar kii nazar yuu.n hii
Mai.n jaanta huu.n ki tuu gair hai magar yuu.n hii
Kabhii kabhii mere ∂il me.n khayaal aata hai...

Sometimes the thought crosses my mind
That you've been made just for me.
Before this, you were dwelling somewhere in the stars;
You were summoned to earth just for me...
Sometimes the thought crosses my mind
That this body and these eyes are kept in trust for me,
That the dark shadows of your hair are for my sake alone,
That these lips and these arms are charged to my care...
Sometimes the thought crosses my mind
Just as the *shehnaii* sounds on the roads,
That it is my wedding night, and I am lifting your veil;
You're shrinking from shame, blushing in my arms...
Sometimes the thought crosses my mind
That you'll love me like this our whole lives through,
That you'll always lift a loving gaze to me like this.
I know you're a stranger, but even so,
Sometimes the thought crosses my mind.

- *Kabhi Kabhie* (Sometimes) – Sahir Ludhianvi[§]

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1
Introduction: The Heart Has Its Reasons

Theoretical domains, exploratory questions, research schema, topographic terrain, personal motives

Sugarless

It is the smoothness of F's skin that absolutely fascinates me. I have never seen anything like it. It is cream in color and almost transparent – I can see the blue vein throbbing lightly under one temple and the sharpness of the Adam's apple just beginning to form. I am enamored by its color and texture that is so different from the fairness of the other Parsi boys in class. They are all either milky white and pasty or brown and dusty, just like everyone else. But F is creamy gold with shining skin that always smells fresh of Mysore Sandal Soap. His hair is brown, straight and soft and never stays combed, but flays about his forehead in uncontrolled wisps. Every six weeks, it begins to grow over his collar at the nape of his neck and shortly after that, he comes back to school with a ghastly crew cut.

I have been staring at F surreptitiously during class since the beginning of 8th grade, ever since the class teacher changed our places and made us 'partners'. We were mere "hi...bye" acquaintances in 7th grade; now the daily proximity has led to a mutual affinity that includes sharing tiffins in short break, water bottles in case one's gets over early and compass boxes during geometry period. It is the first time during my school life that I look forward to Monday mornings; I rush out of the BEST bus that I take to school daily and run up to class so that I can be there before F. Soon he enters the class, with his water bottle dangling around his neck, top button always open and his tie knot askew. He places his faded brown He Man and the Master of the Universe *bag next to mine and eases into his seat. Then our eyes meet and I feel a giant surge of happiness. I want to jump up and down and reach out and kiss him and do a hundred cartwheels all over the school compound, but I avert his eyes and pretend to arrange my belongings all over 'my' part of the desk.*

During the Hindi language class, as the teacher drones on and on, and all the students have lowered their eyes to follow the chapter in their textbooks, my eyes avert to F's lap and the smooth thighs peering out from the shorts that were a part of his previous year's school uniform. His mother has not stitched him a new uniform set for the eight standard yet, though this is the year that most boys switch to long pants. He has spurted in growth since last year and now, when he sits in class, his shorts pulled up tightly around his thighs, there is a tight outline around his crotch that I shamelessly sneak peeks at whenever I can.

In my 12-year-old mind, I cannot yet comprehend the feelings that I am developing for F. I have a crush on Suraiya. That I know. She is wonderful to be with and when she speaks to me, it makes me happy. I blush whenever we are teased together and it makes me feel respected and appreciated amongst my friends, even though it is supposedly clandestine. But what am I to do with my feelings about F? I never stare at Suraiya the same way as I stare at F – have never thought of her at night and replayed the day's instances with her

constantly in my memory, never felt the same thrill with her that I feel every time my leg brushes past F's as we sit together in class. Not even when we held hands on top of the giant wheel that we rode together at the previous year's annual school fete. I had 'proposed' to her and though she had laughed it away, at least she'd agreed to hold hands, so it had been nice and all my friends had envied me for days. But with F, it is something else completely. I just do not know how to explain it.

Fuck. I've started to love saying fuck. Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck fuck.

Fuck. I wish that I had never started 8th grade. I wish I were back in the 6th. In Muscat, going ice skating on Friday afternoons followed by arcade games at Sinbad, burgers at Dairy Queen and late night WWF with Hulk Hogan. I miss all my friends from Indian School – Adrian and Kshitij and Romil and Vasundhara who I loved defeating for first rank and sports day and fancy dress and no knowing about shagging or the meaning of fuck and no Badman incident. Especially no Badman incident. I don't want to remember it. No. Go away. No, no, no, no, no, no, no...

How I was late in getting down for the school bus. How I had run down the stairs instead of taking the lift as was usual. How Badman (my name for the Arab stranger who I had never seen in the mostly Indian building after the incident) had emerged from nowhere and held me by my neck from behind. How he had in a firm voice ordered me to pull down my shorts and how he had lifted his robe and tried to put something wet-wet in my bum but then the school bus horn sounded and then the man had run off and I was all alone, my whole body nervously shaking, on the second floor landing with my shorts crumpled round my ankles until I heard a door opening on the first floor and then I quickly put up my shorts and ran out to my school bus. Jason, the driver next to whom I used to sit in the front seat gave me a quizzical look, but I didn't say anything. Just stared ahead as sweat dripped off my forehead on to my shaking knees.

F has caught me staring at his dick. What are you looking at, he says. And before I can catch myself, I hear myself saying – your dick, it's hard, isn't it. Oh fuck. Why did I have to say that, but I look up and he's not mad. Yours is too, he points out and then the bell rings for recess. When school ends, I ask him if he wants to come to my place the next day, after school. He says no because he would like me to come to his place instead. His mom works and only returns back home a few hours after F reaches home. So this is it then, I guess. All right, I shrug. We both look pretty nervous.

We never use the 'love' word. Or the 'fuck' word either. We never ever talk about what we do. The first time, at his place, neither of us actually knows what to do, or how, but we learn soon enough; our bodies guide the way. Soon, we can't seem to stop. We're doing it in the school bathroom, on the sofa in my house, in his parent's bedroom on the dresser, after school, in class, during school, in class, on the last bench... Once during extra French tuition classes, which we both have connived to join together, we arrive early, and as we wait at the table for the other students to arrive and for the tuition teacher to descend from her

room on the floor above, I decide to give him a blow job under the table. When I emerge, I realize that the house servant has been watching us from the door. He has a big grin on his face. He always winks at us after that whenever he sees us. It embarrasses F no end though I think it's kind of kinky.

I am on the phone with F. Fourteen years have passed since 8th grade and I've remembered his birthday and have called up to wish him. We drifted apart after school – I went to Bahrain and he, to the world of architecture. We managed to meet up once a few years later, when I was back in Bombay and it seemed like just the good old times, laughing, cracking each other up. He asked me then if I was happy. I guess, I replied. Are you? I guess, he repeated. But we never met up again.

He sounds different when he answers the phone this time. Distant. Careful. Emotionless. I have heard that he is engaged to be married but don't bring it up, waiting to see if he will, instead. He doesn't. Please don't call me up again, he states, at the end of the conversation. My life is different now. I am not surprised. Marriage is a different cup of milk. Unlike F's immigrant Parsi ancestors from the 8th century, ex-lovers might find it difficult to dissolve effortlessly. Better instead, to drink it sugarless.

"All discourse is 'placed' and the heart has its reasons."
- Stuart Hall, 1990[1]

The selection of one's research topic is never just a purely academic exercise. It is expected that one will pick an area "where intellectual interests, personal predilections and career outcomes can most happily intersect."[2] (Gupta and Fergusson, 1997) I want to be upfront and declare that both my topic and research methodology are chosen due to a confluence of deep personal motivation, academic opportunism and skill sets acquired in my MIT graduate program.

As an adult, I live a closeted life in Bombay for several years and am not aware of, nor do I seek to be a part of, a greater gay community. Sure, I have some gay friends and socialize with them occasionally – but for the most part, a demanding career and a fairly chaotic personal life keep me pretty occupied; I do not desire any

further interaction with the gay world than that which I already have. It is only a few months before I leave Bombay for Boston in August 2003 that I become aware of the existence of Gay Bombay. I attend one of the parties and am added to the mailing list by one of the friends I make there.

Begun in 1998, this group is an example of what Campbell (2004) has termed as a 'queer haven' – a safe space for gay individuals to come together, "affirm their identities and explore their sexuality."[3] I find it very interesting that the space exists in different dimensions and these offer participants a multiple-choice introduction to a certain kind of gay life in and around Bombay city. These dimensions include:

1. The Gay Bombay website – the web home of the Gay Bombay collective, with information, news and internal and external links to resources for the gay community. (http://www.gaybombay.org)
2. The Gay Bombay mailing list - a Yahoo! Newsgroup. (http://groups.Yahoo.com/group/gaybombay/)
3. Gay Bombay events held at different locations around Bombay, like dance parties, parents' meets, events to mark different Indian festivals, New Year's Eve parties and film screenings.
4. Fortnightly Sunday meetings, mostly with a pre-determined discussion topic.

When I reach MIT, I am astounded that through the grapevine, some students in the university already know of my sexual orientation. I am asked by the campus LBGT group to join them for a leadership retreat in the fabulous holiday destination of Provincetown. The event is an eye-opener and a perfect start to what turns out to be a very interesting year – personally (I decide to be completely 'out' with regard to my sexual orientation as opposed to the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy I followed in India), for the country in which I now live (with the recognition of gay marriage in Massachusetts and the debates about it all over the rest of the country), as well as

for the country in which I come from (with the increased visibility of the struggle for acceptance in the media).

While pondering over various thesis topic possibilities over the course of my first term, I am inspired by the advice of Jenkins, McPherson and Shattuc (2002) to study a culture that 'sticks to my skin.'[4] I am certain that I want to base my research in and around Bombay, a city that I love and hate with equal intensity. But I wear so many Bombay skins...which one should I examine? (Bollywood? Youth culture? Education and media?) I study various media research methods at school and am more drawn to the qualitative ethnographic approach as opposed to the social science based quantitative uses and gratifications approach. In another class dealing with media texts, I discover the pleasures of textual analysis. I know that I want to utilize both these methods in my thesis in some form or the other. My background in journalism means that I have fairly good media research skills – and it would be a shame to not use these for my thesis.

I continue to remain a subscriber to the Gay Bombay list – there is so much going on! I begin to study the different books and films that have emerged over the past decade touching upon Indian LBGT themes. This provides the impetus for me to plan a film festival at MIT dealing with the negotiation of a South Asian LBGT identity across different contexts – amidst the diaspora in the West, as well as among the home countries.[5] Sensing my inclination, my mentor and friend from India, the late Riyad Wadia, cautions me to not to do anything "too gay" for fear of being "branded for life;" Weston echoes his warning when she writes that studying

gay people is the equivalent of "academic suicide."[6] However, I am captivated by the changes that have occurred in my country over the past decade, seemingly right under my nose and without me noticing, and I want to revisit them by making them the focus of my thesis. I am willing to take the professional risk that this entails. Again, I play with several different approaches. Gay cinema? No. Too many people doing that already. Gay activism? Ditto, plus there's not enough of a 'media' component here to satisfy the requirements of Comparative *Media* Studies.

I keep on going back to the Gay Bombay list during my contemplation and gradually grow more and more intrigued by the possibility of the "virtualization of real space and a realization of virtual space"[7] (Silver, 2003) that the group presents. I am sheepish for having lived under a rock for all these years in Bombay and find it ironic that I have been so obsessed with nurturing and living in one kind of online-offline realm (my youth website *Freshlimesoda*[8]) that I have allowed this parallel gay universe to completely pass me by.

I realize that if I base my study within this group, it would be very important for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the context of the study would be urban upper-middle class India, something that has not too often been explored in academia, which particularly in anthropological studies regarding India and South Asia has a "distinctly rural bias."[9] (Hansen, 2001) Secondly, the Gay Bombay group is a symbol of the radical change that has swept across gay and lesbian Asia (especially India) due to the emergence of the internet.[10] Thirdly, while there have been some attempts in the past few years to catalogue a diversity of non-Western queer

experiences,[11] most work on Gay and Lesbian/Queer Studies in the academy still tends to be American/Euro centric. Jackson (2000) points out that there is especially, a sore lack of "detailed historical studies of the transformations in Asian discourses which have incited the proliferation of new modes of eroticized subjectivity."

> We... lack studies of the changes in economies, social organization and political systems which have created the spaces for the emergences of Asian gay and lesbian scenes. Current histories, ethnographies and sociologies of gay and lesbian identities are overwhelmingly from the West, and we need studies of gay Bangkok, gay Seoul, gay Mumbai, gay Taipei and other major Asian cities that are as detailed and as comprehensive as those we have of gay Sydney, gay New York, gay London and gay Amsterdam.[12]

And finally, there has been very little work done on online LBGT identity in any context[13]; the work that exists tend to focus exclusively on the 'online', leaving out the 'offline' component of people's lives that I am deeply interested in; here I am in conjunction with Miller and Slater (2002) when they write that the internet and its related technologies are "continuous with and embedded in other social spaces" that "happen within mundane social structures and relations that they may transform but cannot escape."[14]

Altman (1996) has observed that "sexuality, like other areas of life, is constantly being remade by the collision of existing practices and mythologies with new technologies and ideologies."[15] I realize that a study of Gay Bombay, due to its timing, content and nature, would be the first academic account that would deal with the collision of gay male sexual identity and community, cyberculture, media

and globalization in contemporary India. Studying this collision would (in a Bhaba-

esque fashion) present me with an exciting opportunity to "focus on those moments

or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences."

> These in-between-spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha, 1994)[16]

It is too good a chance to resist!

Some Biases Are Good

Bombay: 25 August 2004. Channel surfing on one of those rare occasions that I come home before midnight, I chance upon Tonight at Ten, *a news program on the finance channel CNBC India. Today's episode is a special debate on whether India's anti-gay laws need to be changed. The dapper news veteran Karan Thapar is the anchor and the guests are Vivek Diwan of the Lawyer's Collective, Anjali Gopalan of the Naz Foundation, Father Dominic, a Christian priest and Jai Pandya, a member of the Indian parliament. I excitedly call my mom from the kitchen to come and watch the show with me.*

Thapar is maneuvering the show adroitly – there is none of the 'balanced perspective' and 'giving both sides a fair view' pretence. It is clear that he is completely pro-gay, he talks about Persian poetry and Greek love; his agenda for the show is to passionately propound the gay-equality cause. I watch with delight as he constantly snubs Pandya and Father Dominic, never letting them complete their sentences, while at the same time, giving Diwan and Gopalan more than enough time to make their case. Diwan comes out on the show and Thapar gives him a lot of airtime to express the problems that he faces in his day-to-day life as a single gay man in India. Father Dominic is very flustered – he is simply not allowed to continue beyond stating that the church position on homosexuality is clear – it's a sin. Pandya is reluctant to stick his neck out – he opines that politics can only reflect the views of the masses – but Thapar counter attacks him viciously, citing various laws, both in India and abroad that prove just the opposite. Thapar's partisanship is evident even in his concluding statement: "We haven't done the subject full justice, no single program can, but perhaps this can be part of the process to start the change needed." I hug my mom delightfully. Who would have thought...

Theoretical Framework

At the onset, I'd like to set the record 'straight' and declare that I am primarily studying gay men in this thesis, and not lesbians, bisexuals, the transgendered, *kothis*,[17] *hijras*[18] and the rest of the spectrum of sexual minorities in India. (More on this in just a bit.) These groups are quite stratified – there is minimal interaction between them and each of them has an entirely different ethos. Covering all of them would require a considerable amount of time and energy (much more than the two years that I spend on only working in the gay world), both of which, I have, alas, only finite quantities of. However, this does not mean that this thesis excludes these other groups completely – they make their appearance in several key debates, often surrounding pivotal issues, but it should be understood that the central characters here are gay identified, English speaking, middle class men, affiliated in some way or another to the different Gay Bombay spaces.

The questions that I am interested in exploring within this thesis include:

— What are the factors responsible for the emergence of Gay Bombay within the 1990s? What has Gay Bombay's impact been on the pre-existing gay scene in the country?
— Have the media changes over the past 15 years influenced the perceptions of gayness in India? How have Gay Bombay's participants responded to these changes?
— Do the participants of Gay Bombay envisage themselves as a community?
— How do they access and negotiate their gayness, and their individual and collective identities in Gay Bombay's online-offline spaces?
— How do they imagine their personal futures as well as the future of Gay Bombay?

In my quest to answer these questions, I work with Appadurai's model for a general theory of global cultural processes[19] (1996) as my over-riding reference grid throughout this thesis. Appadurai's argument goes thus:

1. The old models of studying centers and peripheries, push and pull (migration theory), or surpluses and deficits (balance of trade models) are inadequate to explore the complexity of the current global economy, at least from the cultural perspective. An alternative framework would be one that that looks at "fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics."[20] These disjunctures can be explored by examining five dimensions of global cultural flows or *scapes* viz. ethnoscapes, financescapes, technoscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes. (Scapes are perspectival constructs and the building blocks of what Appadurai deems 'imagined worlds', an extension of Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' [1983]) These are "multiple worlds...constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe," that "contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind."[21] Global flows today occur "in and through the growing disjunctures among ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes."[22]

2. Although these disjunctures "generate acute problems of social well-being," they also have positive aspects, and "encourage an emancipatory politics of globalization" through their effect on the reconstitution of imagination "as a popular, social, collective fact."[23]

On the one hand, it is in and through the imagination that modern citizens are disciplined and controlled—by states, markets, and other powerful interests. But is it is also the faculty through which collective patterns of dissent and new designs for collective life emerge.[24]

In each of the subsequent five chapters, I work with the above framework so as to critically examine the formulation and reconfiguration of Indian gayness in the light of its emergent cultural, media and political alliances.

In chapter 2, I contextualize and present the various 'cultural dimensions' of this thesis through its intersecting network of scapes. Here, the *ethnoscape* denotes the landscape of persons who constitute my world of inquiry – the online/offline inhabitants of Gay Bombay. The *financescape* refers to the economic liberalization of India in 1991 that changed the fabric of the middle classes. The *mediascape* comprises the changing Indian urban media matrix, which witnessed a significant reconfiguration in the 1990s. The *technoscape* refers to the emergence of the internet and the cellular and technology booms of the 1990s. The *ideoscape* refers to the local histories and global influences of the idea of homosexuality in India, as well as the contemporary circulation of ideologies like the struggle for human rights, the fight against article 377 of the Indian Penal Code (colonial, anti-homosexual, outdated) and the different meanings of the word 'gay'.

I add two more elements into Appadurai's mix – *politiscape* and *memoryscape*. I use the word 'politiscape' in a narrow sense – to refer to the changing political spectrum in India between 1991-2005, especially the rise of the Hindu revivalist political party the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, 'Indian People's

Party) and its conservative ideologies. My own location within Gay Bombay becomes a frame for me to look at issues from a deeply personal perspective – and I deem this perspective *memoryscape*. My memoryscape, which constitutes my thoughts, memories and lived experiences, both material and symbolic, is the self-activation of my own imagination at work – my personal narrative of being gay in Bombay – and it weaves itself in and out of the thesis, keeping it unabashedly subjective. I explore some aspects of this subjectivity in chapter 3, when I discuss the joys and challenges of conducting ethnographic research 'at home'. Following this, in chapters 4 and 5, I attempt a sweeping study of the past, present and (imagined) future of Gay Bombay and the negotiation of identity, notions of community and the influences of globalization within its online and offline spaces. Finally, in the last chapter, I argue that it was the combination of recent Indian developments in the 1990s (economic liberalization, media proliferation, the advent of the internet, expansion of the middle class and creation of a pan Indian culture) together with the *pre-existing* social conditions (educated English speaking middle class, gay heritage and relative governmental non-interference), that offered gay identified men in Bombay (and India at large), "new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds." (Appadurai, 1996)[25]

In essence, what I am trying to do with this thesis is attempting to map out the notion and locatedness of gayness in Bombay's (and on a larger level, India's) cultural geography. I am looking upon the online-offline Gay Bombay sphere as a 'counter public'[26] (Fraser, 1991) and studying its economic, institutional, cultural

and social forces as a means of understanding core ideas about Indian citizenship at large. Counter publics like Gay Bombay serve as important sites of contestation – not just for their members, but also for the mainstream to work out some of their anxieties. I realize in this thesis, that within the various struggles in and around Gay Bombay, what is being negotiated is the very stability of the idea of Indianness. When one studies what it means to be *gay* in India at a particular point of time, one also studies what it means to be a gay *Indian* at that time. Thus at a macro level, beyond gayness, this is ultimately a thesis about Indianness – and how its core values are being constantly redefined and reexamined.

So as to take this thesis beyond the realm of a mere mapping exercise; I add a polemic edge and conclude with a *modus vivendi*, comprising suggestions and observations from my research and experiences in the field. I hope I might be able to engage my fellow Gay Bombayites with some of the issues that I raise in this section. Nothing would give me greater satisfaction than if this thesis were to ultimately serve not just as a chronicle of its times, but also as the impetus for a tangible action plan as the group imagines its road ahead.

Wheels

Having a car and a driver is a passport into a completely different world in Bombay. On many days, it is the only reason why I continue to work in the corporate world, with the biggest bunch of bastards I have met in my life so far. At the end of the day, at least I can sit back, relax and cruise….

I am sure my driver knows I am gay but I don't care. He can never mention it in any case; servants don't discuss these things with their bosses. They do discuss it with each other though, and so I am fed a daily dose of office gossip about my colleagues on my ride back after work and I am certain that they all know about my sexuality too, through the driver mafia. On my part, I chose to ignore the fact that my guy is a card-carrying member of the right-wing Shiv Sena – the political party that has polarized Bombay for the past decade,

and wishes among other things, that all Muslims from Bombay should be exported to Pakistan – "where they belong."

The cityscape opens up to me. I spend about four or five hours a day being driven about in my car. I now know every twist and turn of the torturous one-and-a-half-hour (on a good day) journey from my South Bombay home to my suburban office. Now, my gay network is not limited to townies only. I can chat with people online from work (I know from my friends in the computer department that they don't monitor the computers of top management, yet. Hah!), and meet up with them in the suburbs for a drink, on the way back home from work. If I like them, I can ask them to drive back home with me for a quick fuck, and then have them chauffeured back in style. Or I can ask the driver to drive us to a restaurant parking lot, and then take off for a while as I grab a quickie in the back seat. If I weren't so busy, I'd be doing a lot more fucking these days. (Man is never satisfied.) I've given up trying to find love. Instead, I fuck (monthly), work (daily) and moan and bitch (hourly). So this is what corporate citizenship is.

Theoretical Domains

My work is situated at the intersection of internet/cyberculture studies, gay and lesbian studies and globalization studies. All these theoretical domains are relatively new – gay and lesbian studies has been in existence for about 30 years, internet/cyberculture studies is just a decade old and globalization/global studies is an emergent field that is only now being articulated academically. Moreover, each of these domains is within itself constituted of several interdisciplinary and often overlapping sub-areas of study. The newness, connectedness and complexity of my domains means that there is no fixed path to take while navigating them – I have to figure out for myself, what it is in each of these domains that is relevant to my thesis, and what can be left out or kept aside, to be used on some other occasion.

Cyberculture Studies

Cyberculture studies, also called new media, internet and digital culture studies, (Silver, 2004)[27] has over the past decade blossomed into a distinct and legitimate academic discipline, with online and offline centers of study, regular conferences, established academic journals, degree granting educational institutions, and a canon of thinkers and theory builders.[28] (Silver, 2000) The term 'cyberspace' was coined by William Gibson in 1984 in his sci-fi novel *Neuromancer* and refers to "a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators.... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity."[29] The term caught on quickly and soon academic work began to evolve around cyberculture or the culture of cyberspace, especially from the early 1990s onwards, as the internet began to make its presence more and more felt and online space began to be equated with cyberspace.[30] One can very broadly outline three stages of internet studies[31] or critical cyberculture studies.[32]

The first stage was about euphoric utopian versus dystopian visions about the new technology and its effect on society at large;[33] about magazines like *Wired* (1993-date) and *Mondo 2000* (1989-1998) and Al Gore's evangelizing; about the optimism of John Perry Barlow and the Electronic Frontier Foundation ("the most transforming technological event since the capture of fire"[34])... tempered by the negativity of Hightower ("all this razzle-dazzle... disconnects us from each other"[35]); about ambitiously titled books like *The Road Ahead, Being Digital* and *City of Bits:*

Space, Place, and the Infobahn (by internet prophets like Bill Gates, Nicholas Negroponte and William Mitchell respectively), sitting along shelves with titles like *Flame Wars, Data Trash* and *Cyberspace Divide.*[36]

The second stage was about online *versus* offline identities and communities, between the 'virtual' *versus* the 'real', "the net" *versus* "the self" (Castells, 1996).[37] Classics from this time include cyber guru Howard Rheingold's *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1994), Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995) and Julian Dibbell's account of "A Rape in Cyberspace." (1993)[38] Most of these early works are set in MUDs or MOOs[39] – and deal with the internet, as it existed almost a decade ago.[40] This stage witnessed the publication of a slew of cyberculture related anthologies, by authors like Steve Jones (*Virtual Culture*, 1997; *Cybersociety 2.0*, 1998), Mark Smith and Peter Kollock (*Communities in Cyberspace,* 1998), David Bell (*The Cybercultures Reader*, 2000 [with Barbara Kennedy]; *Introduction to Cyberculture*, 2001) and David Trend (*Reading Digital Culture*, 2001). Most of these included pieces by the writers of the aforementioned classics, as well as other staples like Allucquère Rosanne (Sandy) Stone[41] and Lisa Nakamura.[42] This was also the age of large-scale internet user surveys like the Pew Internet and American Life Project[43] and the World Internet Project[44] that "counted the number of internet users, compared demographic differences and learned what basic things people have been doing on the internet." (Wellman, 2004)[45]

The third stage, or what Silver (2000) has calls *critical* cyberculture studies

[emphasis mine], is all about the intertwining between the online *and* the offline; context and interaction; social networks and cultural specificity; where "cyberculture is best comprehended as a series of negotiations that take place both online and off".[46] A good example of a work from this stage is *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (2000) where the authors study the internet and its impact on Trinidad via a combination of online and offline methods. Their ethnographic methodology includes interviews, participant observation and website research; they conduct house to house surveys and visits cybercafés; they explore the meaning of Trini identity not just among individuals located in Trinidad but also among the international diaspora, and they contextualize all of this with a study of the political economy of the internet in Trinidad and an examination of how business is done there. Within an Asian context, *Asia.com: Asia Encounters the Internet* (2003) is an anthology that attempts a similar grand sweep. In my case, although I am working with relatively antiquated mailing lists and websites in this thesis, I believe that my work is extremely contemporary due to its scope and methodology employed, and positions itself within this third stage.

I must stress that these three stages are meant to be understood as loose categories, which overlap and co-exist with each other. Thus we find that utopian (Katz and Aspden, 1997[47]) and dystopian visions of the technology (Kraut et al, 1998[48]) continue to persist; MUDs and MOOs are still being studied (Schaap, 2002); as early as 1997, there is a diversity of methodological approaches adopted by academics writing in this space, such as "content analysis, Foucauldian

discourse.... communication history... online interviews...." (Silver, 2004[49]) and even in 1999, writers like Wellman and Gulia are already placing "the internet into a larger framework of "transportation and communication connectivity, such as the telegraph, railroad, telephone, automobile and airplane" and examining how "intertwined offline relationships were with online relationships."[50]

Researcher like Christine Hine (2000) have coined the term 'virtual ethnography' for ethnographic research carried out in cyberspace. I hesitate to use the term to describe my work – firstly because I carry out my research both in cyberspace as well as in the physical world and secondly, because like Campbell (2004), I am uncomfortable with the qualifier 'virtual' – it seems to suggest that online interviews are less real (and less important) than those conducted in the physical world.[51] My position is endorsed by Wilson and Peterson when they write that "the distinction of real and imagined or virtual community is not a useful one,"[52] and further, that an anthropological approach (such as mine) is well suited to "investigate the continuum of communities, identities and networks that exist – from the most cohesive to the most diffuse – regardless of the way in which community members interact."[53] I prefer to use the less judgmental sobriquets 'online' and 'offline'/'physical' instead to mark the distinction between the different environments I work in.

In general, I am skeptical of extreme positions. With the spurt in scholarship on online ethnography, there are diverse opinions as to what constitutes 'real' research online and what doesn't. I don't agree with those that state that one can

only conduct authentic research if it is conducted both online and offline (Turkle, 1995; Miller and Slater, 2000; Hakken, 1999) – I think it is perfectly valid if research is carried out online by itself (Markham, 1998; Dibbel, 1998; Schaap, 2002; Campbell, 2004) if the phenomena that are being studied exist only online. I am in agreement with Des Chene that "to continue to valorize the face-to-face encounter will impoverish [ethnographic] accounts" and that "it will be far more useful to attend to the relation between our research questions and the possible sources that will illuminate them, and to follow these wherever they may lead us and in whatever medium they may turn out to exist." (Des Chene, 1997)[54] The reason why my thesis consists of "variously routed fieldworks" (Clifford, 1997)[55] situated online and offline, is that the community I am studying exists both online and offline – to do otherwise would be, in my opinion, doing my research injustice.

Gay and Lesbian Studies

Though there has been some questioning,[56] the still predominant belief in (Western) academia today is that "prior to the late 19th century European sexologists' and psychologists' invention of labeled identity categories such as 'invert', 'homosexual', 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual', inchoate sexualities and sexual behaviors existed but were not perceived or named as defining individuals, groups, or relationships."[57] (Vanita, 2002). Even the terms 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' are quite modern (the Swiss doctor Karoly Maria Benkert [Kertbeny] coined 'homosexual' in 1869 and 'heterosexual' a few years after). Before the 19th century, 'sodomy' (referring to a wide range of practices involving non-procreational, or

'unnatural' sex, including anal intercourse) was considered sinful in the Western world but it was something that *anyone* could commit. Punishment for deviance was severe – in Britain, for example, until the 1880s, the punishment for 'The Abominable Vice of Buggery' was death. (Sullivan, 2003)[58] From the 19th century onward, homosexuality was medicalized and brought under legal purview, and a whole new discourse was created to describe sexual behaviors, which evolved new concepts of sexual identities. As, Michael Foucault (1976) famously framed it:

> The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology. Nothing that went into his totally composition was unaffected by his sexuality... It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature.... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[59]

Western society continued to persecute this 'species' well into the 20th century; only the angle had changed – from a sin committer and a pervert who had to be imprisoned, the homosexual became a patient suffering from a medical condition that had to be cured. For gay and lesbian individuals living during that time, "a kind of social contract emerged in the west. It had four elements. There was legal and social condemnation of homosexuality. Condemnation was offset by the closet trilogy of blindness... taboo...and secrecy."[60] (Sanders, 2004) There *were* social networks of gays and lesbians in existence in the US in the 1950s such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, but they were well below the radar. From the late 19th to the mid 20th century, there were several shifts in the medical and legal discourse surrounding homosexuality. The newly emergent fields

of psychiatry and sexology played a significant role in its social construction, especially the work of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havellock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfield, Edward Carpenter, Sigmund Freud and Alfred Kinsey.

There was a rupture in the late 60s, which is when the modern gay and lesbian movement exploded (with "the May 1968 events in Paris, the Binnehof protest in Holland and the Stonewall rebellion in New York"[61]) as a component of the larger "'liberation' movements –'New Left, anti-Vietnam war, counterculture, black, and feminist'"[62] – of the time. Stonewall was especially significant. The fight by lesbian and gay street people and drag queens against the police at the Stonewall Tavern in New York City in 1969 became the catalyst of the gay liberation movement in the West and its most iconographic moment. The event marked "the demand for a new social contract"[63] – and visible changes began occurring rapidly after that as part of an overall attempt to create "a clear *social* identity organized around sexuality"[64] – symbolized by rainbow flags, pink triangles, and parades. Around the same time, gay and lesbian studies began to develop within the academy (predominantly in Europe, North America, and Australia) as a field of theoretical discourse.

> Gay and lesbian studies is the examination, analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon characterized by romantic and affectional preference by individuals for others of the same sex. It is by nature cross-disciplinary, covering a wide range of intellectual bases: literature, history, religion, psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, medicine, law, fine arts, and others. [65]

One can trace the origins of gay and lesbian studies to the work by British anthropologist Mary McIntosh on "the homosexual role" in the 1960s[66] – the first wave of writing in the field included works like Jonathan Ned Katz's *Gay American History* (1975), Jeffrey Weeks' *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Great Britain* (1977) and John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1983).[67] Most of these early works "narrated the formation of a collective lesbian and gay identity with its attendant processes of culture making, institution building and political activism, and argued that this identity was crucial to the struggle of gays and lesbians to gain political legitimacy." (Corber and Valocchi, 2003)[68]

By this time, the gay community was experiencing a wide scale devastation due to the HIV and AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, which was pointedly ignored, especially by the governments of the US and the UK, and accompanied by very strong societal homophobia. As a response to these multiple layers of discrimination, the movement began to cluster around two broad agendas, as outlined by Sanders (2004). The first was the 'equality agenda', focusing on equality-based human rights.

> Western activists use minority rights arguments in what is often called identity politics. The stigmatized identity is used to rally individuals in a movement for change. If the idea of a 'gay identity' simplifies reality, it is a simplification that large numbers of individuals happily accept. The homosexual identity now gives emotional support and forms the basis for collective action. (Sanders, 2004)[69]

Gay and Lesbian Studies was the academic complement to this agenda. Radical gay activism was tempered in favor of a program more focused on health issues, engagement with government and other authorities, and to some extent, the invisibilizing of certain elements of the movement that straight society might be perceived to be uncomfortable with, such as drag queens and effeminate men; also, practices like sadomasochism and fetishism, and race and class differences within the community were smoothened over.[70]

The late 1980s and 1990s were the age of continued mainstreaming – of straight acting people 'coming out' and rapid gains being made in all spheres of society, especially in the workplace. There was another shift of activism in the 1990s from being individual-centered to family-centered. In 1989, Denmark allowed same sex couples the right to have registered partnerships, and most legal rights as that of marriage. That shifted the focus of activism to fighting for marriage equality in the Western world. The field of Gay and Lesbian studies followed this historical process with felicity through its sociological, anthropological, historical and psychological works.

At the same time as all this was happening, there was also another agenda being pursued, though not as successfully and on a much smaller scale. This was the 'liberation agenda', academically articulated under the rubric of queer theory, which attempted to become inclusive of a wide umbrella of sexual minorities (especially those that were feeling left out by the mainstreaming process described above) and was associated with social constructionism and post-modernism and

inspired by French poststructuralist theory. Queer theory, with champions like Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, David Halperin and Michael Warner, is about playfulness, power, indeterminacy and performance. Gender and sexuality are seen as social constructs to be performed, reinforced through repetition, and possibly subverted. These scholars were influenced by the works of Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan – they "rejected the Renaissance notion of "the subject [being] fixed, unifying and self determining… [and] argued that this notion… was an ideological fiction that worked to conceal, ad thereby perpetuate, modern relations of power." (Corber and Valocchi, 2003)[71]

> The central tenet of queer theory is a resistance to the normativity, which demands the binary proposition, hetero/homo… If we can speak of the difference as one of emphasis, strictly gay and lesbian discourse more typically stresses the essentialist nature of sexuality over the socially constructionist nature embodied in queer theory.[72] (Hawley, 2001)

However, while queer theory has gained a fashionable legitimacy in universities, the liberation agenda has had a limited impact on the identity based equality rights activism of the gay and lesbian organizations. Queer theory is essentially about opposing the heterosexual hegemony – but the reality is that the hegemony is really not being threatened one bit and in fact, besides a select few in the academy, nobody really wants to either. What *is* being imagined is "a pluralist, multicultural mutual tolerance, and over the past few decades, gay people in the West have "built networks, organizations and media and colonized social spaces on that basis." (McIntosh, 2000)[73]

> Queer theory has a problem of accounting for why gay and lesbian cultural forms have been flourishing as never before and more and more people appear willing to participate in and embrace the distinguishing markers of sexual difference. Queer theory has little to say about the desire that fuels this widespread proliferation and consolidation of identity markers. (Barry, 2000)[74]

> What queer theory has forgotten is Foucault's observation that the power-knowledge complex governing sexuality is not just repressive but is also productive of new pleasures, possibilities and ways of living. (Barry, 2000)[75]

> There is basic confusion around 'queer' which is sometimes used to describe a particular way of being homosexual, perhaps expanded to include bisexual desires and unorthodox gender behavior, and sometimes meant to represent the whole gamut of opposition to the sex/gender order, so that lesbian prostitutes and heterosexual suburban sadomasochists are equally queer. In practice almost everyone who has adopted the label for themselves is likely to be in practice part of the lesbian/gay world, however much they may rail against it. (Altman, 1996)[76]

Despite these reservations, in an ideal world, I would love to only work under the rubric of queer studies – it makes perfect sense. Of course binaries are silly, heteronormativity is oppressive, playful fluidity is good, inclusion must be paramount, and all sexual minorities and majorities must live and love each other as one big happy family. But reality is a little different, as must be my approach. Thus I consciously position this thesis with the realm of gay and lesbian studies. This is not to say that my work is not queer, in fact I think that this thesis – that looks at multiplicities at every level, and plays with certainty and fixity, Indianness, globalization, belonging, and imagination, as well as a reflexive writing style – could

certainly be considered to *queer* established ways of seeing things. But even though my discussions often question identity politics, they are ultimately firmly rooted in them, as are the people whose lives this thesis professes to describe.

In my interviews and during my research over the past two years, I came across hardly any individuals that used the term 'queer' to identify themselves.[77] The only time I heard it being used commonly was at a sexualities conference I attended in Bangalore in June 2004[78]. (Even in America, although one may have a 'queer eye' or be as 'queer as folk' on television, the fight on the ground is for *gay* marriage, *gay* rights, and *gay* liberation.) Most of my subjects accepted the homo-hetero binary (even if they played with this transgressively sometimes), and for them, identity and community (discovery, affirmation and negotiation) were extremely important. Moreover, they were not so much concerned with the 'gay' versus 'queer' binary as with questions of 'gay' versus India's traditional sexuality constructs, and it is to a discussion of these that I now turn.

There is an ongoing debate within academia about whether one can use Western constructs like 'gay' and 'lesbian' when one studies the sexuality of people from non-Western locations. As Leap and Lewis (2002) write, the usage of these terms outside the North Atlantic domains might be considered problematic:

> Lesbian and gay are not context free categories, but express subjective understandings of gender, sexuality and social location closely linked to the historical emergence of North Atlantic capitalism, and to the politics of cultural pluralism during the late modernity period.[79]

Within the Indian context, there in a vociferous constituency that protests the use of terms like 'gay' for India's male homosexual population instead preferring the more functional 'men who have sex with men' (MSM)[80]:

> In South Asia the socio-cultural frameworks are supremely gendered, and often sexual relationships are framed by gender roles, power relationships, poverty, class, caste, tradition and custom, hierarchies of one sort of another. Here for many men/males we have gender identities, not sexual identities. The phrase 'males who have sex with males', or 'men who have sex with men' is not about identities and desires, it is about recognizing that there are many frameworks within which men/males have sex with men/males, many different self-identities, many different contexts of behavior....

> Hijras, transvestites, transgendered, gay-identified men, *kothis/dangas, panthis/giriyas*, double-deckers/*do-parathas/dubli* [referring to versatile sexual practices – i.e. enjoying being penetrated as well as penetrating one's partner], men/males who have sex with other men/males, in all its variety of terminologies, behavioral choices, desires and constructions. Are we truly saying that we should reduce this diversity into the singular construction of a gay identity, a term that does not readily translate into the multiplicity of languages and dialects that reflect the diversity of South Asia itself? [81] (Khan, 2000)

Ruth Vanita (2002) is skeptical of this approach and wonders if organizations like the Naz Foundation, with their preference for '*kothi*' and 'MSM' terminology over global terms like 'gay' and 'homosexual' are not merely branding themselves trendily 'anti-colonial' in the grants bazaar.[82] She critically notes that "it is usually those who have already obtained most of their basic civil rights and liberties in first world environments who object to the use of these terms in third world contexts."

The words 'gay' and 'lesbian' have gained significant currency over the past decade in the media – they are known; in HIV related work, "the political visibility of a term like 'gay' is likely to be much greater than a term like 'men who have sex with men';" and importantly, "anti-gay groups have no compunctions in using familiar terms." Thus, "while intellectuals squabble about politically or historically correct language, Evangelical missionaries from the US are actively campaigning against 'gay' and 'homosexual' people in India."[83] In any case, as Dennis Altman (1996) rightfully points out, terms like MSM too are hardly innocent – they are constructs, which have been created "in a very Foucauldian way" along with other categories like 'commercial sex workers' and 'people with HIV/AIDS' primarily "in the interest of preventing the spread of HIV."[84]

In relation to this thesis, while I do see the relevance of terms like 'MSM' for health and intervention programs, I find identity-based categories to be more significant culturally, socially and vernacularly. I am working in a space widely considered 'gay' – the name itself says it all: Gay Bombay. Not Queer Bombay, not LBGT Bombay, not *Kothi* Bombay, but *Gay* Bombay. And yes, there are a lot of people in India who identify as *kothi, hijra*, or even perhaps MSM, but there are also many people who identify as 'gay', and this thesis is about them. To these folks, gay does not mean what it does in America, or the 'West' at large. They have creatively played with it, modified it, made it their own, so that a married man is gay, an androgyne is gay; everyone in this universe is gay, in their own way. Thus 'married gay men' becomes a separate category within this gay universe, which

itself constitutes just one shade of the entire sexuality minority spectrum available in India.

For my interviewees, "what gay does label is the possibility of resisting local gender/sex norms. It gives a name to the idea that things might be different, that people marginalized within dominant gender/sex regimes can talk back and carve out spaces by strategic acts of subversion. It is in the imaginings of how things can be different at the local level that we find the source of the infectious excitement that surrounds the gay label"[85] (Jackson, 2000) in India. In short, I do not find the term gay limiting, if used specifically and appropriately.

My solution to this issue is to adopt a poly-vocal naming tactic – where naming is important but at the same time becomes irrelevant, and intentionally confusing, reflecting the ground realities witnessed by me. Here, I am inspired by the persona in Suniti Namjoshi's novel *Conversations with Cow*, who "gets frightened of her own changing self as well as those of others' selves" and "is unable to name any of these selves until she adopts the strategy deployed by Hindu texts and practice...to call the gods and goddesses by thousands of different and often apparently mutually contradictory names." (Vanita, 2002)[86]

> This strategy serves to enable rather than paralyze. It also recognizes that all names, terms, signs and concepts... are constantly in flux and are only approximations necessitated by and necessary to human communication. (Vanita, 2002)

Thus, when I speak about my interview subjects or myself, I use 'gay' as it is what most of us chose to be identified as. I make exceptions for those subjects

who have chosen non-gay identifiers. I refer to other sexual minorities as need be –
so when I talk about *Fire*, which was clearly projected as a lesbian film, I call it a
lesbian film, likewise, when I discuss *hijras* and *kothis*, I address them by these
specific terms. But when I talk of the larger context, I use 'queer' as an inclusive, all
encompassing umbrella term, following Narrain's (2004) lead, because firstly, as he
notes, it is simply easier to use than the current alternative – LBGTKH[87] and "has
the potential of stopping this endless process of adding alphabets to the
acronym;"[88] and secondly, because I too believe that despite their differences, all
the sexual minorities essentially "question the heteronormative ideal that the only
way in which two human beings can relate romantically, sexually and emotionally is
within a heterosexual context."[89] I want to emphasize that my usage of 'queer' is
purely as a framework, not as an identity. (And sometimes, in the spirit of poly-
vocality, I also *queer* 'queer' by replacing it with 'LBGT' or 'homosexual'.)

Globalization studies

Anthony Giddens points out that even as recent as the 1980s, the term
"globalization was hardly used, either in academic literature or in everyday
language. It has come from nowhere to almost everywhere" (2002)[90] to capture the
public imagination and might arguably be considered as "the defining feature of
human society at the start of the 21st century."[91] (Benyon and Dunkerley, 2000)
Consequently globalization / global studies has emerged as a new interdisciplinary
field of study in several universities all over the world (And taken on an increased
urgency in the volatile post 9/11 world scenario). The term 'globalization' itself

remains a contested concept, used on varying occasions "to describe a process, a condition, a system, a force, and an age. (Steger, 2003)[92] Moreover, scholars have not only disagreed on how to define this term, but also on its scale, causation, chronology, impact, trajectories and policy outcomes."[93]

Different theorists have established different endpoints for their speculation on when globalization began. Steger (2003) divides globalization into five periods: prehistoric (10000 BC-3500 BC), pre-modern (3500 BC-1500 AD), early modern (1500-1750), modern (1750-1970), and contemporary (1970-today).[94] For Robertston (1992), the categories are: phase 1 (1400-1750/germinal), phase 2 (1750-1875/internationalism), phase 3 (1875-1925/take off), phase 4 (1925-1969/struggle for dominance) and phase 5 (1969-today);[95] while Held *et al* (1999) present the chronology as pre-modern (before 1500), early modern (1500-1850), modern, (1850-1945) and contemporary (post 1945).[96] Friedman (2000) takes a more recent view; to him, globalization as we know it, spans only two eras (mid-1800s-late 1920s, and 1989-today, separated by a 'time out' period between the start of World War I and the end of the Cold War).[97] Although I recognize the importance of the earlier waves of globalization (expansion of religions, ancient and modern empires built through conquest, extensive international trade, the spread of science, etc.) I shall focus primary on this later period of post-1989 contemporary globalization for the purpose of this thesis.

The contemporary era of globalization has many different dimensions: economic (increased financial flows around the world, spread of free market

capitalism, internationalization of trade, growth of multinational and transnational corporations, trading blocs, worldwide regulatory bodies like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, international accords like the erstwhile GATT and current WTO[98]), political (collapse of communism, the increase in global terrorism and its countermeasures, advance and retreat of civil rights in different countries, international cooperation, political interventions by international organizations like the UN), cultural (global circulation of media and entertainment, fashions and lifestyles, tastes and habits, the predominance of English as the global language), technological (the PC revolution, emergence and spread of the internet, miniaturization of technology), ideological (neoliberalism, protectionism, anti-globalization), and so on. All of these are inexorably intertwined.

Economic and technological globalization is now considered irreversible (and also faces the most flak from anti-globalization writers like Naomi Klein[99] and Arundhati Roy;[100] thousands of protesters in places like Seattle [anti-WTO, 1999] the Narmada valley [anti-dam, ongoing]; and at every iteration of the World Social Forum.)

The end of cold war brought forward two significant and contrasting theses on political globalization – Francis Fukuyama (1992) proclaimed grandiosely that this was surely was 'the end of history', while Samuel Huntington debunked this thesis (1996), proposing equally grandiosely that it was merely the beginning to an even bigger battle – the 'clash of civilizations'. Neither of these rings completely true today and instead we find "both clashes of civilizations as well as the

homogenization of civilizations, both environmental disasters and amazing environmental rescues, both the triumph of liberal free market capitalism and a backlash against it, both the durability of nation states and the rise of enormously powerful non-state actors." (Friedman, 2000)[101]

For this thesis, I am more interested in the area of cultural globalization, which might be defined as "a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding." (Waters, 1995)[102] Arjun Appadurai (1996) presents two perspectives from which we can view cultural globalization – homogenization and heterogenization.

From a homogenizing perspective, globalization might be seen as a force that erases difference. It is commonly perceived (using a center-periphery scheme of understanding) as 'Westernization' or 'Americanization'. Other names for this force include 'coco-colonization' (Hannerz, 1990) and 'McWorld' (Barber, 1995) – where the global might of (mainly American) consumer goods and pop culture overpowers local habits, and soon everyone is eating at McDonalds, sipping Coke, listening to Britney Spears and playing basketball while wearing Nike.

The heterogenizing view is more complex than the mere reverse of privileging local over global. Here globalization is understood to set up a "dialectic between the local and global, out of which are... born increased cultural options." (Benyon and Dunkerley, 2002)[103] It talks of interconnecting and not just one way flows. It says that flows occur from the peripheries to center as well as within the

peripheries themselves. It also states that that global products and processes are re-imagined, re-appropriated and reconstructed in their interaction with the local. It is characterized by paradoxes – such as "the rise of multiculturism and the celebration of ethnicity rather than its extinction" (Bhagwati, 2004)[104] Rosaldo and Xavier (2002) call this 'customization',[105] while Robertson (1995) deems it 'glocalization' (after a Japanese marketing term) – "the creation and incorporation of locality, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, the compression of the world as a whole."[106]

From this viewpoint, McDonalidization does not equate to Americanization or uniformity – thus the vegetarian McAloo Tikki Burger™ (spicy potato patty burger) I eat in my Bombay McDonalds is uniquely local, while the *sambhar* (lentil soup) and rice that I get with my Kentucky Fried Chicken in Bangalore will not even accompany the dish if I have it in Delhi. (And if I am in a Paris McDonalds, I can order espresso and a *brioche* (a light textured French roll or bun) from the standard menu, which might be served to me inside a ski chalet themed restaurant interior.[107])

Some other examples of cultural heterogenization: The rise of China and India's soft power in America[108] parallel to the flow of capital and cultural commodities from America to these countries. The growth of 'Hinglish' in post liberalized India, popularized by the fast talking MTV/Channel V video jockeys and captured so well by the umpteen number of tag lines for brands like Pepsi (*Yeh Dil Maange More*, 'This heart wants more') and Domino's (*Hungry, kya?* 'Are you

hungry?');[109] and the simultaneous introduction of Hindi words (like *chai* [tea],

masala [spices], *yaar* [dude], *chuddies* [underpants] and Bollywood)[110] into the

global English speaking lexicon. Washing machines being used to churn *lassi* or

buttermilk by restaurant owners in Punjab.[111] Bollywood films providing Nigerian

viewers with a 'parallel modernity', closer to their own culture and a counter point to

Hollywood cinema.[112] *Dallas* conjuring up different meanings when seen in Israel or

Japan...[113]

Essentially, the heterogenizing vision of globalization reimagines society as a

'flow' – "of people, information, goods, and.... signs or cultural symbols." (Lash and

Urry, 1994[114]) Some theorists have tried to create an opposition between "the

space of flows versus the space of places," (Castells, 1997[115]) but like Gille and O

Riain, (2002) I don't find this notion very appealing as it makes "places disappear

entirely" and also ignores the "agency of actors and their sense-making activities as

forces in shaping the flows themselves."[116] Instead, I prefer Sassen's pragmatic

middle ground approach that sees "globalization as a repatterning of fluidities and

mobilities on the one hand and stoppages and fixities on the other." (2000)[117] I feel

that Appadurai's construct of intersecting 'scapes' resonates most with the nature

of my study; and in this thesis, I have tried to read Gay Bombay as a "site for the

examination of how locality emerges in a globalizing world... how history and

genealogy inflect one another and of how global facts take local form." (Appadurai,

1996)[118]

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The initial approaches to studying global homosexual cultures were of two types. Either the cultures being studied were exoticized by the anthropologists studying them – as something radically different, or, going in the exact opposite direction, Western style gayness was considered to be something universal, that needed to be sought all over the world. (Berry, Martin and Yue, 2003)[119] The global queering debates in the academia (which started off between Dennis Altman and his peers in the *Australian Humanities Review* in 1996, and have been resonating ever since) spurred the creation of work that was not so essentialist in its approach. Altman set the terms of the debate by provocatively writing:

> There is a clear connection between the expansion of consumer society and the growth of overt lesbian/gay world; the expansion of the free market has also opened up possibilities for a rapid spread of the idea that (homo) sexuality is the basis for a social, political and commercial identity. ... change in America influences the world in dramatic way....American books, films, magazines and fashions continue to define contemporary gay and lesbian meanings for most of the world...[120]

Although he went on to concede that these non-Western gay movements might "develop identities and lifestyles different to those from which they originally drew their inspiration," Altman's view came under immediate attack by his peers, for ignoring the 'hybridity' of global-local interactions. For example:

> One of the things such an account of the circulation of 'Western gay/lesbian identities' inside global space misses is the notion of hybridity: not as something that happens when transparently 'Western' identities impact on transparently 'other' cultures, but rather as the basic condition of cultures on both sides of the 'East / West' divide (wherever that might fall...) at this moment in the

concurrent processes of decolonization and the globalization of economies. Altman's article assumes that the incursion of literature or imagery produced in the US, Australia and Europe into 'other' parts of the world means that 'a very Western notion of how to be homosexual' is swallowed whole and easily digested by women and men in those other cultures who then begin to exhibit the symptoms of the 'global gay/lesbian': you see an American-produced poster in a women's bookshop in downtown Taipei, rush out and buy yourself a stick of Pillarbox Red at Watson's and BAM, you're a 'global lipstick lesbian'. This account assumes that it is always only the 'American' side of the exchange that holds the power; that the 'other side' will never return to seriously disrupt 'our' assumptions and forms (might this be one of the attractions of such an account...?) (Fran Martin, 1996)[121]

I am uncomfortable that Altman's hypothesis only lightly brushes by the rich diversity of specifically local sexualities (such as *kothi* culture). However, I am pleased to note that his 'global queering' doesn't only refer to fashion and entertainment but also to the positive effects of the global battle against the spread of HIV and AIDS:

The imperatives of AIDS education have pushed embryonic gay communities in a number of non-Western countries to create organizations, usually along Western lines, to help prevent HIV transmission among homosexual men. In many parts of the world, you can now find 'gay' organizations, which use Australian, American, German, literature and posters as part of AIDS education campaigns, and in doing so spread a very Western notion of how to be homosexual. (Altman, 1996)[122]

On my visits to the Humsafar center in Bombay,[123] I have often observed some of these posters, and while it does feel a little strange seeing images of say, two white guys embracing each other advocating safe sex to Bombayites, what are

the alternatives – it's not like the Indian government is printing any gay safe sex posters!

Again, I turn to Appadurai's heterogenization model as a way to break through this restrictive "either global McGay or pristine local tradition" (Berry and Martin, 2003)[124] logjam, understanding that the poster means something else when viewed in Bombay. I also keep in mind that both the global queering and the local particularities line of reasoning have often used by harsh governments to clamp down on their own citizens, even in India.[125]

Manfred Stegar notes that, "Globalization is not merely an objective process, but also a plethora of stories that define, describe and analyze that process." (2003)[126] I hope that the evocative stories contained within this thesis will help create an understanding of some aspect of globalization as a lived experience *in* Gay Bombay (as well as the context *of* Gay Bombay), from a close to the ground perspective.

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There are two other terms that feature prominently in this thesis – identity and community – and I want to touch upon these briefly.

Identity

> — *The quality or condition of being the same as something else.*
> — *The distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity; individuality.*

Both these dictionary definitions of identity[127] sit right next to each other, playfully demonstrating the challenge in pinpointing this concept down. In the West,

the essentialist notion of identity (arising from the Cartesian concept of the subject

being fixed and having an essential core that is stable) has been progressively

eroded over the years, starting with the Enlightenment and Romanticism, when the

human psyche began to be thought of as "divided and... not whole or 'one'"

(Gripsrud, 2002)[128] – through Freud's differentiation between conscious and

unconscious identities, until the present day's social constructionist view, which

"stresses the temporal and spatial locatedness of identity, as well as identity as a

process." (Bell, 2001) There have been many different terms used to describe this

modern conception of identity, like 'protean' (Lifton, 1999), 'flirtatious' (Philips,

1994) and 'improvisational' (Barrett, 1998; Eisenberg, 1990; Hatch, 1999).[129]

> Identity can be seen as the interface between subjective positions and social and cultural situations. Identity gives us an idea of who we are and how we relate to others and the world in which we live. Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share the position, and they ways in which we are different from those who do not.... Identities in the contemporary world derive from a multiplicity of sources, from nationality, ethnicity, social class, community, gender, sexuality – sources which may conflict in the constructions of identity positions and lead to contradictory, fragmented identities.... However, identity gives us a location in the world and presents a link between us and the society in which we live; this has made the concept the subject of increased academic interest as a conceptual tool with which to understand and make sense of social, cultural, economic and political changes. (Woodward, 1997)[130]

> Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.[131] (Hall, 1990)

Jeffrey Weeks (1995) describes identities as necessary fictions people need to create, especially in the gay world,[132] implying like Foucault, that identities are essentially constructs. Eisenberg contends that socially created identities are a celebration of the 'multiplicity of selves' that individual perform continuously (2001)[133], echoing Butler's 'identity as a performance' (1990) and Giddens' 'identity as a project' (1991) paradigms. Weeks (1995) reminds us that if "identities are made in history and in relations of power, they can also be remade. Identities then can be seen as sites of contention."[134]

> Each of us lives with a variety of potentially contradictory identities... Behind the quest for identity are different and often conflicting values. By saying who we are, we are also trying to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire. The problem is that these desires are often patently in conflict, not only between communities but within individuals themselves. (Weeks, 1990)[135]

In the gay and lesbian world especially, as we have discussed before, there has been a conflict between those advocating identity politics (using fixed notions of gay identity as a rallying point for seeking legal and political inclusion into the mainstream) and those abhorring it as something that is restrictive and discriminatory.

We might distinguish between notions of identity constructed in Western (individualistic) and Eastern cultures (collective). (Eisenberg, 2001)[136] We might also distinguish between social/collective identity ("the identity we get from other people's perceptions of us and the collective contexts we are a part of"; Gripsud, 2002[137]) and personal identity (that answers the question 'who am I?'; Gripsud,

2002[138]) Closely related to one's social and personal identities is what Bourdieu denotes as *habitus* or internalized social conditions that guide one's thoughts, actions and choices. One's habitus is influenced by one's family background, upbringing and educational, workplace and other experiences – it is in a constant state of reshaping.

Dancing Queens

The sky is pouring outside as I make my way to the Humsafar Center. I have known Ashok Row Kavi and company socially – we have had many common friends – but I have always hesitated when invited to the Center, and backed off citing some excuse or the other. This time, two months before I leave for the US, there's a big group of people I know going for a special Sunday High meeting, so I decide to finally take the plunge. From the outside the building looks old and unimpressive – but inside, the atmosphere is pure magic.

As I enter, two fabulous drag queens in saris *sprinkle rose water on me, fold their hands in a dramatic* namaste *and hand me a* gajra *(bracelet) made of small jasmine flowers strung together that I wear on my wrist in total* filmi *style. There are beautiful* diyas *(oil lamps) placed all round and soft pink curtains that cascade down the walls. There are white mattresses placed alongside the walls with rose petals scattered all over them. It is Indian style seating, arranged specially for the* mujra *(courtesan dance) performance that is to be the highlight of the evening. I sprawl on some cushions and exhale. Why was I so scared to come here for all these years?*

Needless to say, the dances are spectacular – they're all my favourite mujra *songs –* 'Chalte Chate' *from* Pakeezah, 'Maar Daala' *from* Devdas *and* 'Hoton Pe Aisi Baat' *from* Guide…. *The crowd is going crazy, hooting and whistling with every swirl of hips, every lowered glance, every lip twitch.*

I recognize the movements and mannerisms. Last year, I took some business clients from out of town to the famous Topaz dance bar in central Bombay (yes, yes, the things one has to do in the corporate world…) and witnessed a dreaded gangster nonchalantly shower a basketful of 500 rupee notes over the heads of the gorgeous fully clothed girls on the floor, who were winking and coyly making and breaking eye contact the same way as the drag queens at Humsafar are doing; except today, there's no money showering going on, only warmth and appreciation.

It is mesmerizing – the vocabulary of the erotic dance. I feel that I have always known it – and I have, in a way, having grown up on Bollywood. I suddenly realize that this is my first real contact with Indian drag queens – I have seen quite a few in the US while on vacation, but here, the connection is much more immediate. These are my *songs,* my *music,* my

people, and I watch the entire show with a foolish grin on my face. Maybe some day, I might be able to perform like them…

Community

There is no consensually accepted definition of the meaning of community. In 1971, Bell and Newby analyzed ninety-four different definitions of the word, which had "little in common other than their reference to people." (Kelemen, Mihaela and Smith, 2001)[139] Raymond Williams (1985), tracing the etymology of this word notes that it is "the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships; or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships" that "seems never to be used unfavorably and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term."[140]

Within the academy, the concept of community harks back to Ferdinand Tonnies, who in 1887 distinguished between 'community' or *Gemeinschalft* (typified by home and village, family, friends and neighbors, where everyone knows everyone and there are strong and multiple bonds between people, with largely face to face interactions) and 'society'/'association' or *Gesellschaft* (where social relations are brought about by urbanization). One's *Gesellschaft* network is bigger than one's *Gemeinschalft*, but its bonds are shallow and weak, as everyone is busy and the city is too big. The multiple ways of defining community over the years either reinforced this divide between community and society (and within this reinforcement, privileged *Gemeinschalft* nostalgically) or questioned it. (Kelemen, Mihaela and Smith, 2001)[141]

Ahmed and Fortier (2003) list some of the different contexts in which the word community has been used in contemporary times.

> For some, community might be a word that embodies the promise of a universal togetherness that resists either liberal individualism or defensive nationalism – as a 'we' that remains open to others who are not of my kind (Agamben, 1993; Nussbaum, 1996) or 'who have nothing in common with me' (Lingis, 1994). For others, community might remain premised on ideas of commonality – either expressed in the language of kinship and blood relations or in a shared allegiance to systems of belief (Anderson, 1991; Parekh, 2000; Rorty, 1994). Or community might be the promise of living together without 'being as one', as a community, in which 'otherness' or 'difference' can be a bond rather than a division (Blanchot, 1988; Diprose, 2002; Nancy 1991). And for others still, community might represent a failed promise, insofar as the appeal to community assumes a way of relating to others that violates, rather than supports the ethical principle of alterity (Bauman, 2000; Young, 1990); that is, others matter only if they are either 'with me' or 'like me'. Community enters into the debate about how to live with others and seems to be as crucial as a name for what we already do (or do not do); what we must do (or not do); or what we must retain (or give up).[142]

"The present global context of flows and fluidity disturbs the temporal, spatial and emotive certainties of communities...." (Ahmed and Fortier, 2003) With the emergence of the internet in this context, there have been reams and reams of writing on the virtual community and the differences between 'real life' and the 'virtual' world – whether real community can be sustained without a face to face interaction, the respective advantages and drawbacks of either, etc. As I have already noted earlier, I don't find this 'virtual vs. real' debate useful or productive.

People do not build silos around their online and offline experiences – these seep into each other seamlessly.

I am more inclined to agree with Anderson's (1983) contention that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined."[143] Anderson concurs that communities only exist because people believe in them. Citing the example of the nation, he posits that the media and ceremonial symbols (like the national flag, national anthem, etc.) create a sense of time and space into which the national happenings and citizens can be positioned as occurring together and with a set purpose in mind. I find this construct of imagined communities to be a useful way of thinking about Gay Bombay. I am also intrigued by Maffesoli's (1996) conception of 'neo-tribe'[144] as a way of understanding the "complex, heterogeneous and contested nature of community"[145] and by Oldenburg's 1991 contrivance of the term 'third space' ("a place separate from the home and the work place.")[146]

Net Gains

For someone who has covered the commercial arrival of the internet in India extensively within the Indian press, organized one of the first mass surfing spectacles in Bombay through my newspaper youth club, and been a part of every industry networking association in the city, gay chat is a pretty late discovery. I buy my first personal computer in 1996 at age 20, but it is not until 1998 that I get my first internet connection – my primary use of the net in the interim consists of checking my hotmail weekly at a friend's place. Having my own internet account opens up the portal to the wonderful world of gay porn, informational websites and real-time messaging, which is where I first learn about IRC (Internet Relay Chat) and then the India-Countrywide room on Gay.com.

This is a place that is even harder to get into than the toniest South Bombay nightclub on a Saturday night. With entry limited to 50, it takes me 20 minutes of precious dial up time on my first attempt. The main room is full of bitchy regulars, flamers scrolling ANYONE 4 SEX 2NITE, MSG ME NOW and newbies like myself tentatively finding their way around. I learn the chatiquette fast enough and discover my personal predilections. I look for

chat bios with style – something spunky and original, not the run of the mill 'Sexhunk Bby…26…31w cs smth fair 7 uncut and hot lkng for some1 smlr' (read as: Nickname Sexhunk, located in Bombay, age 26, possessing a 31 inch waist, clean shaven, smooth bodied, fair, possessing a 7-inch-long uncircumcised penis and hot, looking for someone similar) types. So while A/S/L (age, sex and location) at the beginning of a conversation is standard fare – if someone asks me for my cock size within the first 5 minutes, I'm turned off. I want wit, intellect and pizzazz.

I am a king in this room because I have something that every horny gay man in India would give an arm and a leg for – a place. Thus I can more or less pick and choose. Despite this, it's a fruitless endeavor on most nights. On the rare occasions that I find someone vaguely intelligent, the bloke gets disqualified because he lives in the suburbs, doesn't want to come to where I am even if he is in town, or doesn't break first in giving me his number. There's a well-defined ritual to follow if I manage to have a conversation half decent enough to warranty my interest in wanting to meet. First, we dither about who gives whom their number first. I'm firm on not giving mine out – it just depends on how easily the other person breaks. Secondly, there's the 'real name' exchange. Everyone in this room calls himself either 'Rahul' or 'Raj' (Shah Rukh Khan's most common screen avatars). I fluctuate between the two, depending on my mood. My preferred meeting place is outside Radio Club, down the street from where I live. It is public, crowded, and it would not seem uncommon for me to be waiting there at midnight, for perhaps a friend's car, if my neighbors or local acquaintances see me.

If I'm especially horny or lonely, I lower my standards and settle for what's available on offer. Not all the encounters lead to sex. Sometimes, it is just a drive and/or a coffee. Often, if the person is not how I imagined him to be physically, I lie that I have an emergency to attend and hence will not be able to continue the rendezvous. I hate it when I'm rejected by similar methods.

If sex eventually happens, I really don't like it all that much. I find it hard to get naked with someone who was a pixellated nickname a few hours earlier. I find the whole "what do you like?" and "what do you do?" pre-foreplay question-and-answer session too businesslike. I find it hard to look at people with their eyes closed when I am pleasuring them, and wonder who or what they are thinking of. I find it demeaning to demand reciprocity after I've finished – isn't it simply the decent thing to do, to return the favor?

The two decent ones I manage to meet become regulars – to be met with one week's notice or less, for sex and nothing more, absolutely no strings attached. A is a psychology student studying for his Masters. Tall, dark, lean and broodingly beautiful, he takes three months to tell me his real name and that his entire life story that he had had me believe was a fabrication. He is extremely confused about his sexuality and tries hard to convince himself that sex with me is an experimental phase – what he really wants to do is have a girlfriend and live a normal life. On the other hand, C, a curly haired, boyish looking, mustached mid-level Parsi employee with a reputed public limited company, is completely comfortable with

his sexuality. He is married, with two kids, and fails to see why he should consider that to be an issue. I get it one way at home, another way with you – what's the big deal, he asks, insisting that it is a win-win situation. He is shocked when I wonder if he would be comfortable with his wife wanting the same deal and is certain that such an idea would never even occur to her.

My closeted friend Ulhas begs me to let him watch one of my internet hook-ups and I am surprised at how easily I agree. (Am I an exhibitionist?) The guy we pick up is open to the idea of a threesome but he can't imagine why someone would just sit on the side and watch instead of performing. He's not aware of the concept of voyeurism, and I don't feel like I want to broaden the vocabulary of someone whose real name I will never know.

Research Schema

Inspired by *Hop on Pop*'s (2002) 'Manifesto for a New Cultural Studies,' (which declares that "the best writing in contemporary cultural studies mixes and matches different modes of cultural analysis, merging history, theory and criticism, or combin[es] ethnographic observation with larger historiographic frameworks, trying to place the details into the most meaningful context"[147]) I appropriate Kim Christian Schroder's notion of 'triangulation' (1999) for my research schema of studying the scapes listed earlier. Schroder draws on Silverman's (1993) definition of the term, borrowed from navigation, "where different bearings give the correct position of an object"[148] to suggest a cross-fertilization between qualitative and quantitative research. In my case, I use the term to indicate the complex combination of multi-sited ethnography, textual analysis, historical documentation analysis and memoir writing that I utilize as my research methodology. Obviously, I do not expect these different tools to all point to the same conclusions; indeed, "if a method is a lens, no one would expect two different lenses to produce the same visual representation of the object."[149] (Schroder, 1999) I simply want my

combination of methods to achieve a more nuanced, textured view of the terrain of my research, a view that I believe would be impossible to attain by only utilizing a single method.

To me, a 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus, 1998) seems to be the most appropriate approach "for studying spatially dispersed phenomena."[150] (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) Within this approach, I "choose sites that would afford me positionalities at varying points along a participant observer continuum."[151] (Passaro, 1997) Thus, I examine all the different manifestations of Gay Bombay, viz. the website, the newsgroup and the physical events in Bombay city. But these sites are not the only positions that I adopt, and I do not spread my time equally among them…. They are the skeleton upon which I build my body of research activities – archival media research, close studies of gay themed films and books, memoir writing, and in depth interviews.

I am drawn to the immense potential of ethnography for intense evocation – to me, this is what makes it so distinct as a research method.

> Evocation is neither presentation nor representation…yet, it makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented. It is thus beyond truth and immune to the judgment of performance. It overcomes the separation of the sensible and the conceivable, of form and content, of self and the other, of language and the world.[152] (Tyler, 1987)

Following Markham (1998), I engage in ethnography 'personally' as well as 'interactively', fracturing "the boundary between 'subject' and 'researcher'," shifting my "position back and forth between auto-ethnographer and discourse analyst,

between identifying with [my] participants and distancing [myself] from them" and grounding the data I obtain in "personal, emotional and participatory experiences."[153]

Since I am not a traditional ethnographer in the Malinowskian mode, I am not studying 'others' – but 'natives' like me. There's no tent that I peg in a faraway field. Although I write three arrival scenes and two departure scenes (in chapter 3), it is with the self-conscious knowledge that my field = home, and I am always in it – both online and offline. Like Visweswaran, I conceive of my field/home as my "location in determining discourses and institutions...a locus of critical struggle that both empowers and limits me."[154] And like Campbell, I consider myself "less an academic gone native than a native gone academic".[155] Due to my 'insider' status and 24/7 presence in the field/home, it is difficult to establish precise dates for when I begin my research and when I end it; the period I declare as my formal field/homework timeline is November 2003-June 2005.

In my role as a native researcher, I find myself in the position of having to make "the familiar strange" for the audience that will read my work.[156] (Weston, 1997) I employ three strategies for this. The first is to conduct my research by moving from the components of my project that I am least familiar with towards those I am most familiar with – and to share experiences of this journey (novel and relived) with my readers as vividly as possible. The second is to follow Campbell's practice of open-ended interviewing with my research subjects, constantly asking them to make "the implicit explicit" in their answers, with the hope to "be surprised

by the connotation of things I thought I already understood."[157] The third is to realize

that I possess what Haraway (1988) has called 'situated' knowledges' and 'partial

perspectives'[158] and to use these with efficacy. I am acutely aware of my own

positionality and shifting 'locations'; I reflect on my background and experiences in

the field/home – both past and present – and integrate these in my writing as a

valid form of field/homework.[159]

I weave my personal narrative in and out of the rest of the text as a means of

being "unabashedly subjective" in exploring the "hybrid and positioned nature" of

my own identity along with that of my research subjects. (Narayan, 1993) These are

people with "voices, views, and dilemmas" and to whom I am "bonded through ties

of reciprocity."[160] Like Joseph, I can check data that I obtain "against my personal

experiences" and "the differences as well as similarities" can become "points of

departure for further inquiry.[161] I agree with Narayan when she writes that

"compelling narrative" and "rigorous analysis" need not be "impermeable".

> Narrative and analysis are two categories that we
> tend to set up as opposites but a second look reveals
> that they are contiguous, with a border open to the
> most full-scale of crossovers... A greater integration of
> narrative into written texts does not mean that analysis
> is to be abandoned but rather that it moves over, giving
> vivid experience an honored place besides it... When
> professional perspectives altogether efface situated and
> experiencing selves, this makes for misleading
> scholarship even as it does violence to the range of
> hybrid personal and professional identities we negotiate
> in our daily lives....[162]

By narrating various personal, intimate, significant details of my life

evocatively, I hope to enrich my analysis by providing the readers a micro

perspective of what it means to be a gay man 'located' in Bombay. My 'coming

out' is inevitable...

> Conducting gay/lesbian research is tantamount to coming
> out, whether one is actually lesbian/gay or not. Although doing
> research in New Guinea for example, does not lead to the
> assumption that one must be a native of that region, studying
> gay/lesbian topics is imagined as only possible for a 'native'. [163]
> (Leap and Lewis, 2002)

Instead of protesting this assumption and cloaking my own homosexuality

under the mirage of objective distance, I embrace it, full on. But my reflexivity is not

just for my readers – it is also an avenue for me to figure out my own self. As

Schaap (2002) writes, in contemporary times, the ethnographer's "journey is not

just about getting to know a strange land and understanding the Other, it is also,

and maybe more importantly, a way to better understand the Self, one's own

country and culture. The journey provides the traveler with the experiences and the

context that allow him to regard himself as in a mirror, as if he were not himself, but

an Other."[164] My reflexive turn is an attempt to discard essentializing

"understandings of self/other" and replace them with "more fluid ontologies of

identity"[165] (Campbell, 2004)

The danger with this kind of intense reflexivity is that this work might be read

as merely an insider's view of things at best, or a foray into "narcissistic solipsism"

(Jenkins et al, 2002)[166] or "egotistical indulgence,"[167] at worse, ignoring the

intellectual and academic rigor behind its production or the diverse and complex

sweep of its coverage. I am also aware, as Weston writes, that "reflexivity does not

automatically confer credibility...."

[It] is not, in itself, an equalizing act... But reflexivity has the advantage of calling attention to differences that make a difference...[It] reminds the reader to view the circumstances of the anthropologist in relation to the circumstances of the people studied. It also highlights the way in which the ethnographer's hand, however light, shapes the presentation of data from the field.[168] (Weston, 1997)

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[The identity of an object] is the retroactive act of naming itself; it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of an object. (Zizek, 1989)[169]

Bombay was renamed Mumbai in November 1995 by the communal minded BJP-Shiv Sena coalition government in power. Gay Bombay was established three years later. However the founders of Gay Bombay still chose to call themselves 'Gay Bombay' – not 'Gay Mumbai', aligning themselves with the notion of the city that was "dynamic, intensely commercial, heterogeneous, chaotic, and yet spontaneously tolerant and open-minded.... the Bombay of ethnic and religious mixing, of opportunities, of rags to riches success stories, of class solidarity, of artistic modernism and hybridized energies...." (Hansen, 2001)[170] This mixing and matching and appropriating a variety of foreign influences to make them one's own is still the imagined inherent nature of 'Bombay' and as I have observed during my study, of Gay Bombay as well. I have addressed the city as Bombay throughout this thesis to honor this vision of the city, even though I realize that it is, and in fact, always was, quite frayed at its edges.

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Overall, perhaps this thesis raises more questions than it answers. I would like to think of it more as a work in progress rather than a finished product; just like the gayness and Indianness it seeks to map out. Now without any further ado, I humbly seek your "patience and intellectual generosity to listen to the many voices" (Trend, 2001)[171] contained herein.

In Memoriam

I am so glad to be at Elle. *For a while, I thought I was doomed to a corporate existence at Reuters and it is good to be working creatively with words and images again. I am also beginning to think about my sexuality in concrete terms. I have blanked it out of my head for the past six years but am not so uncomfortable with the thoughts these days. Why don't we do an article on the gay scene in Bombay, I suggest in all seriousness at an edit meet one week. Why, what's happening out there, the editor queries. I don't know, I reply defensively – how would I know, I mean – but it'd be cool to find out, right?*

The piece never gets written. At my first interview, I meet Riyad Wadia, future friend, mentor and guide, flamboyantly high after the success of his gay themed documentary, BOMgAY. *He had given me his phone number when he showed his film to a roomful of gasps at my film study course last year. Darling, he drawls as he drags on a Marlboro light, at his sprawling Worli sea face apartment one late afternoon. Let's drop this article crap, shall we? You're a faggot. Deal with it. I feel a huge weight lift off my shoulders.*

I stay on at his house for a party he is hosting that evening. It is just like any other party, except that it is full of gay men. Diamond merchants, filmmakers, artists, bankers, corporate executives, consulate staff. (Do they send all their gay employees to India?) Everyone's rich, successful and happy looking. I'm the youngest and the only one wearing shorts. I can feel eyes on me. They won't bite you, Riyad nudges, as he circulates, Martini glass in hand, even though you're looking very bitable. Go talk to someone.

I encounter an interesting group. Mostly older men, who are not really my scene, but this is my intro to gay life 101 and I still have a lot to learn. François the French director of the Alliance Française in Bombay, cooks me fabulous meals at his Malabar Hill apartment and introduces me to my first sex-in-the-shower experience (something that I subsequently use as a stock-in-trade for my younger lovers). Ben, the Israeli consul general, is great for going on dates with, because we always travel in a cavalcade of cars, with flashing lights and a jeep-load of stone-faced Mossad bodyguards to give us company. Ram, from Calcutta, is married and comes to Bombay on weekends where he puts up at the swanky Oberoi Hotel and enjoys the good things in life like gay sex accompanied with Absolut Citron shots. I laugh at them when they tell me they have fallen in love with me. I can afford to; I am 20 years old, tight-bodied and smooth skinned.

Riyad introduces me to Voodoo's and the Walls and late night cruising and the concept of sex without love. We never sleep with each other, which is why I think that the relationship is so special. He feels protective about me. If we have sex, I doubt we would be as good friends. Not that he doesn't try. One night, early in our friendship, after a party from which he is dropping me home, I casually ask him up for coffee, not knowing its implications on the scene. Are you sure, he raises an eyebrow. He is amused when I emerge from the kitchen with two steaming cups but leaves after a pleasant conversation. A few weeks later, he instructs me never to invite a gay man up for coffee unless I want to sleep with him. I keep that in mind, to be used later.

I have Riyad to thank for so many things. And I am not the only one. When he dies in late 2003, his family in India is overwhelmed by the number of emails and phone calls they receive from men and women all over the world, telling them what a positive influence Riyad was in their lives. Whether it is advice regarding the collapse of my company, writing my recommendation letters for graduate school, or being there to share my exuberance at having met S and later V, it is him that I turn to, at every significant moment of my life. When I travel to America for the first time, to college hunt after quitting my job at Sony, Riyad voluntarily sets me up with his network of friends all over the country, so that I have a home in every city I visit. During that trip, I develop a strong relationship with Roy, Riyad's elder brother and the bond lasts till today. Once I see the lifestyle of Roy and his partner Alan in Atlanta, I have new role models that I want to emulate. They seem so normal, so comfortable in their domestic simplicity, cooking together, doing the dishes, and shopping at Home Depot. Riyad senses this when I return, and is often disparaging about me want to have a boring conformist life, but I think secretly, he is happy that I have chosen the Roy way over his.

Sometime in between, Riyad takes off for New York, to try and start a new life. It has been far too long since his last film and he is unwilling to make the compromises needed to survive in the cesspool of Bombay's film world. When he returns unsuccessful, the smile still remains but the spark seems to have dimmed. Yet, there is always an exciting project to keep him occupied – the big gay film that he will surely someday get funding for, the festivals and poster art exhibitions that he curates, the Condé Nast *fashion shoot that he directs, the various avant-garde films he promotes, the parties and the glamour that are second nature to him.*

During our conversations towards the end of his life, he cautions me to not make gayness the center of my existence. It destroyed me, he says. Now people can't think of me in any other way. Don't bracket yourself, please. I can see that he is going through a bad phase, but he never volunteers information about his difficulties and I never ask. He is always guarded when we talk about his life; never completely honest with me – perhaps, in his mind, I have put him on a pedestal that he fears honesty would bring crashing down. So we continue with the charade – he is mentor, I am advisee and the roles can never change. I know that he believes in love but is scared of it; that his nonchalance and acerbic wit are a defense

mechanism, that his nightly cruising and experiments with drugs are but a refuge to escape from the pain, loneliness and pangs of self-doubt that he is consumed by. But how do I say anything without upsetting the fragile status quo that we have built over the years?

I so badly want to show him a different life in Bombay – walks by the old Afghan Church, fresh plump paneer *[cottage cheese] at Napean Sea Road, languid afternoons at the Jehangir art gallery, quiet evenings spent lounging on planter's chairs at the David Sassoon library, bus rides through crowded Dadar and Mahim on route number 1… but it is a wish that remains unfulfilled. Before I leave for the US, I gift him a Mont Blanc fountain pen, as I have once heard him complain in jest that there are no decent pens in his house to write with. I tell him that he should write his next film script with it. When he passes away, his mother tells me that just the night before, he had removed the pen from its case, and was thinking of finally using it.*

Chapter 2
From This Perspective...

Scapes of understanding

In this chapter, I shall elaborate on six of the seven scapes that I outlined in the introductory chapter, as a part of my larger attempt at conducting information arbitrage (Friedman, 1999)[1] throughout this thesis. A quick recap: Appadurai has outlined five dimensions of global cultural flows as *scapes* (mediascape, financescape, ideoscape, ethnoscape and technoscape) – these are perspectival constructs, the building blocks of what he calls 'imagined worlds'. I am using Appadurai's grid of scapes as the theoretical framework of this thesis (and adding to them my own constructs of politiscape and memoryscape) so as to understand the 'imagined world' of Gay Bombay. With their frictions, overlaps and disjunctures, these scapes will help us to contextualize the myriad online and offline circumstances that have made something like Gay Bombay possible and sustainable.

According to Appadurai (2000), "the various flows we see — of objects, persons, images, and discourses — are not coeval, convergent, isomorphic, or spatially consistent" – but in relations of "disjuncture."

> By this I mean that the paths or vectors taken by these kinds of things have different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, or societies. Further, these disjunctures themselves precipitate various kinds of problems and frictions in different local situations. Indeed, it is the disjunctures between the various vectors characterizing this world-

in-motion that produce fundamental problems of livelihood, equity, suffering, justice, and governance.

Examples of such disjunctures are phenomena such as the following: Media flows across national boundaries that produce images of well-being that cannot be satisfied by national standards of living and consumer capabilities; flows of discourses of human rights that generate demands from workforces that are repressed by state violence which is itself backed by global arms flows; ideas about gender and modernity that circulate to create large female workforces at the same time that cross-national ideologies of 'culture,' 'authenticity,' and national honor put increasing pressure on various communities to morally discipline just these working women who are vital to emerging markets and manufacturing sites. Such examples could be multiplied. What they have in common is the fact that globalization—in this perspective a cover term for a world of disjunctive flows—produces problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms but have contexts that are anything but local. (Appadurai, 2000)[2]

These disjunctures produce problems and at the same time can be spaces within which these problems might be creatively tackled with, via the reconstitution of imagination "as a popular, social, collective fact."[3]

Appadurai builds his argument for the importance of imagination in today's world in three steps. First he notes that in the "post electronic world", the imagination has "broken out of the special expressive space of art, myth and ritual and has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people…. in… their everyday lives."[4] Secondly, he notes that this imagination does not necessitate the diminishing of traditional values and religion and furthermore imagination is different from fantasy or escapism. "Fantasy can dissipate…but the imagination, especially when collective, can become the fuel for action…and not only for

escape."[5] Thirdly, Appadurai distinguishes between individual and collective imagination. Collective experiences of the mass media create communities of sentiment – or groups that "begin to imagine and feel things together." These sodalities are "communities in themselves and potentially communities for themselves" and they criss-cross with one another, thus creating the possibilities of convergences... that would otherwise be hard to imagine."[6] (1996)

Let us attach this imagination lens on to six out of the seven scapes which constitute the different dimensions of our world of inquiry and explore what it means to be gay in Bombay, *in* Gay Bombay and *of* Gay Bombay, at this particular time in history. (I am excluding a detailed description of memoryscape from the mix here; it has been sufficiently defined in the introduction and in any case, is omnipresent throughout this work.)

The (Not So) Good Doctor and Other Stories

There's a masseur hiding under my bed, an irate grandmother in my living room, and a phone call from work, asking me to come in as soon as possible. Good morning world – welcome to another fine day in the life of Parmesh Shahani, drama queen.

The masseur, Vijay, is easy to explain. Ramanmal Gangwani, an old friend (married with two children, my age), who has tried to hit on me several times without success (and whose advice to me on leaving for America is to never come out but have my fun on the 'down low'), sends him over one morning, because I complain of a nagging backache. I soon discover that Vijay's repertoire consists of an extremely competent full body oil massage, plus a hand job and clean up for only a slight premium over regular rates; or what my friend Nil calls a "happy ending." Married men in their 50s are his regular clientele but of late, this has widened to include younger customers like me. We have weekly sessions – our arrangement consists of him phoning me regularly from a payphone to fix the time for the next week's appointment at my apartment.

This week, however, my grandmother decides to pay a surprise visit (she has a key to my flat) and I have swiftly managed to get clothed, push Vijay under my bed and emerge from my bedroom, looking like I've just woken up. Right then I get the summons from my office.

My grandmother seems extremely suspicious; normally when she visits, I fuss over her and ask her to stay for tea. Today, I ask her to leave, as I have to get ready for work and don't want to be late. Her greatest fear now that I stay alone is that I will bring girls home and gain a bad reputation (that would be terrible for my marriage prospects, wouldn't it?), and since my grandparents function in loco parentis *due to my parents being abroad, they obsess about my well-being, eating habits and chastity all day. I love it… except in situations like this.

Vijay is not pleased. He has had to stay under the bed for 45 minutes until I finally manage to sound the all clear. I have to pay him double his rates, and no massage in return. A few weeks later, he collects my ejaculate in a handkerchief and threatens to go out of my house and shout loudly about my homosexual tendencies to the entire building, unless I pay him five thousand rupees at once. I wonder how many people he's extorted already, but resign myself to negotiating a fairer price, finally settling for two thousand. He never calls up again – I refuse to recognize him when our eyes lock in a crowded train some years later. The next time my back hurts, I try physiotherapy.

Joining my avert-eyes-from club is Dr. Champak, who has his clinic near the Regal Theatre at Electric House. I go to him with a toe injury while in the first year of college. He asks me to lie down on his examining table and proceeds to tap my feet with a small rubber hammer. He then moves up to my knees, thighs and finally my crotch, asking me very considerately, to tell him if it hurts. Since I am too dumbstruck to respond, he assumed he has my consent to masturbate me.

I feel sorry for the doctor. He is smart, reasonably good looking, and a charming conversationalist. I wonder why he would needs to molest his male patients to get off. It is not difficult to find out information about him – everyone knows everyone in Colaba's Sindhi community and Champak often visits his friends in my grandparents' building. I learn that he lives with his sister and mother in a flat nearby. Their father died recently and now, they are looking for a suitable boy for the girl. So that explains his closetedness – a gay brother is not an attractive proposition when you're trying to hawk a girl in the marriage market. But how desperate can you be, if you are willing to risk your entire professional life, career and reputation by wanking off a patient on your examining table? On the other hand, is he really risking a lot? What man would file a complaint with the cops, alleging that his male doctor had fondled him? Besides being a direct affront to his masculinity, it would be a laughable matter for the cops, and of course the doctor would completely deny it.

Dr. Champak becomes a stalker. He manages to get hold of my number and calls me up at random hours. Follows me to college one day, and begs me to come back to his clinic for a good time. Lands up at my house at midnight asking to be let in. I am utterly disgusted.

Ethnoscape

My ethnoscape is the landscape of persons who constitute my world of inquiry – the online/offline inhabitants of Gay Bombay. They are physically 'located' not just in Bombay, but in other cities in India and the rest of the world. They flow in and out of the different Gay Bombay spaces as per their needs and situation. I conducted formal interviews with 32 individuals from this ethnoscape over a period of 2 years, both online and in physical Bombay. (See Appendix A for detailed interviewee demographics.)

This ethnoscape did not suddenly emerge out of nowhere; Gay Bombay was simply the latest addition to an already thriving existing gay scene in Bombay. From my discussions with some of my older interviewees and archival research, I have constructed a brief history of this scene from the 70s to the 90s, which I present below, followed by the origins and history of Gay Bombay from the late 1990s till the present date.

I am providing this origin story for two reasons. Firstly, I want to resist the trap of researchers who willingly grant local affiliations like *kothis* and *hijras* histories and identities but do not do the same for those who profess a gay identity in non Western locations, "and talk instead of 'globalizing influences' and the 'borrowing' of Western models" (Jackson, 2000)[7] for such people; as if to say that they have simply emerged suddenly and without any back story. Secondly, and on a related note, I want to avoid a simplified and linear relationship between the economic liberalization that I discuss shortly and the emergence of gayness. My argument is

that the 1990s were important because they enabled gayness to be articulated above the ground – but this would not have happened unless there was already a foundation to build upon, and Gay Bombay has built upon this foundation in a local and situationally specific way. So the group *does* have a back-story, and it is *both* global and local.

* * *

Ashok Row Kavi (1999) writes, "Bombay in the seventies and eighties was ripe for a gay sub culture. A distinct class of salaried professionals had a firm grip on the city's cultural life. A corporate work ethic had finally evolved..."[8] Indeed, there was a rollicking time to be had for those in the know; popular cruising spots included the Chowpatty beach, the Gateway of India promenade, Maheshwari Gardens, Cooperage Park, the Bandra, Churchgate and Dadar train stations and of course, train compartments. There were female impersonators who danced regularly in elite restaurants like Talk of the Town. Bombay's first gay hangout was a tiny bar called Gokul located in a bylane behind the 5-star Taj Mahal Hotel in South Bombay. The availability of alcohol at affordable rates and the bar's convenient location resulted in it attracting a wide range of patrons, from advertising executives who worked in the office district nearby to Navy officers, stationed at South Bombay's Navy base a stone's throw away. Saturday evenings at Gokul's become a regular event on the gay social calendar of Bombay in the 80s.

From the beginning of the 1990s, private dance parties began to catch on. These were either hosted at the homes of rich volunteers, in rented bungalows on

the beaches of faraway Madh Island or even in school premises over weekends.

The private party phase coincided with the decline in the popularity of Gokul and

the rise of Bombay's second gay hangout – Voodoo, a dance club, once again

located in South Bombay's touristy Colaba area. Unlike Gokul's casual and

conversation oriented atmosphere, Saturday nights at Voodoo were loud, brash,

noisy, and for all practical purposes, standing only – an appropriate metaphor for

the post-liberalization 'spell' that urban middle class India was undergoing at that

time. One of my interviewees, Kabir, described it as his own "mini Stonewall" that

"marked a whole explosion on the scene...."

> KABIR: GAY PEOPLE WERE MORE CONFIDENT AND DIDN'T
> JUST WANT TO BE MEETING IN A DINGY BACK ROOM OF A
> BAR ON A SATURDAY NIGHT. WE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF
> BEING MONETARILY AFFLUENT AS WELL. WE HAD MONEY TO
> SPEND AND WANTED TO PARTY.

While Voodoo continues to be popular even today, the large private parties

came to a halt, largely due to what is now known as the White Party fiasco of

1999.[9]

Parallel to this social scene, in the late 80s and early 90s, the city witnessed

the growth of political and sexual health oriented activism, largely symbolized by the

Ashok Row Kavi led *Bombay Dost*[10] magazine, established in 1990, and the

Humsafar Trust[11] (1991). These grew in tandem with and often, in close interaction

with diasporic south Asian groups like Trikone in the US and Shakti in England.

Humsafar's gravitation towards an activist agenda and its strident approach to a

variety of issues concerning homosexuality in India did not find favor among a large

proportion of Bombay's gay identified homosexuals – their sense of alienation and

quest for a purely *social* interaction space, together with the fortuitous arrival of the internet led to the birth of Gay Bombay.

When the internet began in India in 1995, several gay men in India began to subscribe to an email list called 'Khush'. Founded in 1992, this list (which continues to exist today) was then the oldest and most establish online discussion space for LBGT identified South Asians. However, due to the location of most of its participants, the list predominantly discussed issues that were related to the lives of diasporic Indians from India and the UK, something that its subscribers located in India could not relate to. A few enthusiastic Bombay-based members of this list decided to create a separate list, modeled on Khush, that would discuss India centric issues and thus Gay Bombay was launched on 31 December 1998.

The founders of the list had not planned for the group members to interact offline. However most of the list's initial members were from Bombay and some of them decided to meet weekly on a trial basis. Many of these members had previously attended events organized by the Humsafar Trust and had either found them threatening or too stringent in their tone. They saw in their Internet organized weekly meetings, a possibility of creating a social space that was non-threatening and also non-HIV focused, as Humsafar Trust was beginning to become. Initially, these meetings were conducted over tea at the homes of some of these regular list members, but it was soon decided to open them up to the other list members as well. They followed a system of first assembling at a restaurant[12] and then moving on to the official meet venue. As the meetings continued, one of the group's

expatriate American members, who was soon to leave India because of the completion of his posting, offered his spacious house to the group as a party venue. The experience was so good that the group members demanded an encore.

Due to the networking and organizational skills of one of their new members (a food and beverages industry professional), the group managed to host another large party at a centrally located abandoned warehouse in the city. It was decided that the party would be free, with a voluntary contribution to be accepted at the door, and subsidized by some of the group members, who chipped in with a thousand rupees each.[13] The huge success of this party too, along with a cash surplus from door collections, led the group to realize that they had a good thing going. The next step was to have an event at a more public space; Drumbeat, located in the central Bombay locality of Dadar, was the first bar in the city that offered its premises to the group and other bars and nightclubs started following suit soon, once their owners realized how successful these events were becoming. Today the Gay Bombay parties are a regular fixture on the city's social scene, taking place every fortnight at well-established trendy nightclubs like Copa Cabana, Velocity, Red Light, Liquid Lounge and Karma.[14]

The different facets of Gay Bombay have grown in different ways over the years. The list, described to me as "the pillar of the community" by its moderator Pulkit, has over 2,900 members (in June 2005) and gets a healthy average of 450 postings per month. People who have newly joined the list first have their messages

moderated. They gain direct posting privileges once Pulkit deems it fit, usually, a few weeks after they join. The list has strict rules that Pulkit follows diligently. For instance, no pornography and no classifieds. Some of the most common threads of discussion according to Pulkit are those that deal with the topics of safe sex, relationships, married gay men, jokes, parties and cinema. Many times non-gay issues get discussed also.

The Gay Bombay website is India's main website relating to information on gay issues. Depending on their popularity or necessity, various sections have been added (like 'Gay Bashing' and 'Coming Out Stories') or dropped (like 'GHAR', aimed at people who were looking for gay flat mates) over the years. The most popular sections are the 'Calendar' and 'Events' sections. The film festivals started off slowly – the venue for the first event was a hall in the distant western suburb of Kandivili and about fifty people showed up. However, when the venue was shifted to the more accessible venues of Juhu Jagruti, Mithibhai College and then Bandra's National College (the current venue) – the attendance more than doubled and currently, all screenings here are houseful. The films screened are mostly Western films, full and short length features and documentaries, without explicit frontal nudity and sex.

Special GB Sunday meeting events with themes related to marriage or the family, useful events like those relating to financial planning, or the much-awaited parents' meets garner a good attendance of forty individuals or so. The regular weekly events usually manage to have about twenty individuals attending them. The

group also sporadically organizes different outings, like hikes to historical caves, kite flying events, food expeditions on festivals like Eid and the like, for which attendance varies, depending on the event.

The group as it stands today is not a formally registered entity.[15] While participation is encouraged from all, direct administration of the group's activities are carried out by a small number of members that currently call themselves GBAG (Gay Bombay Advisory Group) or the Core Group, whose genesis lay in the original bunch of people who had contributed for the first dance party. Over the time, some of these original contributors dropped out and currently, membership comprises fifteen individuals all of who reside in Bombay. This residency is a prerequisite to be considered for admission into this inner circle. Other requirements include a deep interest in the work of Gay Bombay and an ability to get along with all the other members. The members have spread out the various tasks among themselves based on their personal preferences.

Financescape and Politiscape

My financescape refers to the economic liberalization of India in 1991 that changed the fabric of the middle classes – the gay scene I talk about would not have been possible without these financial changes. Closely connected to this is the politiscape or the political landscape of the time. I will discuss these together.

1991 can be considered as the defining year for modern India. This was the year that witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first Persian Gulf War and the advent of a new geo-political world order. It was also the year that socialist

leaning India undertook wide ranging economic reforms spurred by a massive

balance of payments crisis – with spectacular results. (See Appendix B for an

overview of these reforms and their results.) The Congress party initiated reforms

were continued by the United Front and National Democratic Alliance coalition

governments that followed and the country has grown rapidly ever since, which is

evinced by even a cursory look at some economic indicators: If we use GDP (Gross

Domestic Product) – the global standard indicator of economic progress – we see

that India's GDP growth rose from 0.9% between 1990-91 to 7.5% between 1996-

1997.[16] For 2000-2001, the GDP growth was 5.8% and it was 8.1% for 2003-

2004.[17] In 2004, the country's GDP stood at US $ 5990 billion – an annual average

growth of 5.8% since 1990.[18] India's foreign exchange reserves rose from a paltry

US$ 1 billion in July 1991 to US $ 136 billion at the end of March 2005.[19] From

being shunned by investors due to the severe governmental constraints, India has

morphed into a desirable global market – AT Kearney's 2004 Foreign Direct

Investment Index ranks it as the third most attractive country in the world to invest

in, only behind China and the U.S.[20] One indicator of India's reversal of fortunes is

that it actually loaned US $ 300 million to the IMF as well as provided economic aid

to ten poorer countries in 2003.[21]

Noted economists like Delong (2003), Williamson and Zagha (2002) and

Rodrick and Subramanian (2004) have disputed this popular narrative that ascribes

India's current economic robustness to the 1991 reforms and argued that the

growth upshift actually occurred in the 1980s itself. I acknowledge the veracity of

their arguments, but still insist on treating 1991 as a watershed year for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, as Rodrick and Subramanian themselves concede, the 1980 changes were pro-business (replacing government hostility towards large business houses with guarded support) rather than pro-market (structural reforms and trade liberalization)[22] and so their impact on the general population was rather limited. The impact of the 1991 changes, in contrast, was palpable; it resulted in the rapid emergence of a "pan Indian domestic class of consumers"[23] (Khilnani 2001), or what is now popularly known as the Great Indian Middle Class (See Appendix C for an account of the growth of this phenomenon), members of which constitute my ethnoscape. And for this class, as Pawan Varma writes, 1991 "removed the stigma attached with the pursuit of wealth. It buried the need for hypocrisy about the aspirations to become rich. Most importantly, it made politics congruent with the temperament of the people. ... Material wants were now suddenly severed from any notion of guilt."[24] Consumption was cool. Fashion, lifestyle, beauty, celebrity, entertainment, dining out, travel, credit cards and malls were the new buzzwords and "consumerism [became] an Indian value." (Fernandes, 2000)[25] (Marketing expert Rama Bijapurkar [1995] described this attitudinal transformation to 'freedom of choice' and survival of the fittest' as a new way of living, a liberalization of the mind that created a new type of Indian culture – which, importantly did not subsume these changes or allow itself to be subsumed by them, but rather accommodated them creatively.[26])

Secondly, along with a fast changing financescape, 1991 also witnessed sweeping changes in my mediascape and technoscape – changes without which the gayness I talk about would have been difficult to articulate. The mediascape is especially relevant; post 1991, the plethora of media outlets enabled the visuals of the new commodities and lifestyles available in the country as opposed to only being accessed 'abroad' earlier, thus allowing the notion among the middle classes that finally, 'abroad [was] now in India'[27] to circulate widely. The flow was not a just one way – as India began to become an international buzzword, Indian IT engineers, skilled managers, models, and others began to flow out of India (and back) rapidly.

Thirdly, as Das notes (2002), besides liberalization, there were many other liberations that the country went through during the period: political liberation (the passage of the 73rd Amendment by the Indian parliament in 1992 requiring every village and municipality to have its own elected officials, one third of which should be women), social liberation (the rise of the backward castes post the implementation of the affirmative action Mandal Commission report in 1989; the rise in literacy from 52% in 1990 to 65% in 2000[28]; the fall in the poverty ratio from 39.4% to 26.8% in rural areas and 39.15 to 24.1% in the cities between 1987-2000[29]; a declining population growth rate of 1.9% in the 1990s as compared to the 2.2% of the three previous decades[30]), technological liberation (the spread of the internet and telecommunications) and mental liberation (a positive new mindset among [certain] people).

Was it a coincidence that the Indian economic boom and liberalization of the 90s coincided with the rising Hindu nationalistic wave in the country throughout the late 1980s? The destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 was a cataclysm; it was followed by several waves of communal riots across different flash points in the country which culminated with a (Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP led) Hindu right wing nationalist[31] government being established at the center in 1998 as well as in several key Indian states from the mid-1990s onward, including Maharashtra (of which Bombay is the capital) in 1995. (Here, the BJP won power as part of a coalition with the even more fundamentalist Shiv Sena.) Rajagopal (2001) argues that this was not coincidental at all and that economic reforms and Hindu fundamentalism were opportunistic bedfellows which fed off each other in the public imagination.

> Both militated against a *dirigiste* status quo and promised radical change if hidden social forces were emancipated, whether of the profit motive or of a long suppressed Hindu religion. Both drew on market forces energized in the process of liberalization, on the support of middle classes asserting their newly legitimated right to consume and of business groups seeking a successor to a developmentist regime in eclipse.... [Both] shared their technologies of transmission for expanding markets and audiences respectively...[32]

Now, these national and Maharashtra state governments *did* have extremely rigid notions of Indianness, tradition and purity. However, these were conveniently tweaked when necessary. So the West was evil, but only sometimes. Western culture was bad, but Michael Jackson was welcomed into Bombay as "a part of our

culture"[33] (and of course, in gratitude, he donated his performance proceedings to a Shiv Sena fronted charity); capitalism was horrible and Enron was first rebuffed, only to be heavily seduced shortly after (allegedly after a whole lot of bribes exchanged several hands); short skirts were frowned upon and bars were closed early, except when they were owned by the politicians in power... Kissing and Valentine's Day style consumerism were supposedly degenerating Indian youth, but the Bollywood films with frantic pelvic thrusts produced by the daughter in law of Bal Thackeray, the de facto head of the Maharashtra government, were presumably alright.[34]

This schizophrenia was manifested at the national level in the public debates around the BJP's *swadeshi* (meaning 'from the home country', an appropriation of Gandhi's philosophy of self reliance that he advocated during and after the freedom struggle) policies before and after its ascent to power at the center in the mid 1990s (In contrast the 1991 reforms were passed without much debate and with much euphoria, because off their necessity and the dire situation the country was in then and also the inability of their opposers to get parliamentary consensus to vote against them). Before the BJP rose to power, it positioned itself as anti globalization and pro *swadeshi* – however once it won the election, it did an about turn and redefined *swadeshi* as a pro-globalization philosophy. The incumbent finance minister conveniently called it "pro-Indian without being anti-foreign."[35]

I do not want to make it seem like the economic reforms of 1991 and the subsequent pro-globalization policy changes of the successive state and national

governments in power have been accepted as an inevitable certainty within India –

they were debated (and continue to be debated) across all strata of society, and

also through the ballot. (The verdict of the 2004 elections which booted the BJP led

government out of power was widely perceived to be a silent revolt by India's poor

voters that the economic benefits heralded by the government's much hyped 'India

Shining' campaign has passed them by completely.[36]) But while middle class India,

whose lives the reforms have benefited immensely, worried about the loss of its

cultural and social values, (or as Seabrook presents it: Liberalization – liberation or

Westernization?[37]) for poor India, the issues were much more serious – the loss of

jobs, homes and often, even lives.[38]

Coming back to gayness, the questions that fascinate me the most are:

How did so many changes in the gay landscape pass by, seemingly unnoticed,

within the *Hindutva* ('Hinduness') charged, schizophrenic environment of the mid

1990s? Why did the press and public, even in the English media, embrace the

articulation of gayness and not jump upon it as another Western influence – to be

fought tooth and nail? Why didn't the political parties in power squash it? I shall

explore these issues in chapter 6.

Perfect Human
I am laughing and talking to my classmates as we emerge from our college building but there is someone blocking our way. It is an old man, stooped, with his right hand outstretched and tears in his eyes that refuse to trickle down. Stationary, silent, pleading, holding his turban in his left hand. Daring us to ignore him. Normally, I would just walk by, pretending that he didn't exist – my usual beggar avoidance technique – but there is something mesmerizing about this man that compels me to make eye contact.

What I see stays with me forever. It is sadness beyond comprehension, misery beyond reason, a loss of pride, self-respect and dignity that will never be repaired, and poverty in

every sense of the word – of options, of reasons, of hope. He does not seem to be a regular beggar. His clothes are tattered but not dirty. I can see that he was once 'someone', and that this act – of spreading his hands out before strangers, head shamefully exposed, asking for help, is probably the worst thing for him, ever. It is heartbreaking. I want to talk to him, connect in some way, tell him that hope is the last resort, and not to lose it please because as long as there is hope, there is the possibility that things may be different but it seems so trite even as I think of it. What can you say to someone who has nothing? My eyes tear up as we observe each other silently for a moment. I hand him a ten rupee note and then another, and then leave because I cannot bear the density of the moment any more. When I reach home, V is already waiting for me, and I make love to him desperately and ferociously, needing to exorcize myself from the burden of guilt about what I just experienced.

Who was this man? Where was he from? What could have his circumstances been that compelled him to efface his pride in such a manner? And why the fuck is it so important to me? I encounter hundreds of beggars everyday, most of them way more miserable looking than this man. Why such strong feelings all of a sudden?

I am reminded about these questions a few years later when I see clips of the 1967 Jørgen Leth short film The Perfect Human, *in the 2000 collaborative effort between Leth and Lars von Trier -* The Five Obstructions. *"Watch the perfect man. Watch how he eats. Look at his ear. Look at his feet..." The visuals on screen are plush and evocative – but all I can think of are the haunting eyes of the old, proud, defeated, powerful man who I met in my college in Bombay. He is my perfect human. Perfect in his pathos. Human in his desperation. There is a segment of* Obstructions *that is shot in Bombay, where Leth recreates the* Perfect Human *character by consuming fish and champagne on a table set up in the city's poorest and most notorious red light area. Behind him is a transparent backdrop against which we can see the faces and bodies of hundreds of people who have gathered to watch him eat. It is sick and surreal.*

I feel his eyes on me constantly now. When I am pondering over whether to buy smoked salmon or turkey sandwich at the Oberoi delicatessen. When I am in Nalanda – the Taj bookshop... browsing through foreign magazines... looking at the beautiful men in GQ *and their taut, sexy bodies, almost always white. The magazines are expensive. I hold them up to my nose and sniff with pleasure – it is the sweet smell of freedom – this is what Indian magazines will never have, I think... the reason why I need to go to America. For so many years, and perhaps even now, America, to me, is the sweet smell in the folded perfume advertisements in* GQ, Vogue *and* Bazaar *that I read inside air-conditioned Nalanda, forgetting that I eventually have to walk out to the beggar-infested, fly-buzzing, cockroach-crawling, shithole of a city that I called home. Inside, I belonged to the beautiful bodied, white, chiseled gods and soon, I hope, I will be among them.*

It is the curse of being middle class in India. To have access to cultural capital and knowledge of all kinds, but not the financial capacity to convert that knowledge into reality. To yearn for Prada and holidays in the south of France and Dom Perignon *because*

Condé Nast Traveler *says that they are cool, but to have to 'make do' with Cotton World, Lonavala or Goa (by train!), and* chikki. *To be able to sit in the Taj lobby, with confidence, and perhaps, even order a coffee, but not a meal – and not just because of the cost, but because of the guilt that accompanies the desire for extravagance. When eventually, I am able to have a meal at the Taj without feeling terribly decadent, or better still, actually go to America, I feel invincible – proud and accomplished (never mind that both these experience fall way short of the gigantic expectations I had about them). The haunting eyes of the old man continue to constantly interrupt my dreams....*

Mediascape
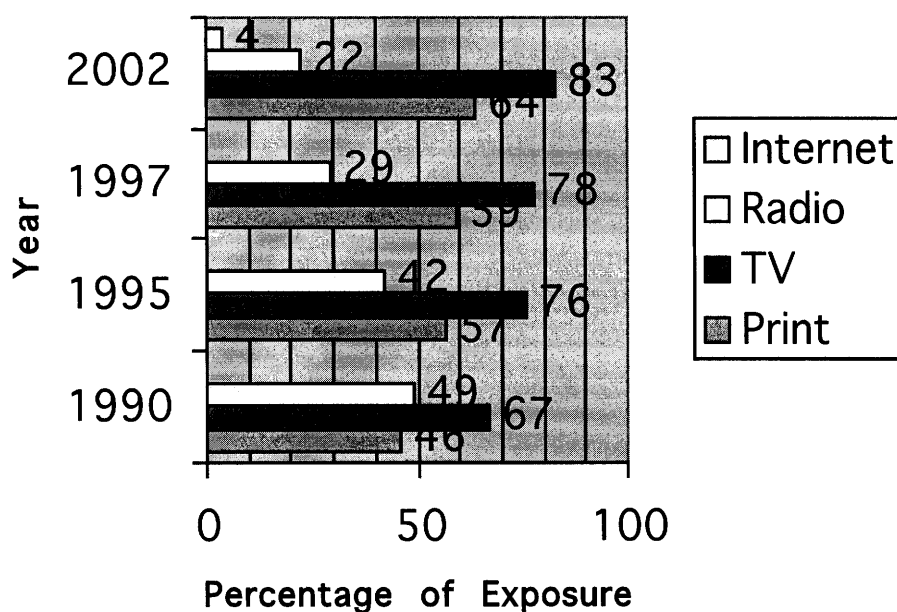
Changing Media Exposure – All India Urban[39]

My mediascape refers to the changing Indian urban media matrix, which has witnessed a significant reconfiguration in the 1990s. While television and print have made big gains in terms of urban penetration, radio has witnessed a sharp decline in its importance. The internet has grown rapidly, but it is still a marginal presence, although its impact on the life of the homosexual urban population has been tremendous. Also, most of the major global media conglomerates have quietly

established their presence in India over the past two decades.[40] The competition

between them and their homegrown counterparts (Times Group, Zee Network,

Living Media Group, etc) has led to an exciting array of media choices with a lot of

envelope pushing as far as content is concerned. This has largely been to the

benefit of India's urban gay population, as we shall see in Chapter 4.

As Sanders writes, "electronic transmission crosses borders more easily;"[41]

and we see that today, as a result of this changed mediascape, gay images are

flowing through Indian newspapers, magazines, films and on television to an extent

unimaginable even a decade ago.

Print Media

I identify two major trends that have changed the texture of how gayness

has been covered in the English language print media since the 1990s[42] – the

tabloidification of news and the boom in lifestyle-based publications. Tabloidification

of news refers to the packaging of news into bite-sized capsules with a focus on

light news and entertainment stories and a move away from weighty analysis of any

kind. This approach, made popular by *USA Today* in the American market and

followed in varying degrees worldwide through the 1990s has been accompanied

by an eager willingness to bend the rules with regard to editorial content in India,

especially by the *Times of India* group. This has led to some soul searching and

hand wringing by media commentators but not much else; the *Times* juggernaut

marches ahead at full steam[43]. As a key element of its strategy, the group launched

Bombay Times in 1995 as a twice-a-week (extended eventually to a daily) eight-

page color supplement accompanying its flagship brand, the *Times of India*'s Bombay edition. Full of gossip, celebrities, fashion and film trivia and lavish photo spreads of the lifestyles of the country's rich, famous and beautiful people, the supplement heralded what is now popularly known as 'page 3 culture' in the county.[44] Other newspapers followed – most notably the *Indian Express* with *Express Newsline* and *Hindustan Times* with *HT City* – but *Bombay Times* (along with its other city avatars like *Delhi Times, Bangalore Times, Pune Times*, etc) has consistently led the pack.

Page 3 culture means that the cult of celebrity has been yanked out of its hitherto confined space as an indulgence or a pastime (say, the monthly *Stardust* Bollywood magazine one bought, to flip through at leisure) and propelled on to the center stage – as something that *has* to be consumed on a daily basis. This has necessitated the creation of page 3 events by the media houses (the Times Group for instance, organizes the annual *Filmfare* Awards, the *Femina* Miss India Contest and the *Bombay Times* Party, to name just three) as raw material, to then be circulated around their various channels, as well as the building up of certain celebrities within the page 3 circuit (only to bring them down viciously a little later, of course, all part of the game). All this is not new of course – but I find it interesting for this thesis because, within this page 3 circuit, openly out gay celebrities like Riyad Wadia, Sylvie, and more recently Bobby Darling have began to thrive, and their gayness has begun to be consumed by mass media vehicles on a regular basis.

There have also been a great number of new national and international lifestyle magazines launched catering to different market segments like news (*Outlook*, 1995), women (*Cosmopolitan*, 1995; *Good Housekeeping*, 2004), men (*Man's World*, 2001), youth (*JAM*, 1995; *Seventeen*, 2003), fashion (*Verve*, 1995; *Elle*, 1996; *L'Officiel*, 2002), motoring (*Autocar India*, 1999), investing (*Intelligent Investor*, 1998), travel (*India Today Travel Plus*, 1997; *Outlook Traveler*, 2001) and food (*Upper Crust*, 2000). In the face of the challenge mounted by these new entrants, older and more established magazines have revamped into glossier avatars (like *Femina*, *Society, Savvy* and *Stardust*), changed their periodicity (the fortnightly *India Today* shifted to a weekly edition in the face of the competition from *Outlook*), or shut down (like the venerable *Illustrated Weekly of India*; 1880 – 1993).

Here, I must point out that though the urban English language press has certainly made important strides through the 1990s and beyond, 45% out of a total print readership base of 187 million (as per the 2003 National Readership Survey) is rural and even within the urban press, the English language press is really not that large in terms of the overall number of readers. Thus though the *Times of India* is the most widely read English newspaper in the country with 7.4 million readers, it ranks only number 10 on the all-India list – well behind the national leader *Dainik Bhaskar*'s 15.7 million readers. Similarly, *India Today*'s English edition with 4.1 million readers is well behind the magazine category topper *Saras Salil*'s 9.3 million readers as well as its own Hindi edition (5.9 million readers).[45] However the English press is considered most influential. It is called the 'national' press (as distinguished

from its 'regional' or 'vernacular' counterparts)[46] and receives a significant price premium in terms of advertising rates and hence a subsequently higher share of the advertising pie, because of the quality of its readers that it delivers to advertisers. As upper middle class English speakers in a country still struggling with high levels of basic illiteracy, they are the aspirational target groups and highly coveted.

Television

The Indian television scenario changed dramatically in 1991. Until then, there was only one terrestrial state controlled network (called Doordarshan or DD),[47] along with a small homegrown cable industry in the cities[48], which screened pirated Bollywood and English films, music and game shows.[49] The telecast of the Gulf War live on CNN and the launch of Star TV[50] spurred the cable operators to buy satellite dishes and offer these new channels to their customers. Star's initial bouquet available in India included four English channels.[51] The tipping point occurred when Star TV entered into a joint venture with the Hindi channel Zee in October 1992.[52] Zee's programming mix of soaps, game shows, and musical variety programs[53] introduced viewers to an *Indian* consumerist lifestyle well suited for the roaring 1990s. In this environment "money and good looks [were] the hallmarks of success"[54] and entertainment and fun were all that mattered. Films and film based programming[55] became a key ingredient of the channel's programming mix. With Zee's success, a horde of other international, national and regional satellite channels began operations. Some of these have since shut shop (Home TV, BiTV, ATN, Jain TV) while others have been successful. (MTV, Sony. Sun, Discovery,

HBO, Cartoon Network, AXN, Eenadu, SAB TV, Sahara). DD has responded by launching a slew of different channels (an upmarket Metro network, various regional language channels, sports channels, etc.) leveraging its vast terrestrial reach to attract viewers. MTV and Star's Channel V have become significant barometers of the tastes of Indian youth – their Hinglish speaking VJ's, sexy couture, racy videos, and yet extremely Indian positioning has ensured their immense popularity among their target audience. Star's fortunes have soared since 2000 – its flagship Star Plus (now completely Hindi) is the country's leading channel with over 50 of the top 100 Cable and Satellite programs in the country, including all of the top ten programs.[56] On a macro level, there are now 20 satellites beaming into South Asian homes with more than 300 accessible channels.[57] (About a hundred more channels are expected to be launched within the next 3 years.[58]) The number of Indian TV homes increased from 34.9 million in 1992 to over 80 million in 2002 – these include 42 million cable and satellite homes.[59]

Radio

Like television, Indian radio was state controlled until 1993,[60] when the government opened up All India Radio's (AIR) FM channel and allowed private companies in different cities to buy time on it, brand their allocated time slots and resell commercial space on these slots. This move proved to be a big hit with urban India as there was no pre-censorship of the content that was aired – it could be Western music, talk shows, call-in requests, anything (even call in shows discussing homosexuality), and soon, people were listening to FM radio in their homes and

cars. In 2000, the government held an open auction for 108 radio licenses[61] – once a company obtained a license for a city – it could run its own complete station. Currently, there are several of these new stations operating in a very tightly competitive market.

Internet

The internet was officially launched in India on August 15, 2005 as a government run monopoly service.[62] Its initial growth was slow and there were only 700,000 users within the country by March 1998.[63] After the government allowed private ISPs entry into the market in November 1998, the number of users increased to 3.7 million in 2000[64] and 18.5 million in 2004[65] and it is estimated to rise sharply to 52 million by the end of 2005.[66] On a related note, the Indian PC penetration too grew from 350,000 PCs in 1991 to 12 million in March 2004[67] and is expected to cross 16 million in 2005[68] and 80 million by 2010, according to the latest Forrester predictions.[69] This are still pretty low numbers, however they are increasing sharply, and also, something else to remember is that almost 50 percent of Internet access in India happens through cybercafés. (According to the market research firm IMRB, there were 50,000 cafés in the country at the beginning of 2004 – the market has been doubling every two years.[70]) In fact, quite a few of my interviewees mentioned that they accessed the Gay Bombay site and newsgroup from a cybercafé, even if they had access to a computer at their home or office, because of the privacy and anonymity that this provided them. Thus the reach of the internet (albeit, within a certain demographic segment) is pretty wide.

Technoscape

My technoscape refers to the emergence of the internet and the telecommunications and technology booms of the 1990s and how both these were enablers of gayness. We have already discussed the emergence of the internet above. Let us now turn to the telecommunication and IT (Information Technology) revolutions.

Telecommunications

Prior to 1992, the government of India had a monopoly over telecommunications in the country and there were only about five million fixed line telephones in India in 1990.[71] As part of the economic reforms process, the telecommunications sector was liberalized in 1992 and private sector participation was encouraged, especially in the cellular mobile services sector.[72] The number of cellphone subscribers in the country rose from about 800,000 in 1997-98 to 5.5 million users by the end of 2001 – and then sharply rose again to reach 50.8 million in February 2005.[73] The figure is expected to touch 290 million by the end of 2008 and cross 500 million by 2010.[74] This cellphone boom has benefited India's gay population in general – the increasing ubiquity and constantly decreasing costs of handsets and phone rates has enabled even modest-income individuals to own their own phones, and enjoy the benefits of private communication – this is something that used to be a luxury in India until a few years back. Gay Bombay makes an effective use of the thriving cellphone culture in the city to connect to its

constituency virally – organizers regularly sent party announcements via SMS (short messaging service, or text messaging) to their phone lists – and these are forwarded all over the city, in a chain like manner, thus having an effective blend of good old word of mouth and modern connectivity.

IT

India's IT revolution of the past decade has been truly spectacular. From negligible revenues in the late 1980s, the Indian IT and ITES (IT Enabled Services including Business Process Outsourcing and Call Center) industry[75] grew at an astonishing compound annual growth rate of 50% during the 1990s and crossed US $ 22 billion in combined revenues, employing over a million individuals in 2004-2005[76]. The industry is expected to reach a size of US $ 100 billion by 2010.[77] This is not the space to go into why and how this technology and call center boom happened;[78] I am interested in it because it of the empowerment it generated among the urban gay community involved within this industry.

As Carol Upadhya (2004) has noted, the bulk of Indian owned software and ITES companies (including those located outside India, in Silicon Valley, which are not really Indian, but still appropriated by Indian media and included within the larger narrative of the Indian IT success story) have been founded by middle class engineers and entrepreneurs. These individuals (like Infosys' Narayana Murthy) became heroes for the Indian middle classes when their companies started doing well, and symbols of the possibilities available in the new India of the 1990s. The advent of venture capital during the dot com boom made the possibility of success

very palpable for many of these middle class individuals, and even though the boom did not last long, the dreams stayed on. For those working within this sector, like several of my interviewees, their employment has enabled them to achieve financial independence, and articulate desires that would have been unthinkable for their parents' generation.

For my respondents, in some instances, this had led them to gather up the courage to come out to their families. But even when this did not happen, the financial independence coupled with the high self-esteem and positive buzz around their professions had certainly inspired confidence. This confidence fuelled their desire to access the different gay outlets that were simultaneously becoming available and I could see that they were striving to imagine and then to live out a gay lifestyle of their choice.

After reading Galatea 2.2…
Picture a bus heading north. The red double-decker winds its way through Bombay's crowded streets. It coughs out smoke and jerks and jolts it way through the seething mass of humanity, miraculously managing to avoid direct contact with any one of the individuals that cross its path. On the bus are two young men with shiny happy faces who are oblivious to the mayhem that surrounds them. They sit close, their thighs fused together as one, just like their breath, and their fingers gently caressing each other, just like their smiles, for they know that the journey is short and the night will be long.

Dear V,
"It was like so, but it wasn't." As I put the phone down after speaking to you for what I hope will be the last time in our lives, block you on MSN Messenger and tear up your photograph that has switched bedside tables via a 30-hour plane ride (but not your Valentine cards and scribbled pencil drawings of the two of us; I can't bring myself to tear those), the irony of Richard Powers' words does not escape me. All our dreams, our hopes, our destinies, were, yet plainly weren't. Langston Hughes once wrote about a dream deferred drying up like a raisin in the sun. But what about a dream shattered, V, without the comfort of a slow burn? I need a metaphor for the way I feel.

When our love first blossomed, I was so full of it that I felt I would burst. I remember how I shouted out loud from my nani's building terrace at the passers by walking below and wrote lovesick editorials on my web magazine till the readers pleaded with me to stop. How the crowds parted as we moved to the center of the dance floor at our first (and only) Gay Bombay party together, and looked on approvingly as our bodies swayed to our own private rhythm. How you would spend hours curled up against me in bed, happy to just trace the contours of my neck, my elbows, and my heart. The superstitious before-exam walk on exactly the same route that we took every day, the redness of the sherbet your mother made for us when we returned home, the roughness of your braces as you carefully tried not to hurt me every time our lips met, your smell... our smell. The tenderness of your perfectly formed love-bites that I would wear as a badge to college for my classmates to raise their eyebrows in amusement. The radiant love, our exuberant foolish confidence in eternity. This relationship was supposed to work, damnit! We had everything on our side – love, togetherness, the approval of our families...it was the perfect Bollywood love story, a guaranteed blockbuster! How the hell did it flop so badly?

Now that it's over, I want to curl up into nothingness and am finding it difficult to type as my hands are shaking and my heart is empty. I have come to understand that to be "as small as love" is still a very big thing, and sometimes, your love doesn't want to fit in response. I don't want to buy the premise that "a love fostered on caretaking cripples the loved one". I want to believe that in some way, however small, and however silly, you grew with me, as I with you. That despite all your bitterness, your tirade against me, your family, the people who love you the most, you will surely one day find the ability to uncoil, unburden, understand. Remember the magic we shared. And not break someone else's heart. I know that I hurt you. I am sorry that I was not more patient. How I wish things were different. But they are not and I am tired and don't want to play any more, V. I wish you a good game, though. Best of luck and see the world...for yourself.

Ideoscape

To understand contemporary Indian gay identity – we need to know its history and background, the forces that it is fighting against to assert itself and the global influences it is co-opting along the way.

As I have noted in the introduction, most "Western writings do not hold out a lost past that accepted sexual and gender diversity."[79] But might Foucault and his acolytes have been wrong, or perhaps, just ignorant? There is ample evidence that even in Western societies, terms like 'Ganymede', 'sapphist', 'tribade' and 'lesbian'

were being used hundreds of years earlier (Vanita 2002),[80] and that there were similar categories existing in other societies as well such as the '*mahu*' and '*aikane*' in Polynesia, '*berdache*' in Native America, '*sekhet*' in prehistoric Egypt, '*eunochos*' in ancient Greece and Rome, '*saris*' in ancient Israel and '*mu'omin*' in Syria. (Wilhelm, 2004)[81] In ancient China, "homosexuality acted as an integral part of society, complete with same sex marriages for both men and women." (Hinsch, 1990)[82] In Indian mythologies and ancient texts, one finds the mention of terms like terms like '*napumsaka*' (gay men), '*sandha*' (transgender), '*kliba*' (asexuals) '*kami*' (bisexual) and '*adhorata*' (anal intercourse); (Wilhelm, 2004)[83] and in the recent past – '*dogana*' (lesbian/lesbian activity) and '*chapti*' (lesbian/lesbian activity).[84] (Vanita, 2001)

Ancient Indian texts from the Vedic period[85] and the *Kama Sutra* (a treatise on pleasure, penned by the sage Vatsayana about two thousand years ago) all indicate that ancient "Hinduism acknowledged a 'third sex' or people who were by nature a combination of male and female and such people were considered special in many ways..."

> People of the third sex were described as homosexual, transgender and intersexed people, they were such by birth and consequently were allowed to live their lives according to their own nature.... Even gay marriage...was acknowledged in the *Kama Shastra*[86] many thousands of years ago.[87] (Wilhelm, 2004)

In ancient texts like the *Artha Shastra*,[88] "while homosexual sex is unsanctioned, it is treated as a minor offence" and similarly in the *Manu Smriti*

('Laws of Manu', another ancient text*)* – the penances for a man who has sex with another man are minor. In one case, "the same penance [is] prescribed for stealing articles of little value" such as "eating the five products of a cow and keeping a one night fast."[89] (Vanita and Kidwai, 2001)

Vanita and Kidwai have claimed on the basis on extensive research that pre-colonial India was generally tolerant.[90] In general, India, love between women and between men, "even when disapproved of, was not actively persecuted,"[91] and there are no records to prove that anyone was ever executed for homosexual behavior in India. As opposed to this, "for centuries in many parts of Europe, men found engaging in homosexual acts were vilified, tortured or legally executed."[92] They argue that all evidence points to the 19th century being a "crucial period of transition when a minor strand of pre-colonial homophobia becomes the dominant voice in colonial and postcolonial mainstream discourse."[93] They indicate the "homosexualization of the *ghazal*,[94] the suppression of *Rekhti*[95] and the introduction of the anti-sodomy law as three markers of this transition."[96]

> British educators and missionaries often denounced Indian marital, familial and sexual arrangements as primitive...Hindu gods were seen as licentious and Indian monarchs, both Hindu and Muslim, as decadent hedonists, equally given to heterosexual and homosexual behavior...Educated Indians defending Indian culture, did not altogether reject Victorian values but rather insisted that Indian culture was originally very similar to Victorian culture and had been corrupted during the medieval period. (Vanita and Kidwai, 2001)[97]

The British also collected, translated, rearranged and sometimes rewrote Indian history as part of their 'Orientalist' agenda during the two decades of their

rule and part of their rearrangement included eliminating or marginalizing all traces of positive same-sex references and correspondingly, showcasing texts or instances that glorified heterosexual masculinity.[98] (Baccheta, 1999) Finally, in 1861, the British legal system was imposed on to India as the Indian Penal Code and section 377 of this code was an offshoot of the British 1860 anti sodomy law.

But one must not blame colonialism for everything (Although it *is* a rather convenient sitting duck). As Narrain (2004) pertinently points out, the continued perpetration of the stigma against homosexuality in India "owes as much to nationalism as it did to colonialism."[99]

I have compiled this history as a part of my ideoscape of gayness, not just to provide a temporal background, but also because I believe that it is imperative that this history is known and constantly reiterated. Firstly, this "destabilizes opponents who argue that homosexuality is purely a Western import."[100] (Sanders, 2004) Of course, playing the blame game on homosexuality is nothing new, as Vanita and Kidwai (2001) point out. Thus "Arabs argue that Persians introduced the vice and Persians blame Christian monks... many believe that the idea and practice of same sex love were imported into India by 'foreigners' – Muslim invaders, European conquerors or American capitalists."[101]

Also, "the simple fact that there is history behind sexual variation is validating for contemporary gays and lesbians. They are not alone in history."[102] (Sanders, 2004) Indian historians especially, as Narrain writes, including highly esteemed figures like Romila Thapar and DD Kosambi, have either been completely silent on

the issue – they have either dismissed it as something irrelevant, or have

purposefully heterosexualized queer traditions.[103] (Narrain, 2004) Reclaiming the

right heritage of India's homosexual past, and constantly emphasizing it, may

provide hope and sustenance, more so for those who are living very difficult lives in

very difficult circumstances.

Going back to section 377. The law, with the heading 'Unnatural Offences'
states:

> Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against
> the order of nature with any man, woman or animal,
> shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with
> imprisonment of either description for a term which may
> extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.
> Explanation - Penetration is sufficient to constitute
> the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence
> described in this section.

The statute does not clarify exactly what these unnatural acts are but "the

courts have interpreted the same to include anal sex, oral sex, intra femural sex

[thigh sex], and mutual masturbation. In effect all the possible forms of sexual

expressions between males have been criminalized." (Bondyopadhyay, undated)[104]

Although there are very few charges under 377 in the courts, the law is used in

public spaces by the police to abuse and blackmail gay people and harass

outreach workers doing HIV/AIDS intervention work. The existence of this section

also means that homosexual domestic partnerships and *hijra* kinship are not

recognized by the law.

> Queers and *hijras* have had no rights to inheritance,
> adoption, custody, hospital visits, or to the bodies of
> their deceased partners or kin. It has been perfectly
> legal for employers to refuse to hire or once hired to fire

someone simply because he or she is queer. Doctors
have been able to refuse to treat queers with impunity.
And the list of queer deprivation of basic citizenship
rights goes on. (Bacchetta, 1999)[105]

There have been various debates in English newspapers about the pros and

cons of abolishing section 377 over the past few years; the topic remains

contentious.[106] Legally, the section was first challenged in 1994, when the human

rights activist group AIDS Bhedbav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA, 'Campaign Against

AIDS Discrimination') filed a public interest petition in the Delhi High Court regarding

its constitutional validity. However, the group became defunct soon afterwards and

the petition was never heard.

In 2001 the legal process was revived, when the Naz Foundation (an India

and UK based AIDS prevention organization), represented by the Lawyers

Collective HIV/AIDS action unit, approached the Delhi High Court with a request to

abolish Section 377 as it was violative of the right to equality (Article 14), right to

freedom (Article 19) and right to life and liberty (Article 21) guaranteed by the Indian

constitution. This action was duly reported by the country's media.[107] The court

wanted the Central government's view on the subject before it issued its response,

and repeatedly sent requests to the Attorney General of India, asking for a

clarification on the subject.[108] On September 8, 2003, after dilly-dallying for two

years, the Indian Central Government finally informed the Delhi High Court that

homosexuality could not be legalized in India as in their view, Indian society was

intolerant to it. This decision and the protests by gay activists in its aftermath were

widely broadcast in the media[109] as was the further dismissal of Naz's review

petition in 2004 that asked the court to reconsider its stance. The petitioners then approached the Supreme Court and on April 1, 2005, the court directed the government to file its response,[110] which is where the situation stands as of today.

Overall, the queer activist movement in India is broad and diverse, pursuing several legal and health agendas. A number of such different gay, lesbian, *hijra, kothi* and other groups came together under the umbrella of the India Network for Sexual Minorities (INFOSEM) in October 2003, in order to collectively advocate for their rights.[111]

The current situation in India might be considered to be both similar and different to that of Western societies pre-gay liberation. It is similar in a sense because, the struggle to repeal section 377 has helped in galvanizing LBGT activism in the country. (Narrain, 2004: "In Foucauldian terms, power elicits its own resistance...[112]) It is different because in India as with other Asian developing countries, "official condemnation of homosexuality exists but based on much different concerns than in the West. It is part of a broader discourse about Western influence." (Sanders, 2004)[113] The drivers for political activism (besides section 377) in India include economic growth, international LBGT NGOs, international human right NGOs and the overall discourse around human rights, travel to the west (however with internet this has changed – as Sanders writes, the journey to the west no longer requires travel[114]), help from the diaspora, technological changes, and HIV/AIDS. With regard to AIDS, its role in the West is well documented, in India too, we see that firstly, the disease is creating spaces to discuss issues about

sexuality and secondly, the majority of the Indian LBGT activist group[s] receive

funding for HIV/AIDS related work.[115]

Chapter 3
Up Close and Personal

The pleasures and complications of ethnography at 'home'

Queen's Necklace

> And love
> Is not the easy thing
> The only baggage you can bring
> Is all that you can't leave behind

Walking down Marine Drive at seven in the evening. Hungry Eyes Chinese food truck is shut for the day. Every afternoon, it feeds the hordes that cannot afford a table at the Oberoi, and the grub's better too. Twilight, dusk. I am surrounded by the Queen's Necklace. Very beautiful. High tide. The angry sea rises above the breakers and hits passers-by. I've seen it much angrier. Bombay has just had seven days of incessant rain. I have walked this route for years. It is my catharsis. All the way from home, down Colaba Causeway across Nariman Point and then along the seashore. I climb the rocks and look at the vast sea, the eternity beyond.

The Queen's Necklace begins with the high rise buildings of Navy Nagar – all similarly sized; then the tall Air India and Oberoi Hotel buildings at Nariman Point and the new NCPA complex with flats more expensive than Manhattan; the revolving restaurant of the Ambassador Hotel; the string of art deco buildings, none of them more than six floors high; the floodlight Wankhede Cricket Stadium, now dark, but when there is a match on, all of Marine Drive is electrified and people climb up to the terraces of the neighboring buildings for a free aerial view. Walk past the flyover from Metro, which curls in a sweeping arc on to the sea front. The point at which the flyover and Marine Drive intersect is the center of the necklace. If you sit here, you can see the two ends in the periphery of your vision and the horizon beyond where the sky meets the ocean. I often pause at this point, and wonder about life and being gay and finding happiness… shit like that. My yoga class is across the road at the 100 year-old Kaivalyadham Institute, but I've been skipping sessions.

Crowded, crowded traffic moving at 80 kilometers per hour. Crazy people running across at all the wrong places. 2002. I see a dead body on this very road as I speed home in my car from another bad day at work. A young man with his thigh torn from his body and flung across the road. There is a pool of blood and I can see the bone poking out of the flesh where the thigh used to be. So many vehicles are rushing by but no one stops. My driver reassures me that there must be an ambulance on its way. Cold cruel city – home, nemesis, love. Why do I hate you so much? Why can I not leave you forever? Why did I let my driver drive on?

> What you got, they can't steal it
> No they can't even feel it

Walk on
Walk on
Stay safe tonight

A light drizzle. Now past the new renovated Police Gymkhana, the dilapidated Hindu and Parsi gymkhanas, the old Taraporewala Aquarium, where no one really goes any more, except poor country-hick tourists. Chowpatty and its massage men; crowded bhel puri *and* falooda *stalls, sanitized and contained into a concrete food plaza. The beach is cleaner than ever. Wait till the Ganpati festival when it turns into a big filthy garbage dump with all the plaster of Paris statue immersions. Nana-nani Park — a good idea for old people — but no parking. New Yorker's restaurant with the best Indianized* nachos *in the world, outside which there is always a line to get in, even on afternoons and weekdays. The glittering skyscrapers of Malabar Hill and oversized hoardings in the distance. Some like 'Binani' and 'Raymond's' have been there for decades; others like 'Reliance India Mobile' are new. And then, the clasp of the necklace, a stretch of pristine land with its private beach — the governor's estate -- Raj Bhavan.*

And I know it aches
And your heart it breaks
You can only take so much
Walk on

Tall swaying palm trees, sea salt water spraying my face, wind running through my hair, tears flowing down my cheeks. Nariyal pani *vendors huddled up under ineffectual beach umbrellas. Muscle men in their jogging suits, fat ladies in* salwar kurtas *and walking shoes, lots of people walking their dogs, lots of dogs walking their people; servants and children; beggars. Office-goers deciding to walk from Marine Lines to Charni Road station, the walk their only respite after a hard, hard day at work. The women will chop vegetables on the train ride home and the men will play cards with their 'train friends' who will jump into fast moving trains before they stop at the station to claim a spot for them on the return journey. Space is premium in Bombay city and a seat on the train a precious commodity to be fought over. Trains filled with horror. Jayabala Asher thrown out, her legs cut off, for fighting a rapist while a compartment of men watches silently, not stepping in. The mayor gives her an award for bravery. Acid thrown on pregnant women from outside the train compartment. Aircraft engineer tossed out on to the tracks by rowdies. Killed. The city's trains devour 3,500 a year, approximately 10 per day. Always hungry for more. 1996. Early morning train ride to Bombay University's Kalina campus. Squatters shitting on the railway tracks, their backs modestly turned towards us voyeurs on the trains, so that we can see their exposed bums and their shiny globules of freshly ejected shit with flies hovering above, but not their genitalia. The buttocks turn me on. One should never board a running train, I hear my mother say. I am 14 years old and running after a bus I have just alighted from because I left my pencil box in it — but I am too slow. My mother screams at me when I reach home. Is your pencil box more important, or your life? Never run after a moving bus train or anything, do you understand?*

Leave it behind
You've got to leave it behind

I see myself in the schoolboys walking on the road today, their shoulders hunched over with their overloaded bags. They have finished their extra tuition class and will go home to do two sets of homework while the rest of the family watches Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi *on television. They have to study hard, and run, run, run, so that they can keep up in the rat race. But they have their arms draped comfortably around each other's waists and their friends will not taunt them with "that's so gay" – physical contact between friends is much more accepted in India – it is a demonstration of homosocial behavior, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would say. So they walk about, bodies comfortably touching, flip flops tossing up brown splotches of mud on their bare calves. Lovers sit down on the rocks amidst the crabs, holding hands – a brief moment of intimacy before the policeman comes and shoos them away. The drizzle turns into a downpour. I open my umbrella, adjust my iPod, walk on*

All that you fashion
All that you make
All that you build
All that you break
All that you measure
All that you feel
All this you can leave behind
     – *U2*, Walk On[1]

Ethnography in flux

The discipline of anthropology[2] has Western colonial origins, with its theories and concepts "formulated from the point of view of Western ideology, Western needs and a Western way of life" (Jones, 1970)[3] The early anthropologists, mostly British, stayed at home and relied on third person accounts from soldiers, missionaries and other travelers for their studies. Their research was "uninterested in the patterns of everyday life and grounded almost entirely in what people said, not what they did." (Van Maanen, 1988)[4] Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas and AR Radcliffe-Brown changed the course of the discipline with their practice of actually living among their research subjects and documenting their daily lives and

subsequently, "interactive depth and coresidence" (Clifford, 1997)[5] became a professional requirement. Thus social anthropology became redefined as "'the study of small-scale society – ahistorical, *ethno*-graphic and comparative,' with extended participant observation as its distinctive method." (Vincent, 1991)[6]

The method that these anthropologists used to conduct their research was ethnography, or "the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives..."

> Carrying out such research involves two distinct activities. First, the ethnographer enters into a social setting and gets to know the people involved in it; usually the setting is not previously known in an intimate way. The ethnographer participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it and observes all the while what is going on. Indeed, the term participant observation is often used to characterize this basic research approach. (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1997)[7]

The work of the ethnographer tends to be published in a written account, also called ethnography. "Ethnographic accounts are both... descriptive and interpretative... ethnography requires analytical rigor and process as well as inductive analysis (reasoning from the particular cases to general theories)." (Plowman, 2003)[8]

While pioneers like Malinowski advocated a detached and objective approach to their subjects, later ethnographers like Clifford Geertz chose a more involved participative style. Geertz (1973) recommended total immersion in the culture being studied for the ethnographer and the writing up of experiences and interpretations through the technique of "thick description" or a detailed

understanding and rendering of the "multiplicity of conceptual structures" that the

ethnographer encounters, "many of them superimposed or knotted into one

another... strange, irregular, and inexplicit."[9]

However, Geertz's approach too was critiqued in subsequent years on both

counts – "ethno" as well as "graphic" (Witel, 2000).[10] Within the 'graphic' critique,

key terms include "othering, authorial control, crisis of objectification, dialogical or

polyphonic texts".[11] The critique of 'ethno' was predominantly against a limiting

"idea of 'a culture out there'."[12] In contemporary times, anthropology and

ethnography find themselves once again at a crossroad.

> As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories and reconfigure their ethnic 'projects', the 'ethno' in ethnography takes on a slippery, non-localized quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will have to respond. The landscapes of group identity – the ethnoscapes – around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically self-conscious, or culturally homogeneous...The task of ethnography now becomes the unraveling of a conundrum: what is the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world?[13] (Appadurai, 1991)

This unraveling has included a reexamination of the field (Gupta and

Fergusson, 1997), the conduct of multisited ethnographies (Marcus, 1998) and the

growth of insider/native/indigenous ethnography (Hurston, 1935; Srinivas, 1976;

Altorki and El Solh, 1998). Some of the other major changes in ethnographic

practice over the years are the University of Chicago's urban ethnography

(pioneered by Robert Park and his colleagues like WI Thomas and Ernest Burgess

just before the Great Depression[14]), anthropology of women (Golde 1970; Reiter 1975; Behar and Gordon 1995[15]), gay and lesbian anthropology (Lewin and Leap, 1996, 2000; Weston, 1991, 1998; Walzer, 2000; Manalanson, 2003) and the use of ethnography as a qualitative research tool by scholars working under the umbrella of disciplines like cultural studies (Willis, 1977; Hebdige, 1979; Radway, 1984; Jenkins, 1992[16]) and cyberculture studies (Rheingold, 1994; Turkle, 1995; Markham, 1998; Smith and Kollock, 1998; Dibbel, 1999; Jones, 1997, 1998, 1999; Cherny, 1999; Hine, 2000; Schaap, 2002; Campbell, 2004). Currently, ethnography is also to be found being used in corporate circles (e.g. Cheskin's 'cultural sense making',[17] Look-look's 'coolhunting'[18]) and fields as diverse as "political science, law...social welfare, advertising, public administration, marine studies, education...criminal justice, and policy studies."[19] However, the core of what constitutes ethnography still hasn't changed. "Almost without exception, ethnography still involves the study of a small group of people in their own environment in order to test the ethnographer's hypothesis." (Plowman, 2003)[20]

I want to briefly focus my attention upon two changes in ethnography that have a directly bearing on this thesis – the changing concept of the field, and the collapse of the subject/object divide.

The field denotes the site where an ethnographer produces his ethnography through fieldwork.[21] The traditional notion of the field is a place that is geographically defined and spatially separated from the home country of the anthropologist's origin.

This separation is manifested in two central anthropological contrasts. The first differentiates the site where data are collected from the place where analysis is conducted and the ethnography is 'written up'. The second place the sharp contrast between 'field' and home is expressed is in the standard anthropological tropes of entry and exit from 'the field'. Stories of entry and exit usually appear on the margins of texts, providing the narrative with uncertainly and expectation at the beginning and closure at the end. [22] (Gupta and Fergusson, 1997)

With the various changes in ethnography, the notion of what constitutes the field has changed too. Marcus (1998) has introduced the concept of a 'multi-sited ethnography', which consist of "research self-consciously embedded in a world system, that "moves out from the single sites and local situations.... to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space."[23] In turn, Gupta and Fergusson (1997) suggest a "decentering" of the field. They muse that so far, "location has often been elided with locality, and a shift in location has been reduced to the idea of going 'elsewhere' to look at 'another society'. Instead, they propose that fieldwork be considered as "a form of motivated and stylized dislocation", in which "location is not something that one ascriptively has.... [but] something that one strategically works at." They speculate that in today's interconnected world, "perhaps we are never really 'out of the field'."[24] On the same lines, Mary Des Chene (1997) imagines the field as "a period of time, or a series of events, the study of which will take the researcher to different places" and raises interesting questions such as: "If one's work concerns events that have taken place in many locales, what renders one of these the primary site for research? If one's

focus is on historical processes, what makes a geographically bound residential unit

the obvious object of study?"[25] She warns that "to continue to valorize the face-to-

face encounter will impoverish [ethnographic] accounts" and suggests that "it will

be far more useful to attend to the relation between our research questions and the

possible sources that will illuminate them, and to follow these wherever they may

lead us and in whatever medium they may turn out to exist."[26] Clifford (1997)

imagines contemporary ethnography as the conduct of "variously routed fieldworks

– a site where different contextual knowledges engage in critical dialogue and

respectful polemic".[27]

<p style="text-align:center">❋ ❋ ❋</p>

> Of all the oppositions that artificially divide social
> science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous,
> is the one that is set up between subjectivism and
> objectivism.[28] (Pierre Bourdieu, 1990)

Traditionally, students of ethnography were taught that detachment from the

object of one's study was something that they must aspire to. In his critique of this

viewpoint, Rosaldo (1989) writes:

> The detached observer epitomizes neutrality and
> impartiality. The detachment is said to produce
> objectivity because social reality comes into focus only
> if one stands at a certain distance. When one stands
> too close, the ethnographic lens supposedly blurs its
> human subjects. In this view, the researcher must
> remove observer bias by becoming the emotional,
> cognitive and moral equivalent of a blank slate.[29]

In Morsy's (1998) equally scathing attack of this position, such a supposedly

detached ethnographer would "behave as if he has no judgment, as if his

experiences were inconsequential, as if the contradiction between his origins and

his vocation did not exist.... Moreover he will imagine that he has no politics and will

consider that a virtue."[30] Morsy chronicles the historical refutation of the detached

observer position in anthropological practice:

> Affected by anti-imperialist struggles and changing global relations, the evolution of critical anthropological thought has challenged traditional disciplinary claims of objectivity and ethical neutrality. As Third World and radical critiques of anthropology exposed the discipline as a Western-dominated 'child of imperialism', anthropologists began considering not only the history of the 'people without history', but the history of anthropology itself. (Asad, 1973; Copans, 1975; Huizer, and Mannheim, 1979; Leacock, 1982; Wolf, 1982). Calls for 'reinventing anthropology (Hymes, 1974) followed critical assessments of the assumption of 'objectivity in anthropology' (Maquet, 1964).[31]

In contemporary ethnography, "because locations are multiple, conjunctural,

and crosscutting, there can be no guarantee of shared perspective, experiences, or

solidarity...."[32] (Clifford, 1997) and the ethnographer's subjectivity is expected to be

highlighted in his writing.

> To acknowledge particular and personal locations is to admit the limit of one's purview from these positions. It is also to undermine the notion of objectivity because from particular locations, all understanding becomes subjectively based and formed through interactions within fields of power relations. Positioned knowledges and partial perspectives are part of the lingo that has risen to common usage in the 1980s (Clifford, 1986, 1988; Haraway 1988; Kondo 1986; Rosaldo 1989)[33] (Narayan, 1993)

This approach calls for the substitution of "unabashed subjectivity" in place

of objectivity. "Knowledge, in this scheme, is not transcendental, but situated,

negotiated, and part of an ongoing process...By situating ourselves as subjects simultaneously touched by life-experiences and swayed by professional concerns, we can acknowledge the hybrid and positioned nature of our identities.[34] (Narayan, 1993) It is wrong to assume that "an epistemology of 'Otherness'" is "the best route to 'objectivity'...'objectivity' is not a function of 'distance'..."[35] (Passaro, 1997) In any case, distance is far too overrated – it can be replaced by making the ethnographer's identity and location "more explicit" and by giving informants "a greater role in texts."[36] (Narayan, 1993) However this does not mean doing away with distance completely:

> To question the discipline's canonical; modes of objective distance is not however to forfeit subjective distance and pretend that all fieldwork is a celebration of *communitas*. Given the multiplex nature of identity, there will inevitably be certain facets of self that join us up with the people we study, other facets that emphasize our difference. In even the closest of relationships, disjunctures can swell into distance; ruptures in communication can occur that must be bridged. To acknowledge such shifts in relationships rather than present them as purely distant or purely close is to enrich the textures of our texts so that they more closely approximate the complexity of lived interaction.[37] (Narayan, 1993)

Instead of asking, "what fundamentally unites us or separates us?" we should be more concerned with "what can we do for each other in the present conjuncture?" (Clifford, 1997)

> What from our similarities and differences can we bend together, hook up, articulate...And when identification becomes too close, how can a disarticulation of agendas be managed in the context of

alliance, without resorting to claims of objective distance and tactics of definitive departure?[38]

The ultimate aim should be "to represent and understand the world around us more adequately, to see beyond the epistemologies of received categories of collective identity and the assumptions about anthropology and fieldwork that continue to reinscribe various 'Others' of internal and external colonialism," and thus "participate in ethnographic practices of liberation."[39] (Passaro, 1997)

'Pricked By a Thorn'

My friend, the poet and writer R. Raj Rao, is visiting Bombay from Pune where he lives and teaches, and he asks me to meet up with him at the infamous Voodoo club. For six days a week, the place is a seedy pick up place for the Arab tourists that congregate in the area to pick up cheap hookers. But every Saturday night, it undergoes a magical fabulous transformation as hordes of gay men descend upon it and make it their own. Though it is located just off the street where I live, I have only been there once, with Riyad, maybe five years ago.

I arrive late, a little before midnight, pay Rs. 250 to the old Parsi owner sitting at the counter (wasn't it 150 the last time?) and swing open the door. It is a lot smaller than I remember. I walk straight on to a packed dance floor. There is a tiny DJ booth to the right, a basic bar to the left. The walls are scribbled with neon graffiti, there are strange colored shapes spray painted on to the ceiling. Very 80s. There are a few tables arranged towards the back of the club, and a metal staircase that leads to a mezzanine observation lounge, as well as passages that lead to a more private lounge in the back of the club, and to the toilets adjacent to this lounge. This is the 'make out' lounge with soft sinkable sofas, slightly tattered, and even lower lighting than the rest of the club.

I climb up the metal staircase and position myself midway, leaning on the railing, arms folded, just like I'd seen Riyad do the last time. (Maybe, he's watching me and smiling indulgently from somewhere way up there). From my perch, I can scan the crowd, predator-like. I lean over and chat with Raj, who is dancing on the floor with someone he has just met. I make polite conversation with an older guy and discover to my surprise that he is the uncle of A, former fuck buddy, brief crush, and now soul brother. He is a jet-setting global academic, and this is his first time out to a gay place in Bombay. I wish him all the best and continue sightseeing.

Tonight, I am horny and angry. B has just told me online that he has slept with a girl back in Boston, I don't know whether he is lying or not – but I despise myself for being head over

heels in love with a stupid 18 year-old Venezuelan boy who has only just begun exploring his sexuality. I seek revenge. Someone random, someone I will never meet again. I see a possible candidate. A cute white guy, standing by himself in a corner of the club. Hmn. Why not? He's skinny and geeky, exactly my type. American? Probably not. They never travel alone. Perhaps European or Israeli. I ponder about whether I should descend and make a move, but before I can make a call, Xerxes (who is discover later is Nihar's ex-boyfriend and a complete slut) bags him — and within five minutes, they're the centre of attraction on the dance floor, groping each other all over. Sheesh.

I look away disappointed. On the floor, there is an assortment of men of all ages, sizes and shapes, merrily dancing away. This is not Gay Bombay crowd — it's more mixed — though I do see some familiar faces from the GB parties. One of these is Kirit. He is about 5 and a half feet tall. Not more than 20. Perhaps younger. Very thin with a smooth body exposed due to the fact that his T-shirt is raised to his nipples as his hips gyrate feverishly. He is surrounded by a pack of hungry wolves, but his eyes are closed as he dances. It's such joy — to see such beauty, such grace, such unabashed pleasure with one's own self. He moves confidently, assuredly, slickly. I was such a dork at his age — pondering over my sexuality, wasting all those years being scared.

With his eyes closed, Kirit looks a little bit like B, and that does it for me. I alight, cut through the crowd with practiced ease, and whisper into his ear while nuzzling his neck that he's the sexiest person I've seen all week. It's a really lame line, but Kirit giggles and pulls me close to him. On the floor, we fondle each other's dicks and try to tongue each other's mouths out. Ten minutes later, we're on the sofa in the make out lounge, kissing fervently. I unzip his jeans and pull him to me, but he wants to go back and dance to Kaanta Lagaa *('Pricked by a Thorn') — the hot new remix that the DJ has just begun playing — understandably, a gay dance floor favorite. We can do it after this song, he winks as he zips up and prances back on to the floor. I sit for five minutes on the sofa by myself. What the fuck do I think I am doing? And stupid, stupid boy. What kind of an idiot is he, wanting to "do it" with someone he's just met in a club. Does he do this often? I want to go back to the dance floor, slap him and educate him about safe sex and being careful. But I slink away home quietly.*

When Field = Home

> [There] are people who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically), inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home; who have learned to negotiate and translate between cultures, and who, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, have learned to live with, and indeed to speak from, difference. They speak from the

'in-between' of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another, and thus finding ways of being both the same as and at the same time different from the others amongst whom they live. (Stuart Hall, 1995)[40]

As discussed earlier, the ethnographer in the classic mould was someone who traveled far away from his home country to an exotic place in order to study the culture of the natives residing in that place. This posed no problem in colonial settings, because the "natives were genuine natives (whether they liked it or not)."[41] (Narayan, 1993) But with the growth in ethnography and the collapse of the subject/object division for the ethnographer, this concept of ethnography no longer prevails. The 'natives' have begun to wield academic influence and "read the ethnographies that purport to explain them" (Weston, 1997)[42] and for them, "the notion of going to 'the field' from which one returns 'home' becomes problematic." (Altorki and El Solh, 1998)[43] "Going 'out' to the field now sometimes means going 'back', the ethnography becoming a 'notebook of return to the native land'." (Clifford, 1997)[44] However, besides a wide variety of nametags such as 'native', 'insider' and 'indigenous', there is no real criteria for defining what this kind of research actually entails. All these different sobriquets might be used to denote a commonality between the nationality of the researcher and the subjects of research, membership in a cultural community, or the sharing of language, religion, ethnicity or class. (Altorki and El Solh, 1998)[45]

Over the next few paragraphs, I mull over some of the broad concerns regarding the practice of ethnography in one's own society (however one may

choose to define this 'own'). In subsequent parts of this chapter, I will address specific instances of the challenges that I encounter in my fieldwork, and how I respond to them.

To begin with, is it right for a researcher to exploit his background as a valid point of entry in his field of study? Gupta and Fergusson (1997) certainly think so and they contend that growing up in a culture could and in fact, should be considered as a "heterodox form of fieldwork...an extended participant observation."[46] Being an insider certainly has advantages. Such a researcher "knows the language, has grown up in the culture, and has little difficulty in becoming involved with the people." (Jones, 1970)[47]

> The indigenous field worker has the undisputable advantage of being able to attach meanings to patterns that he/she uncovers much faster than the non-indigenous researcher who is unfamiliar with the culture of the wider society. Being part of the same cognitive world implies that the subject and object share a similar body of knowledge.... Being indigenous also implies the advantage of being able to understand a social reality on the basis of minimal clues; i.e. the meanings of cultural patterns are more readily understood.... Indigenous researchers ...are believed to be able to avoid the problem of culture shock.... They are expected to be less likely to experience 'culture fatigue', namely the strain of being a stranger in an unfamiliar cultural setting and the demands this places on their role as researcher.[48] (Altorki and El Solh, 1998)

On the flip side, there are also disadvantages to being an insider. One of these is that "information may be withheld when it relates to behavior that must be concealed from public knowledge. If one is outside the system, one's awareness of goings-on may not be problematic. But as a participant, the researcher constitutes

a threat of exposure and judgment.[49] (Altorki, 1998) Therefore, one should be cautious not to excessively privilege the inside position over that of an outside researcher.

> One vantage point cannot be said to be better than the other. There are logical dangers inherent in both approaches. The outsider may enter a social situation, armed with a battery of assumptions, which he does not question and which guide him to certain types of conclusions; and the insider may depend too much on his own background, his sentiments, his desires for what is good for his people. The insider, therefore, may distort the 'truth' as much as the outsider...

> It is undoubtedly true that an insider may have easier access to certain types of information as compared to an outsider. But it is consistent to assume, also, that the outsider may have certain advantages in certain situations.... The crucial point is that insiders and outsiders may be able to collect different data; they also have different points of view, which may lead to different interpretations of the same set of data.[50] (Jones, 1970)

There is the danger that a researcher who chooses to study his own society is "likely to be seen as native first, ethnographer second."[51] (Weston, 1997) If such researchers chose to use ethnography as a means of activism to bring about change in their own societies, they often have to "confront charges of unprofessionalism and various labels of personality aberration, not to mention accusations of extremism."[52] (Morsy, 1998) On the one hand, these researchers are often viewed "with suspicion, as people who lack the distance necessary to conduct good fieldwork; on the other hand, well intentioned colleagues thrust upon them the responsibility for speaking their identity, thus inadvertently forcing them

into the prison-house of essentialism."[53] (Gupta and Fergusson, 1997) Weston (1997) characterizes the native ethnographer as a 'hybrid' – one that "collapses the subject/object distinction" by the "act of studying 'people' defined as one's own."[54] This hybridity creates a "double bind" for the native ethnographer when it comes to writing up one's work – one has to surrender "the intricate operations of hybridity to the oversimplifications of nativity or objectivity" and "treat the components of [one's] hybridity as merely additive ('native' + 'ethnographer') or split ('native'/'ethnographer') by writing from only one subject position at a time... [55]

It is naïve to posit the insider/outsider dichotomy as a clash between subjectivity and objectivity, as both the researcher and the research subject are "social persons with a certain position vis-à-vis one another with a common social structure" and thus, instead of wondering whether the indigenous ethnographer can be objective or not, the concern should rather be about how his "relative social position.... affects the methodology of research."[56] (Shami, 1998) In any case, "for those engaged in working with their 'own' communities, engaged in activist organizing or for supporting financially strapped extended families, exoticism has no inherent value. Leaving their commitments and responsibilities for the sake of untethered research interests.... [would imply] a betrayal of those people whose lives and livelihoods are inextricably linked to their own."[57] (Gupta and Fergusson, 1997) According to Narayan (1993), as ethnographers, we all exhibit what Rosaldo (1989) has termed as 'multiplex subjectivity' with many crosscutting identifications.[58] "What facet of our subjectivity we choose or are forced to accept

as a defining identity can change depending on the context and the vectors of power."[59] Thus "dismantling objectivism creates a space for ethical concerns in a territory once regarded as value-free. It enables the social analyst to become a social critic."[60] (Rosaldo, 1989) "One invariably takes a stand; indeed, one must take a stand, not as the waving of certain flags, but as a reflection on where one's allegiances and emotions are, what sympathies and empathies drive one to interpret events in certain ways rather than others."[61] (Hansen, 2001)

I am drawn to Kamala Visweswaran's (1994) differentiation between 'homework' and 'fieldwork'[62] that Clifford cites in his 1997 essay 'Spatial Practices'; it hints at the unorthodox ethnographic model that I am looking to employ for my research, one in which ethnography does not succumb to a home/field divide:

> [For Visweswaran] Homework is not defined as the opposite of exoticist fieldwork; it is not a matter of literally staying at home or studying one's own community. 'Home' ... is a person's location in determining discourses and institutions...a locus of critical struggle that both empowers and limits the subject wherever she or he conducts formal research. By restructuring the home/field opposition, Visweswaran clears space for unorthodox routings and rootings of ethnographic work.[63]

Clifford builds on this argument to envision the inclusion of the ethnographer's "autobiography.... the shifting locations of his or her own life"[64] as a part of this homework. In the same vein, Narayan reflects that "people born within a society can be simultaneously both insiders and outsiders, just as those born elsewhere can be outsiders, and if they are lucky, insiders too."[65]

The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart

from those whom we study are multiple and in flux. Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status. Instead what we must focus our attention on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accented as subjects with voices, views, and dilemmas – people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity, and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise.[66] (Narayan 1993)

Arrival Scene 1: Dark Stormy Night

What's ethnography without an arrival scene or two? (Or three?)

Cambridge, Massachusetts. December 2003. It is a dark, stormy night. A chilly wind rattles my dorm windows as the snow swirls around in concentric circles like a dervish. I brew myself a steaming cup of *masala chai*, cuddle with my laptop and type 'gaybombay.org' into my internet browser. It is strange that I have never visited the site before. The computer screen loads a cluttered white, lavender and pink homepage and I cannot help feeling nostalgic. I love America but at this very moment, I want a delicate *khaara* biscuit to dunk into my *chai*, not an oversized American cookie; I want to see pigeons and taste the sea breeze instead of snowflakes when I go out for a walk, be amidst brown faces and hear the unique cacophony of Bombay languages on the street that Rushdie calls 'hug-me' (Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi and English) in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet.*[67] I want to be home instead of on a homepage.

The website is dense and information-heavy. The homepage has the Gay

Bombay logo on the left (the letters 'g' and 'b' in small case, joined together), with a permanent picture of one of the Gay Bombay kite-flying events and a constantly changing (upon refreshing the page) gay-themed art picture below it. The two images are separated by links with information about Bombay, the gay community at large and the history of the Gay Bombay community. I click on the one titled 'About Gay Bombay' and read...

> In the pre-Gay Bombay days, we realized there were many young men who were gay but felt out of place in the gay cultures they stumbled upon. Some groups addressed only sexual needs through solicitation and discussion of sexual conquests. Others saw being gay as an immensely enjoyable 'side-activity' to an otherwise heterosexual existence. Still others equated being gay with cross-dressing, and being effeminate. And then there were those for whom being gay meant activism, politics and the law. Many young men not belonging to any of these schools of thought went into their shell feeling frustrated, alone and miserable. We chose to address these young men by creating a group that was different. Since the venture was mainly web-based, most of those who participated in the activities belonged to a certain segment of society – this was not intentional. To address the non-web-based community, a personal interaction venture, 'The Sunday Meets' was initiated...

> Gay Bombay is a self-evolving informal group, a product of like-minded gay people from Mumbai (mainly, but not totally) coming together in good faith to create a safe space for men who are romantically and sexually attracted to men. All of us at Gay Bombay have experienced the joys and sorrows of being 'different'. We wanted to make things a little easier for those who have come after us. So we created this space where gays can:

> — Exchange views using the GB mailing list

— Participate in (and even help organize) offline GB events

— Meet and interact in broad daylight at GB Meets

Our aim is to make you (and eventually your family and friends) comfortable with your sexuality, and make life a bit easier.

There is nothing 'official' about the group. There never was, and there still isn't a membership form, registration fee, annual general meetings, minutes of meetings and voting or veto. Everyone is free to participate. In fact, participation is encouraged, as the group has to evolve in order to survive.

The group organizes GB events to facilitate offline interaction between members. What is a GB event? Events that respect GB values of safe space, of not promoting sex and solicitation, of not being too political, of respecting the wishes of those who participate in, contribute to and spearhead decision making processes [the informal core-group]. It is also an activity where profits, if any, are used to support non-revenue generating GB-ventures.[68]

The central part of the homepage has direct links to the five main channels into which the topics of the site are categorized ('Events', 'Issues', 'Support Channels', 'Interactive Channels' and the 'Reading Room'), as well as links to each of the sub-categories of each channel. There are alerts about the forthcoming events being organized by the group and an invitation to subscribe to the Gay Bombay mailing list. There is a prominent sprinkling of signifiers like 'gay' and 'homosexual' and rainbow imagery on the homepage and throughout the site. There are also small banner ads that change regularly exhorting the site's visitors to "make gaybombay.org a habit" and "attend GB events regularly."

The 'Events' channel contains a calendar of past and forthcoming events, including Sunday meets, parties, special outings and parents' meetings. There are first person reports about each of these events – written by members of the group. The highlights of the 'Interactive Channels' section are the Gay Bombay mailing list (discussed below), 'GBTalk2Me' (the one-on-one instant messenger service that enables users to chat with a Gay Bombay representative online) and 'Neighborhood Watch' (an opportunity for interested persons to directly contact a Gay Bombay representative living in their vicinity). The 'Issues' section contains very useful information on sex including details about safe sex and condom usage, oral and anal sex, HIV prevention information and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. There are also true coming out stories by Gay Bombay members, and sub-sections on relationships and emotional issues, religion and spirituality, gay bashing and blackmail threats, and legal information concerning homosexuality in India. The 'Support Channels' provide useful services for the website's gay visitors. 'Ask Doc Uncle' is an anonymous service that promises to answer visitor's medical queries related to gay/lesbian life style. 'Parent's Corner' aims to answer some common questions posed by parents of gay and lesbian children and provides resources for them to come to terms with their children's sexuality. There is also useful information on recommended HIV testing centers in Bombay city and lists of support groups in India and around the world for the Indian LGBT community. The 'Reading Room' contains gay themed poetry, all kinds of reviews and art images. Highlights of this section are the recipes provided by the site's regular visitors with

names like 'Sopan's Sudden Tomato Pickle For When Friends Descend', 'Hardley's Mother's Mutton Dhansak' and 'Vikram's Versatile Ratatouille and Stoved Potatoes'. For a convenient overview, I present the site structure in the form of a diagram below:
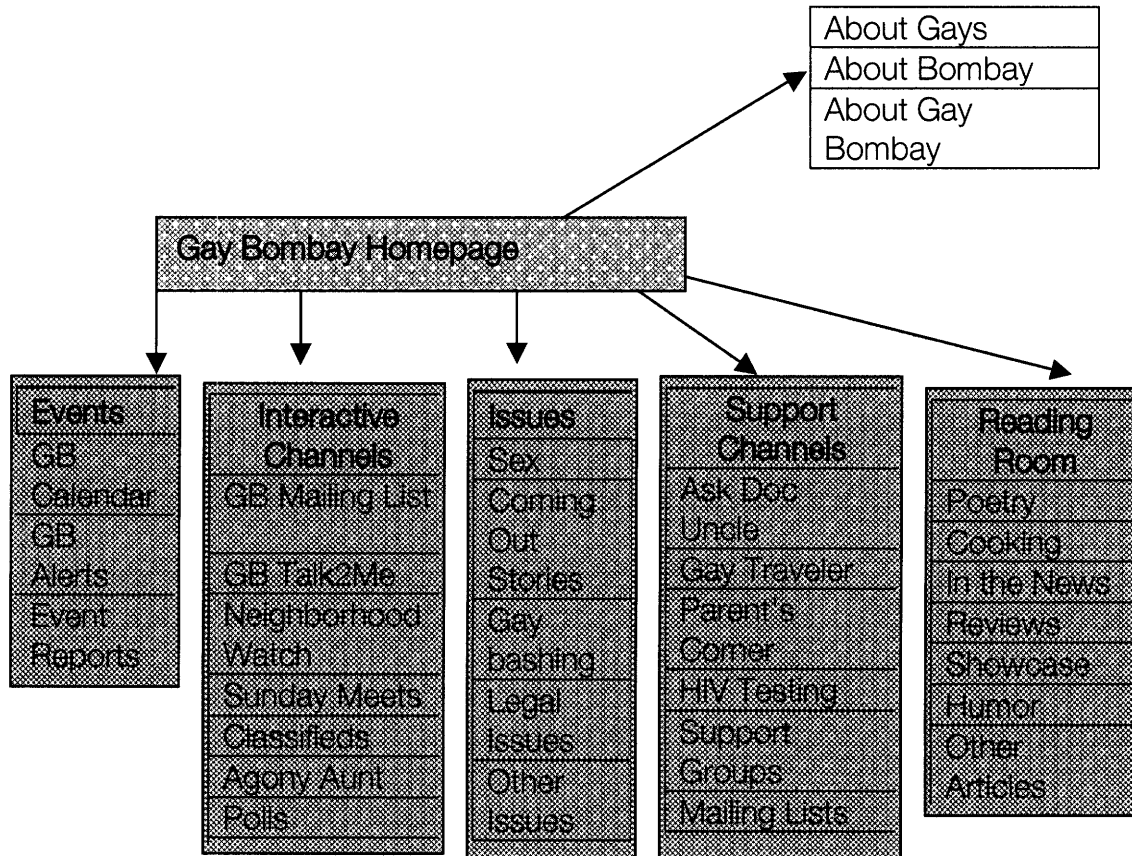
Arrival Scene 2: Post-it Notes

The Gay Bombay newsgroup[69] began on 31 December 1998 via the free group email service Egroups, which was subsequently renamed Yahoo! Groups after its acquisition by Yahoo! in June 2000.[70] Yahoo! Groups is one of Yahoo!'s many free services offered to its users. Through Yahoo! Groups, one can not just

send and receive group messages, but also upload and download files, engage in online chat, work with photos and albums, link to other web pages using bookmarks, conduct online polls, maintain an online calendar, create online databases as well as maintain lists of members. The groups are indexed according to several categories. Yahoo has a team of category editors, known as 'surfers', that go through the Groups directory constantly. If they feel a particular group has been improperly categorized, they may move it to a more appropriate location.

The person who starts or maintains the group and has administrative powers over the group functions is called the group's 'owner' or 'moderator'. The moderator can decide whether to restrict membership to the group, permit email attachments and let members post directly to the group or through the moderator. Yahoo! Groups is free to both members and moderators and is partially sponsored by advertisements. To join the service, one needs to register for a Yahoo! ID and link it to any email addresses that one wants to use for the purpose of accessing the groups. The Yahoo! website outlines the general guidelines for the use of the groups.[71] In addition, each individual group may have its own set of guidelines, both explicit and implicit that its owners/moderators enforce.

I am a subscriber to the Gay Bombay Yahoo! newsgroup since August 2003, but my presence on it is that of a lurker – a silent observer of the postings. Because of my background within the Indian media, and network of gay friends in Bombay, which include some Gay Bombay regulars, I know that it will be difficult for me to start afresh, as someone 'new' in the space. At the same time, I need to

clarify my purpose and intentions of my research clearly. I go to the Yahoo! Groups homepage (http://groups.Yahoo.com/) and create a separate Yahoo! identity (ID) just for research purposes. Like most other large portals, one's ID gives one access to the entire range of free Yahoo! services, including email, calendar, chat, address book, photograph management, etc. The procedure is very simple and involves filling in a standardized questionnaire including details like one's name, location, offers of free subscriptions to services, etc. There is also a word verification box, which requires one to retype a printed word from the screen into a special box placed on the screen. I choose an ID that specifies clearly my name, my institutional affiliation and my purpose within the newsgroup: parmesh_mit_researcher. On confirming my ID and password I can now access any of Yahoo!'s services by using this new ID.

I proceed to the Gay Bombay group page. There are five main sections here – the horizontal top bar, the horizontal bottom bar, and the center of the screen divided into three sections – a wide center section and two narrow sidebars. The horizontal top bar is used to navigate to other sections of the site, the vertical bar on the left is used for navigation within the specific site. The vertical bar on the right lists details about the Gay Bombay group, the number of members, date founded, and the language of the group. It also provides the settings for the group as decided by the group's moderators. The settings for Gay Bombay are:

— Listed in directory
— Open membership
— Posts from new members require approval
— All members may post

— Archives for members only
— Email attachments are not permitted

The center portion of the screen has the name 'Gay Bombay' with different links above it separated by thin horizontal lines. Right on top is the caption 'Our virtual community' with an icon of a fluttering Indian flag. Below it are links to the Gay Bombay website, upcoming Gay Bombay events, and Gay Bombay ads. Below this lies the section for archived messages. These are archived by month and year. Details on how to post messages, unsubscribe, etc, are listed below the message archives.

I click on the link 'Join this group' which is located on the top of the screen, in the center. I am then asked my preferences about messages – whether I wish to access them off the site, receive them in my Yahoo! Mailbox individually or in 'digest' format (in batches of 25) or at some other email address. On confirming these preferences, one clicks on another link to join the group. In the case of Gay Bombay, membership is confirmed immediately and doesn't need prior approval from the group's moderators. However there are other groups that need to applicant to be approved by the moderators before granting membership.

In March 2004, I post my first message to the newsgroup,[72] introducing myself and my research intentions:

```
From:"parmesh_mit_researcher"<parmesh_m
it_researcher@y... >
Date:   Tue Mar 2, 2004  12:50 am
Subject:   Hello - and an introduction

A short note to say hello and that its
a pleasure to be here. My name is
Parmesh. I am currently studying and
```

conducting research at MIT, in
Cambridge, MA, USA and my primary theme
of inquiry is the negotiation of gay
identity among urban gay individuals.
Being both gay, and from Bombay - for
me, being a participant in this group
is like being home in more ways than
one, and I'm excited by the idea to
academically consider it as one of the
"locations" for my study. I'll be
clarifying my ideas online within this
space over the next few months as both
an observer and an active participant
in this community - I have already
begun a dialogue with some of the
members here - would love to continue
it with others who may be interested.

Best regards
Parmesh

I follow this up with a notice about *Between the Lines*, the LBGT Film Festival I am organizing at MIT in April 2004.[73] I do this because I want my position as an out gay activist and event organizer in Boston to be known within the group. I think this would be an effective way of immediately establishing my credibility within the group as well as the integrity of my research intentions. However, to my disappointment, I only receive 4 responses. I was ambitiously hoping that the moment I declared my research intentions and MIT credentials, I would be flooded by a deluge of emails from eager members, all wanting to share their experiences with me.... but this is clearly not happening.

It is time for plan B. I scan through the posts on the newsgroup of the previous 6 months and note down the nicknames of the regular posters. I then send each of them a personal email, introducing myself, outlining the nature of my

work, and requesting an opportunity to interview them using an instant messaging (IM) client such as MSN Messenger or Yahoo Messenger. I mail 22 people – trying to construct a balanced mix of newsgroup administrators, regular posters, flamers and dissenters, as well as some completely random posters.

The response to my effort is more favorable this time. I receive replies from 14 of the 22 I have emailed stating that they would be happy to be interviewed. However I face another problem. Most of the respondents say that they are not comfortable with an online interview – they would rather have me compose a questionnaire and send it to them, which they can answer at their leisure and mail back. With others, the time difference becomes a factor. I schedule several interviews with one particular person based in India, but each time, either one of us can't make it online at the required time.

At first I am irritated as I see my plans of Annette Markham style chat-oriented data collection[74] disappear in smoke. On reflection however, I realize that this is fine and in fact, my idea of on online chat was quite silly considering that the newsgroup is asynchronous in nature – that is, messages on it are posted through email by its members at their own convenience and not in simultaneous real time. By carrying out email interviews, I am merely collecting my data from the group using the same device they use in their regular interaction with the group. It is as it should be. I interview a total of 12 individuals electronically, conducting only two IM interviews – the others are conducted via email.

I use an open-ended questionnaire, which I think will work both for online research and my subsequent physical world research in Bombay city. I divide the questionnaire into four different sections: 'General Information', 'Being Gay in India', 'Gay Bombay' and 'Identity'. I structure the questions in each section to move from the general to the specific, trying to replicate textually the interview style I will use later on with my face-to-face respondents. I reproduce the questionnaire below:

General Information
1. Age
2. Location
3. Sex
4. Gender
5. Educational Background (School, College, Post-grad, etc, as well as last major qualification, if possible)
6. Current Occupation
7. Religion Practiced
8. Marital/Relationship Status (Same-sex/different-sex)
9. Sexual Identification (Straight/gay/bi/trans/queer/MSM/*kothi*, etc)
10. Are you out/closeted/selectively out?

Being Gay in India
1. What is your personal view on homosexuality?
2. Is India becoming more open to the idea of homosexuality?
3. Is it different for people to be gay in India as opposed to in other places in the world?
4. What are some off the unique things about being gay and Indian? Is there a unique gay culture? What would some of its components be?
5. What is your view on Indian gay activism? Have you ever considered joining/lending support?
6. What role do caste/religion/economic factors play in your interaction with other gay people in India? Is this different online versus in the real world?
7. What is your view about globalization and the effects it has had on gay culture in India?
8. Tell me about the role of the family – has that influenced your decisions regarding your sexuality in any way.
9. Do you have other gay friends? How did you meet them? What about lesbian friends – and your interactions with the lesbian community? Do you separate your gay friends from your straight ones – or do they know each other?
10. Are you in a relationship currently? If so, when and where did you meet this person?
11. Do you participate in online chat sites like gay.com? Which ones? Have you met anyone off those sites? What was the purpose of the meeting, if it happened? And how did it go?
12. Which are some of the real world locations that you would go to, in order to express your gay identity? (Pubs? Bars? Etc?) How common is this for you?
13. Where else do you meet other gay people – online or offline?
14. What access to other gay material do you have – in terms of writings, books, videos, porn, etc? Where would you obtain this material?

15. What do you think is the biggest issue confronting Indian gay men, including yourself?

Gay Bombay
1. Where do you access GB primarily from (Home/work/cybercafés, etc):
2. How did you discover GB?
3. What made you sign up for it?
4. Do you access it from your regular email/separate email?
5. Do you visit it from home/office/cybercafés?
6. What are the main reasons that you continue to visit it?
7. What is your status in terms of the group? Do you post regularly, occasionally, or just read others' posts?
8. How do you access the messages? (Digest, email to your account, directly on the site, etc?)
9. How frequently do you visit the site/read the GB messages?
10. What are the reasons that you think that made a space like GB possible?
11. What do you think the role of GB should be? Is it fulfilling it?
12. Are there any interesting articles that you have read on GB? What have they dealt with?
13. Are there any interesting interactions that you have had on the GB newsgroup that have been memorable for any reason?
14. Have you attended any of the GB events? Which ones? How did you get to know of them – through the site or other ways?
15. Are there any interesting events/people that you met at these events that you'd like to tell me about.
16. Do you feel that GB is a 'community'? Why/why not?
17. Do you feel that there is something uniquely 'Indian' about GB, or does that aspect not matter?
18. Do you think that organizations like GB are a part of the global gay community? Why/why not?
19. Do you think that the advent of the internet and online groups like GB have significantly changed the texture of gay culture in India?

Identity
1. What made you choose your GB nickname?
2. Do you think you post differently under an anonymous nickname from the way you post on other forums or in other emails?
3. Do you think that you are a different person when you are online and participating in the group, or are you the same? Do you perform/take on any special traits when you are online? If so, which are these?
4. Are you consistently the same online, or does your online persona vary.... (Or do you have several online personae?)
5. Have you ever deceived/been deceived by someone online – and in specifically in settings like GB? If so, what was the experience like?
6. Is your behavior different in a real life gay setting, as opposed to a real life straight setting? Does this happen consciously?
7. Is there such a thing as a gay Indian identity? How would you describe your own identity?
8. How do you balance and express your sexual identity with the other elements of your identity?

In cases where I feel I need clarifications on the answers I receive, I mail the respondents and they reply my queries promptly. Some of them are curious to

know more about my research and me and I establish an informal bond with them

through back and forth email correspondence. Others realize that they know of me

through their friendship networks and mail me commenting about how small the

world really is!

At the end of May 2004, I send out another email to the group, informing

them of my three-month visit to India, and seeking further inputs for my research.

This results in six new responses that eventually translate into two productive

interviews. I also mail the Bombay respondents of my questionnaire and ask them if

they would want to be interviewed in person during my trip – almost all of them

agree.

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From: "Parmesh Shahani"
<parmesh_mit_researcher@y...>
Date:   Sat May 29, 2004  8:00 pm
Subject:   visiting India for research


Hello,
A short note to say that I'm going to
be spending the next three months in
India, doing research on my thesis for
next year that deals with the
negotiation of an online/offline 'gay'
identity in India. I have already had
the chance to interview some of the
members of this group over email and
instant messenger with regard to this;
it would be extremely helpful to
interview some members in person as
well. As with any project of this
nature, all information provided will
be confidential - real names will not
be used, nor will the Yahoo IDs. I will
be spending the next three months
traveling between Bombay, Delhi,
Bangalore and Calcutta trying to attend
the different local queer events and
interviewing as many people as I can.
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If you'd like to participate in this,
I'd greatly appreciate it if you could
send me an email. Also, if there's
anyone that any of you think I should
meet specifically with regards to my
thesis, then let me know as well.

Thanks and best regards
Parmesh Shahani
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Arrival Scene 3: Home, Sweat Home

"We have now begun our descent into Chattrapati Shivaji International Airport..." After 24 hours of non-stop travel, I stretch my legs as much as my cramped economy class seat can allow, and look out of the window.

> If you look at Bombay from the air, if you see its location – spread your thumb and forefinger apart at a thirty-degree angle and you'll see the shape of Bombay – you will find yourself acknowledging that it is a beautiful city: the sea on all sides, the palm trees along the shores, the light coming down from the sky and thrown back up by the sea. It has a harbor, several bays, creeks, rivers, hills. From the air, you get a sense of its possibilities. On the ground it's different.[75]

I have made this descent into Bombay airport so many times in the past, but this time when the plane taxies to a halt on the shantytown hugged runway, my emotions begin to swell and by the time I emerge from the airport, they burst in a giant tidal wave of tears. Bombay is a visceral feeling, psychological as well as physical. I can already smell the stench in the humid air. Little beads of sweat begin trickling down my forehead – by the time I have walked to a taxi, the beads have turned into rivulets that are flowing liberally down my back. This city is unbearably hot, ugly, stinky and filthy, but it is home. Home, sweat home.

Three days later, I attend my first Gay Bombay Sunday meet. I am still a little

jetlagged. I have been away for just one year; I shouldn't feel out of place. Still, it

was only five days ago that I walked down the street to the Central Square Red

Line T...now, halfway across the world, I have to reorient myself to making another

BEST bus number 123[76] journey just to get to the train station.

> Bombay, also known as Mumbai, is a city of 16
> million inhabitants, of whom 6 million ride the city's
> three main lines daily – more riders than all of New York
> City's subways, buses, trains and ferries combined.
> Trains designed to hold 1,700 passengers carry as
> many as 4,700 during peak hours in a bone-crushing
> 1.4 bodies per square foot of space.[77]

I am lucky to be traveling on a Sunday. Moreover, since I live in Colaba, the

southern most part of Bombay, I board the train at its origin – Churchgate station,

an ugly square monstrosity, only 40 years old, so ordinary and squat in its

appearance compared to it splendid predecessor just across the street (now a

Railways office complex). There are twenty-eight stations between Churchgate and

the suburb of Virar (a distance of 60 kilometers) on the Western line that I am taking

– its route hugs the Western coast of Bombay, from south to north. On weekends,

the traffic generally moves from the suburbs (north) to 'town' (south) – and I am

going against the flow, so I will be assured of a place to sit and there will be no

crowds to crush my body against; no fond hopes of being fondled, as on previous

weekday journeys. Today, the station is quiet – there is an indolent air to the

proceedings.

> *The only hub of activity is a bookstall run by the*
> *famed A.H. Wheeler. Here, newsboys busily sort out*

bundles of Sunday newspapers to cater to the metro's news-hungry multitudes. (Later in the day, they can be seen hawking The Statesman *and* The Hindu *that have arrived by air from Calcutta and Madras.) Trains, of course, keep zooming in and out. But there are no stampedes on the platform.*[78]

I pick up copies of the *Sunday Express* and *Mid-Day* to read during the ride and buy myself a return 'Card ticket II class' to Andheri (sixteen rupees, price gone up from last year!) from the expressionless spectacled clerk behind a cool-marbled ticket window, barely avoiding stepping on the mangy grey dog taking its siesta underneath. When I reach for my wallet to put my change back, I feel a nudge at my elbow and turn towards two yellow eyes popping out of the brown covered skeleton of a child not more than five, hand outstretched. It is perfect timing – I don't have much of a choice. I hand over a ten-rupee note, being careful not to make direct contact with the dirt-crusted hand.

I have nine minutes until the next slow train leaves and I decide to I pop in to see if anyone is cruising in the infamous loo. It's never been my scene, but I've accompanied friends there before and found it tremendously entertaining. Today, there is a middle-aged pot-bellied mustachioed man standing in a corner cubicle, playing with his dick. He looks inquiringly when I walk by, but I shake my head.

I go back to the cavernous railway platform covered with a metal gridlocked roof, opaque skylights running across its length. There are different benches nailed to the platform, some made of wooden slats, others from interlocking metal mesh, and red trash cans attached to metal frames, again, efficiently nailed in. All kinds of things dangle from the roof – ineffectually rotating fans, tube lights, digital black

train schedule display screens, giant clocks, huge backlit billboards with delicious smooth bodied men in skimpy VIP underwear who exhort me to "make a big impression," funky looking *Dhoom* movie posters with leather-clad John, Abhishek and Uday straddling phallic red motorbikes...

I climb the maroon-yellow two-toned 12-coach Borivili-slow, snaked along platform number 3 through its green always-open doors. The compartments are color coded – yellow with red or green diagonal stripes means 'first class,' dark yellow means 'ladies only' and pale yellow is 'gents regular' where I belong. I am in a cage – the seats, sides, floors and roofs are all metal, painted in different hues of peeling yellow or green paint.

The train lurches forward; its noisy departure augmented by the rows of handles hanging over head, the loose broken In-Case-of-Emergency-Pull-Chain going clickety-clack, and a noisy beggar family making its way through the compartment. It is a blind middle-aged man led by two young children, one of them almost bent over under the weight of her harmonium. They're singing and playing '*Pardesi Pardesi Jaana Nahin*' ('O Stranger, Don't Go Away') from the Bollywood film *Raja Hindustani* ('Indian King', 1996). I love the song, but I've done my alms giving for the day. I avoid making eye contact and stare instead at the Kaya Kalp International Sex Health and Clinic advertisement pasted above my seat, and then read the name of the stations on the route map, first in Hindi and then in English. Churchgate, Marine Lines, Charni Road, Grant Road, Mumbai Central, Mahalaxmi, Lower Parel, Elphinstone Road, Dadar, Matunga Road, Mahim, Bandra, Khar Road,

Santacruz, Vile Parle, Andheri, Jogeshwari, Goregaon, Malad, Kandivali, Borivali, Dahisar, Mira Road, Bhayandar, Naigaon, Vasai Road, Nallasopara, Virar. The teenage boy next to me rolls some tobacco between his palms contentedly and leisurely inserts it between his lower lip and teeth.

> Greater Bombay's population, currently 19 million, is bigger than that of 173 countries in the world. If it were a country by itself in 2004, it would rank at number 54... India is not an overpopulated country... it is the cities of India that are overpopulated. Singapore has a density of 2,535 people per square mile; Berlin, the most crowded European city has 1,130 per square mile. The island city of Bombay in 1990 had a density of 17,550 people per square mile. Some parts of central Bombay have a population density of 1 million people per square mile. This is the highest number of individuals massed together at any spot on the world.[79]

Andheri station, where I get down from the train, sure feels like this spot. I have been suffering from claustrophobia since the past six months in America, but that is a luxury I cannot afford to have in Bombay. I suffer a brief panic attack, but draw upon my crowd navigation skills (luckily, like cycling and swimming, one never loses these) to emerge outside 10 minutes later.

The meeting venue is the McDonalds in the bustling open-air market located right outside Andheri station. This is the norm – people collect at a restaurant and then are guided to the actual meeting (in someone's home) by volunteers. There are thousands of people milling about the market with noisy rickshaws, cars, bicycles, cows and goats, buses and the loud sales pitches of hundreds of street vendors all adding to the commotion. The restaurant is as densely packed as the streets outside, with families, groups of teenagers and swarms of children running around

(or rather, squeezing their way around the crowds). The harried service people at the counter are trying their best to fulfill the incessant demands of Maharaja Macs, Vegetarian McCurries, spicy fries and cardamom tea. I am to look for a man wearing a black cap with 'GB' written on it. I am a little nervous and wonder how I would be if I were not approaching this meet as a very 'out' researcher who has already appeared this year on the BBC and in the *Boston Globe* talking about my sexuality. Probably it would have been the same as last year, before I left. Sure about my sexuality, but not wanting to do anything publicly about it. Now, intoxicated with one year of reading *Out* and *The Advocate*, gay marriages in Massachusetts being a reality and the little bit of fame that my film festival generated, I cannot possibly go back to "what might people think" mode.

The group is easy to spot. I introduce myself to everyone around the table – around eight or ten men, including a few first-timers who are shy and reserved. The veterans strike up a conversation right away. I am made to feel at ease. After half an hour, we rise and board a local bus. Joseph, who is in charge, buys tickets for everyone. "Don't worry, we have a budget for this," he grins when I raise an inquiring eyebrow. We reach our destination, Pratham's home, singing film songs and laughing loudly, much to the consternation of the other bus passengers. I am happy as I walk with the group, making small talk, and getting to know more about their lives.

Once inside, I introduce myself to the individuals already assembled there and tell them more about the kind of work I plan to do – these are people I will

come to know intimately over the course of the next few months. Some of them recognize me from my emails on the mailing list, others are learning about me for the first time. I can see that they are intrigued by me – they wonder where I was all these years – if I was indeed living in Bombay, and I wonder the same. They are taken aback by my shorts, highlighted hair and brazenly out attitude and I enjoy the attention I receive. My excitement is palpable and I know that the group members can sense it. It feels so good to be here...could Malinowski have felt the same rush as he pegged in his tent on an *alien* beach?

Two weeks into my trip, I walk into the Bandra café 'Just Around the Corner' with the practiced air of a Gay Bombay veteran. Enter. Find man with cap. Hugs all around for those I know. Handshakes and smiles for the newbies. Small talk until we reach the actual meeting venue. Then ease into the meeting, observing, taking notes, and interjecting as need be. In the interim, I have traveled to the southern city of Bangalore to attend the Second International Conference on Sexualities, Masculinities, and Cultures in South Asia – which has been an eye opener for me in terms of making me aware of the momentum gathering around LBGT rights in the country.

Today's meet is in Karim's home. Karim is a journalist with one of the country's leading news magazines. He lives in an airy one-bedroom-hall-kitchen apartment. The décor is ethnic chic: cane furniture, hand woven rugs, low seating cotton cushions in pink, mustard, blue and lime green, wispy red curtains, potted plants, books. Paintings by the famous writer-artist Manjula Padmanabhan adorn

the walls. Today, the room is cramped with 25 gay men – scientists, engineers, students, corporate executives; young twinks with colored hair, in tight singlets, harem pants, jewelry and sunglasses; old butch men with paunches, glasses and salt and pepper beards. Bottles of Pepsi and Fanta are being passed around, as are fresh scones, courtesy Karim's excellent baking abilities.

The free wheeling discussion begins with the challenges and practical issues faced by gay men seeking long-term relationships in Bombay. Isaac suggests the organization of a matchmaking bureau for gay men, on the lines of the arranged marriage bureaus for straight people in India. Karim wonders if we are not fetishizing long term gay relationships in India, just like the West. He informs the group that the gay guide Spartacus has asked them for an update on the India section and there is a debate on what locations to reveal in the guide. He also warns the group about internet hustlers that have been operating in gay chat rooms, meeting people offline, and then robbing or blackmailing them.

There are some tense moments at the meet. The first occurs when Isaac asks Homi, a newbie from Andhra Pradesh, to say something about himself. Daulat chides Isaac to stop treating the first-timer like "an animal in a zoo." Isaac angrily responds that he did not refer to the man as "an animal." Murgesh steps in to defuse the tension. Meanwhile, the object of this attention nervously observes the proceedings, silently. I find out that he is a Navy officer, recently posted to Bombay but never see him at another meeting or dance party after this during the rest of my stay.

The second tense moment occurs during an argument about increasing the mandate of Gay Bombay to include more outspoken public activism. Senthil, Karim, Vidwan, Daulat and others are of the opinion that members of Gay Bombay should play a more proactive role in protests like the recent one organized by Humsafar against the obnoxious Bollywood film *Girlfriend*, be more visible on television and in the press and make financial contributions to other needy LBGT causes, such as the recent email appeal from a *hijra* group seeking funds for a new computer. Isaac, Pratham, Pulkit and others disagree and a heated argument follows. Murgesh proposes that a blanket decision not be made and each proposal be considered individually, based on its feasibility. Karim reminds the group that they had raised money for the Larzish Bombay gay and lesbian film festival through one of their bar nights last year, and the same method could be adopted again, if everyone agreed upon it. Vidwan states that there is a difference between helping *hijras* and including them as part of the community; he feels that the Gay Bombay group is exclusionary to other sexual minorites, to which Pratham retorts: "Why should we be messiahs for the downtrodden? We are a social space for *gay* people, why be anything else?" Senthil counters this by reminding the group that even the existence of Gay Bombay as a social space might come under threat if political organizations like the Shiv Sena make gay people their next targets for victimization, or if their dance parties began to be raided by the police and in case such things happen, the only people who will publicly demonstrate are the *hijras*. I chip in with comments about us all having a conscience that we should be guided

by, which receives indulgent smiles from the warring parties. It is evident that this issue is a deeply divisive one within the group; I am to encounter it at several times during my stay at several different levels.

Over the next three months, I am a regular at meetings like these. I also attend a series of get-togethers organized by the Humsafar Trust every alternate Sunday called 'Sunday High.' Some of these meetings discuss important issues faced by the community like the threat faced by gay men from hustlers and blackmailers, while others are just occasions to unwind and watch films together. At these meeting I am exposed to a different kind of gay culture existing in the city.

Then there are the parties; not just regular Gay Bombay parties at clubs like The Razzberry Rhinoceros and Liquid Lounge, but also 'gay nights' at places like Tres Botas (where a drink costs 300 rupees[80] and the 'gay nights' are the only nights that the place ever reaches full capacity) and private dinners in people's homes. I visit the Humsafar center to see the HIV-prevention work they are doing and dig through their archives.

Throughout, I interview, interview, interview. I am lucky that it is a "gay summer," as the *Indian Express* writes;[81] and I am there, bang in the middle of the action. Sexuality conference in Bangalore. Pride March in Calcutta. The Pushkin Chandra double murder case in Delhi. The *Girlfriend* controversy all over the country.... (See chapter 4 for a discussion of the media coverage of all these events.) So much juicy material to dig into.

Intimacy

I use the same questionnaire I designed for my online interviews as a guide for semi-structured personal interviews with individuals that I meet in the different Gay Bombay spaces as a participant observer. I use a snowball interviewing or friendship pyramiding technique format: I begin with a set of established contacts – including some of the Gay Bombay organizers and my online interviewees – and cull new informants based on their recommendations and also from my observations at Gay Bombay events. By using theoretic sampling, I try and maintain diversity among my respondents, with regard to factors like age, occupation and marital status as well as how they choose to access Gay Bombay (i.e., via the net, meetings, parties or a combination of these). I also interview some leading gay and *hijra* activists from Bombay that have been critical of Gay Bombay in the past; even though their interaction with the Gay Bombay list or events is limited, I want to incorporate their viewpoints into my analysis.

Following my online questionnaire, I move from general questions to specific ones in my physical interviews – I work loosely within the framework of the questionnaire – but let the bulk of the agenda setting be directed by the respondents. I conduct some of my interviews with my participants individually and the others as dyads (interviewing two friends, partners or associates together).

The community welcomes me warmly. I think there are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, my own homosexuality. Almost all my subjects first ask me if I am gay when I express an interest in interviewing them. My sexuality thus serves as my

passport into the community. It helps me build rapport and gain the confidence of the community members. My forthrightness in revealing details about my own private life is also appreciated. Since, I am asking my respondents to be open and share details of their lives with me, I reciprocate by being honest about my life experiences and beliefs.

My interviewees are college students, working professionals and businessmen. They live either alone or with their partners, with their families as either out or closeted, or with their spouses and/or extended families as married men. Those who can, invite me to their homes to conduct my interviews. Others ask me to come to their offices late, after hours. I schedule interviews with those whose homes or offices I cannot visit in different restaurants at locations convenient to them and embark on a delightful gastronomical journey: Vithal Bhelwala near the Victoria Railway Terminus where I gorge on delicious *pani puris*, the best street food in the world; Aswad at Dadar with its Maharastrian *kothambir vadis* and *missal*; prawn *pulao* and *kheema parathas* at Jehangir art gallery's Samovar café; sizzlers at Yoko's in Santa Cruz – and when time is of the essence, the local Barista or Café Coffee Day. (These are India's Starbucks equivalents, with branches in every corner of every major Indian city and by the end of my sojourn, I know their menus by heart.)

I don't face any problems in explaining my research theme to my interview subjects – it is enough for them to know that it will be turned into my graduate thesis and probably a book later on. For some of them anonymity is important;

others insist that their real names and identities be used in my write up. (Ultimately, as I explain a little later, I decide to use pseudonyms for *all* respondents.) They are often conscious of their position as research subjects – and sometimes ask me, even after casual conversations, if I am going to use the conversations within my project.

A few of my respondents are skeptical – of both, my intentions and research methodology. They felt that I am exploiting my sexuality to gain currency in Western academia and would certainly not engage in such a project were I living in India. Although they agree to be interviewed, they sometimes pepper their answers with cynical and often condescending judgments about me. Others strongly advise me that though my intentions are good, what is needed right now in India is hard activism on the ground and if I really cared as much about the gay community in India, perhaps I should come back and get involved in these grassroot efforts.

The majority, however, are appreciative that I have chosen to focus on issues dealing with contemporary gay life in Bombay. They respond to me personally and warmly – and go out of their way to help me in my efforts. Gopal offers to send me relevant magazine articles to Boston whenever required. Karim loans me his private collection of press clippings and makes sure that I am well connected with a diverse range of people while I am in Bombay. Mohnish takes me to see a drag *lavni* – a traditional Indian folk dance being perfumed by male dancers in female clothing and make-up (it is a huge hit among the Marathi speaking audiences in Bombay) – and even arranges a private backstage interview with the

performers and director. The Humsafar Trust opened up its premises and archives to me. Mike gives me his cellphone when mine stops working – and lets me keep it for the entire duration of my stay in Bombay. There are many other incidents, both big and small, but by far, the most important gifts that my interviewees give me are their valuable time and their fascinating stories.

I exploit my 'multiplex subjectivity'[82] to win the confidence of my potential interviewees in various ways. Sometimes, I utilize my privileged class background to gain access to people who might not have spoken to me otherwise. My relative youth and somewhat zany style-sense means that I can connect with a lot of people in their 20s and even younger, as a peer. When needed, I flaunt my academic punditry – and use my intellectual position as a student at MIT as a door opener. In other cases, my prior life as a corporate citizen of Bombay comes in handy.

While I always try to be as much of 'myself' as possible in my interactions with group members, I fine tune certain aspects of my personality to suit the need of the hour. For example if I feel that a particular interviewee might bond better with me if I act or sound a little campy, then I do so. Likewise, other decisions like meeting place and clothes to wear are all conditioned by my prior knowledge of the interviewee. If I feel that it is advantageous to bring up my American connection, I do so, but if I sense resentment, I quickly play up my innate Bombaynness. My age is also a factor in the role that I play with my interviewees. Older respondents tend to treat me with indulgence. If we go out for a meal, they refuse to let me pay the

bill and I feel pampered in their company, perhaps like a younger sibling. Correspondingly, with respondents who are younger than me, I tend to assume a big-brother kind of role, paying for our meals and advising them on their lives.

My respondents get irritated when I ask them for basic demographic information – they presume that I already know these details through my interaction with them. My strategy for asking open-ended questions is not always well received – some respondents interpret this as vagueness. Sometimes, when I ask them basic questions that I should already know the answers to due to my 'insider' position, they think that I'm unprofessional and ill informed. Or they think that I'm just joking or teasing them. Occasionally, they get angry and lash out that I should know *how it is*.

I want to tell them that I do know, but my situation is different. I have been very lucky actually – my parents have accepted my sexuality without a fuss (well, more or less). I am economically, educationally and socially privileged, I have a place of my own to bring guys to if I so desire. So, yes, I can speculate, but have no idea how it *really* is. Of course, I can't say all this or I'll lose my rapport. But I can certainly sense that I am a cause of resentment within some of my respondents (although they do not voice it directly) due to my upper-middle class South Bombay origins and my multiple-entry American visa that allows me to cross (at least certain) borders with ease.

I find it very hard to do research in the city in which I have spent most of my adult life. My non-researcher life is always trying to intervene. Because I am so

involved with my field/homework, I do not return calls from friends, delay many

personal appointments, and even cancel two out-of-town trips at the last moment.

This causes a lot of irritation among my friends and family members. While doing

research, I am constantly aware of the fact that my work is going to be judged by a

committee that will grade not my enthusiasm and desire to do good but my

professionalism and my work's methodological and theoretical rigor. This is

frustrating and it prevents me from enjoying myself. On other occasions, like

Joseph (1998), I find it "difficult to think of my relationship with [my subjects] as a

source of research data. They became active subjects, rather than objects of

research" and I often forget to record important data while I am with them,[83] or as

the following chat excerpt reveals, reverse roles with them.

```
Parmesh says: (4:09:38 PM)
Have you ever deceived/been deceived by
someone online — and in specifically in
settings like GB? If so, what was the
experience like?

Ormus says: (4:09:56 PM)
not applicable

Ormus says: (4:10:06 PM)
Never Been Deceived

Ormus says: (4:10:15 PM)
we could make this into a Drew Barrymore
movie

Ormus says: (4:10:21 PM)
have you?

Parmesh says: (4:10:28 PM)
several times

Parmesh says: (4:10:46 PM)
in my youth
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Ormus says: (4:11:14 PM)
person turned out to be completely different
from what he claimed to be, huh?

PARMESH says: (4:11:18 PM)
u bet…

Ormus says: (4:17:04 PM)
are you happier now or were you happier
then?

Parmesh says: (4:17:07 PM)
hehehe

Parmesh says: (4:17:14 PM)
i'm always happy

Parmesh says: (4:17:18 PM)
or the reverse

Parmesh says: (4:17:20 PM)
im never happy

Ormus says: (4:17:41 PM)
how extremist…

Parmesh says: (4:20:13 PM)
is it me interviewing u? or vice versa?
```

It is impossible to be emotionally detached. At one Gay Bombay meeting, I am carried away by the drift of my argument and maliciously attack Pratham, someone who I have just interviewed before the meeting, for not being 'out' enough. For this, Karim publicly chastises me. I initially feel bad about this, but on reflection, decide to interpret it as a sign of my acceptance in the group. (You would never tick off a guest in Indian culture, only family or close friends, no?) I apologize to Pratham and he smiles and tells me to relax – it's no big deal.

There are many ways in which ethnographers may choose to disguise the identities of the individuals and community they research. These include "creating composite characters out of individuals in the community, fictionalizing certain details and breaking identifiable individuals into multiple identities in the write-up."[84] (Cherny, 1999) In my case, because of the online/offline nature of my work, I decide to adopt Amy Bruckman's (2001) guidelines for treatments of names and online pseudonyms in published accounts.[85] She delineates a disguise "continuum of possibilities" ranging from "no disguise, light disguise, moderate disguise, to heavy disguise." I choose 'Light Disguise' as my strategy, which stipulates that:

1. The group is named.
2. Names, pseudonyms and some other identifying details (place names, organizational and institutional names, etc.) are changed.
3. Verbatim quotes may be used, even if they could be used to identify an individual.
4. Group members themselves may be able to guess who is being discussed.
5. An outsider could probably figure out who is who with a little investigation.
6. Details that are harmful to individuals should be omitted.

I think that it would be difficult for an outsider to guess the identities of the individuals that are mentioned in my study. However for those within the group – it may be certainly be possible to guess which pseudonym stands for whom. In fact, as I mention earlier, a large number of my interviewees ask me to use their real names in my work; others ask me to use their online nicknames. I decide to change all names, instead of having a confusing mix of real character names and pseudonyms. I also change the names of some locations that are used by the

community as meeting/party places, but use real names for the venues publicized on the group website. For the reflexive passages that deal with my own personal history, I use either first or last name initials for those who I have been in close sexual or emotional relationships with and fictionalize some but not all other names, thereby preserving a balance between authenticity and identity disguise. I acknowledge that my method may simply be "a useless middle road between privacy protection and research rigor"[86] (Cherny, 1999) – but it is a road that I believe is a pragmatic one to take for a study of this nature.

Altorki and El Solh (1998) write that "[indigenous] fieldworkers are not only held accountable by those who constitute their academic frame of reference, but also may be expected to be conscious of their moral obligation to the subject of their study."[87] I am acutely conscious of this unstated obligation, I am responsible to the Gay Bombay community for my actions and the way I write about them. I am also responsible to the greater Indian gay community at large.

> Describing and analyzing the culture of one's own community is also affected by the realities of one's group membership. …While all ethnographers have to deal with questions of confidentiality and exposure of data, for those who return to live with the people they study – even more for those who are participating members – these considerations have more drastic consequences. It is not whether a book will be read or not, assigned or banned from use. It is a question of potential and severe ostracism for the ethnographer."[88]
> (Altorki 1998)

As a friend and community member, my respondents sometimes reveal very private information about their lives – although these revelations may be helpful, I do

not include them in my write-up; I think that doing so would be both "dishonest and disloyal." (Jones, 1970)[89]

Sexual involvement with one's research subjects has in general been taboo for ethnographers for a variety or reasons, including the power inequality that often exists between researchers and those researched. Recently, this taboo has begun to be questioned. Thus Clifford (1997) asks: "Why should sharing beds be a less appropriate source of knowledge than sharing food? There may of course be many practical reasons for sexual restraint in the field, just as certain places and certain activities may be off-limit to the tactful...but they are not off-limit in all places and at all times."[90] Mark McLelland too argues against sexual prudishness in the field – in fact he bases an entire study on sex that he has with participants encountered via the internet.[91] Bell and Valentine (1995) declare: "Our research relationships and the way we report them cannot (and indeed must not) be kept impersonal and clinical. We must also be reflexive about how we feel about our respondents – owning up if we feel sexually attracted to them rather than struggling to maintain a false front of objectivity."[92]

I acknowledge the existence of sexual tension between me and some of my respondents – both online and offline, and adopt Campbell's methodological device of 'bracketing' as a means of addressing this tension; that is being upfront with my respondents whether I am "speaking to them as a researcher or as a friend and community member."[93] Like Campbell, I avoid "initiating any discussions I suspected would be construed as libidinous or even as deeply personal"[94] during

formal interviews, leaving these for another occasion when I am not performing my researcher role. I am successful in this endeavor, however like Campbell, I realize that my participants don't "always observe such bracketing themselves."[95] Sometimes, this makes for interesting scenarios – on one occasion, when I declared to an interviewee that I cannot respond to his sexual innuendo as we are in the midst of a formal interview, he volunteers to stop answering my questions so that I can start thinking of him as a sexual playmate instead of as a research subject! In another case, I am tremendously attracted to an interviewee and go out with him to a gay party where I try to hit on him, but am unsuccessful. One of my online interviewees happens to be someone at whose company I have interned many years ago as a fresh high school graduate. He is now married, with two kids and he reveals to me over email that he was very attracted to me during the time we worked together, but unable to declare his feelings.

One of the people I become close to is Ormus. He is the first person I contact off the Gay Bombay list, after reading a post by him describing his first experience at a Gay Bombay party. It is eloquently written and extremely expressive. I mail him immediately, telling him about my project, and he agrees to be interviewed for it. Subsequent to that, we exchange emails, have several informal chats on MSN, and speak to each other twice on the telephone, long distance. He tests the waters, and flirts, not overtly, but using clever wordplay that could be read in multiple ways. I do the same.

We finally meet on MSN chat for a formal interview. As with our other conversations, we start off by catching up with our respective lives. Ormus knows about the film festival I have organized at MIT and wants to know how it went; he shares with me details about his recent out of town trip. He is training in the same professional school as my ex-boyfriend V, and so we have connections across several levels. Ormus has obviously read the questionnaire I sent to him in advance of our online meeting in detail – his answers are eloquent and well framed. He is being honest and sharing intimate details of his life. I feel privileged to have this trust, but I also feel strangely exploitative. Is Ormus being so honest and open because he wants to make a good impression on me? Would he be so forthcoming even if we hadn't established our bond earlier? Am I attracted to him? I am enjoying the conversation immensely.... we really have an excellent rapport, and my previous conversations with him have meant that I have enough background information as well as a level of comfort established to ask him probing questions without wondering if I have gone too far. The formal interview goes off excellently.

Informally, we exchange pictures and decide to meet in Bombay for a date when I visit the city. During the course of this date, it is clear that there is a possibility of romance. Although this does not eventually materialize (we develop a platonic friendship instead), it results in my not conducting an offline interview with him and only retaining the online component as my data for research.

Departure Scene 1: Goodbye

India, I have swum in your warm waters and run
laughing in your high mountain meadows. Oh, why

must everything I say end up sounding like a 'filmi gana', a goddamn cheap Bollywood song? Very well then: I have walked your filthy streets, India, I have ached in my bones from the illnesses engendered by your germs. I have eaten your independent salt and drunk your nauseatingly sugary roadside tea... farewell my country. Don't worry, I won't come knocking at your door. I won't phone you in the middle of the night and hang up when you reply...India, my terra infirma, my maelstrom, my cornucopia, my crowd. India, my too-muchness, my everything at once, my Hug-me, my fable, my mother, my father and my first great truth... India, fount of my imagination, source of my savagery, breaker of my heart. Goodbye.[96]

I attend my last Gay Bombay Sunday meet two days before I leave Bombay to return to Boston. It is the group's 6th anniversary – and it is being celebrated in style, with several events spread over a fortnight. The meeting I attend coincides with the festival of *Raksha Bandhan* – the Hindu festival commemorating brother-sister love. Appropriately, it is titled 'The Siblings Meet.' For old times, sake, the meeting point is the Bandra McDonalds, just like it was at the first meet, six years ago. I climb upstairs to the second level of the restaurant and am met by Isaac, dressed in a splendid cream embroidered *churidar kurta* and the black GB cap identifier, greeting all the gay guests that arrive with a traditional hand folded *namaste*. As always, there are the old regulars and a bunch of (eight) newbies: a motivational trainer just relocated from Dubai, two guys from South Africa and Kenya, a group of shy college students, some software engineers... There is also Upal, a brooding 20-something assistant film director from Delhi, who I am instantly attracted to – he looks like a young Matt Dillon, with his underfed, starving poet look, and blazing eyes. He'd been introduced to me at the last dance party by my

date for that evening; now I have the chance to chat him up as the group shifts to Sargam's aunt's place – again, a repeat of what took place six years ago.

The apartment is on the 3rd floor of a building in a quiet by lane off crowded Pali Naka in Bandra. It has been recently renovated in the Palladian style common to upper-middle class Bombay homes.... plaster of Paris false ceiling, lots of arches, sculpting, molding, cornices and scalloped curtains. Egyptian looking vases abound, and there is abstract art on the walls. There are sofas arranged all around the apartment. By the time we arrive, it is already a full house with old timers who have come there directly. I make sure I squeeze myself right next to Upal. Sargam's two widowed aunts preside maternally over the proceedings – passing around sweets and drinks and urging everyone to speak up.

I hear several stories that evening. Robin talks about his brother's rejection upon learning about his sexuality, something that he didn't expect at all, since the brother was a doctor who lived in America. Karim speaks about his sister's queasiness regarding his sexuality when it comes to telling her fiancé about it. He also feels strange that although she knows that he is in a long-term relationship, she avoids making any inquiries about his partner whenever they speak. Sargam feels that although his sister has accepted him for whom he is, she is still uncomfortable if he holds hands with his partner in her presence. He makes fun of her by threatening to attend her wedding in full bejeweled drag. Sankalp narrates his story of playing 'doctor-doctor' with his cousin all through his childhood, which progressed into sexual action in their teens. Now, his cousin, married to a woman,

constantly ignores him at family gatherings. Bhisham confides that he was blackmailed into having sex with his cousin and brother since the age of 12. There is a debate over the action of Isaac's brother – on coming out to him, he advised Isaac to leave the house and stay by himself, away from the family. Isaac chooses to interpret this as concern, the others feel it is selfishness and callousness on the part of the brother; instead of standing up for him, he is in fact shunning him, but Isaac is not convinced.

Shoeb, a software engineer who lives in California with his partner, has a happy tale. He came out to his family six years ago, and now his parents and his partner's parents treat each other like in-laws. He advises that everyone should make their parents feel comfortable, answer their questions honestly and help them get over their fears. Likewise Senthil discloses that although his then 12 year old sister initially "freaked out" when he came out to her at age 16, she was very supportive afterwards and even highlighted his sexuality in an admissions essay for a university in the US. (It worked, she was accepted!) He is not yet out to his parents though – he says that they are very conservative and might not be able to understand or accept. Joseph's story is unique – when he came out to his brother, his brother in turn revealed his own homosexuality to him – and now they are close confidantes.

The aunts interject with a list of concerns that parents might have on learning about their child's homosexuality. Who will look after him when he falls ill? What will happen when he grows old? They feel that gay men should be ready to answer

these questions before coming out to their families. There is a general consensus that one should only come out after achieving financial independence. The meeting ends with a warm round of applause for the two aunts and their hospitality – and then its time for the great telephone number exchange to begin. The new guys mingle with the others, happy to be a part of this exciting community, and old friends renew contacts. I am busy hugging everyone I know – saying goodbye.

Some of us decide to continue the evening by walking to the Bandra Bandstand Café Coffee Day. I am excited that Upal agrees to come along. He lights a cigarette the moment we're outside, which is a big turn off – but I'm leaving in two days, it's not like anything's going to happen. I am happy to be among friends. Nihar, who I have grown exceedingly fond of; Bhuvan and Om, my first interviewees in Bombay; Murgesh, someone I have grown to admire; and beautiful, beautiful eye candy, Upal. The coffee shop is hunk paradise – it seems like all of Bandra's beautiful boys have decided to come out on this gorgeous Sunday evening. There's a cool breeze coming in from the sea, and I look around at the chatter-filled café, at the smiling animated faces of my new friends, and feel horribly, miserably, achingly sad to be leaving. Nihar sees my expression and envelopes me in a big bear hug. We'll miss you Parmesh, he says simply. I nod back and continue sipping my coffee. When the waiter comes for the bill, I flirt with him shamelessly, much to the delight of my companions.

Departure Scene 2: Homeland Security

In Boston, a few months later, I come home from *Swades* (Homeland), the

latest Shah Rukh Khan film playing at the Somerville theatre, with a song in my head that refuses to fade away.

> *Mitti ki jo khushboo, tu kaise bhoolaayega*
> *Tu chaahe kahin jaaye, tu laut ke aayega*
> *Nayi nayi raahon mein, dabi dabi aahon mein*
> *Khoye khoye dilse tere, koyi ye kahega*
> *Ye jo des hai tera, swades hai tera, tujhe hai pukaara*
> *Ye woh bandhan hai jo kabhi toot nahin sakta*
>
> 'How could you possibly forget the smell of the earth here?
> It shall force you to return, however far you go.
> While on newer routes, within your suppressed sighs,
> Someone shall say to your lost, musing heart –
> What calls out to you isn't just a country; it's your homeland.
> Your bond with it is eternal and unbreakable.'
> — AR Rehman *Swades* ('Homeland')[97]

I return to my dorm room and read and re-read my field notes spread out all over the floor. I am sleep deprived but when I close my eyes, I don't sleep... Instead I see a small fishing boat bobbing solitarily on a tempestuous Arabian Sea from the windows of Kabir's gorgeously decorated Bandra apartment... Pulkit's kind mom insisting that I eat something before going back home after my interview ....a casual conversation with Murgesh's school uniform-clad, video game-playing 16 year old nephew while Murgesh filters coffee in the kitchen... Yudhisthir's bedroom wall completely covered with Hulk Hogan posters ....red eyed Nihar, drinking soup and pouring out his heart to me at a rooftop café in Colaba with the rain spattering on a blue plastic tarpaulin above our heads... Harbhajan's diamond encrusted gold watch, rings and chains clinking as he tells me about his wife's decision to serve as Gay Bombay's treasurer....

Now I am panting heavily as I climb 12 floors to Isaac's friend's apartment in a new building near Bombay's Film City (The construction symbolizes Bombay for me completely – brand new, surrounded by slums on a potholed and puddled road, with every amenity possible except a working elevator), to find an army of gay hotties sprawled around the living room, clad in only their boxers ... an elevator that works – a rickety ride up to the Lawyer's Collective office in Fort where six diligent workers type away quietly at their computer screens, surrounded by stacks of papers and files and posters, badges and pamphlets that read "Preventing HIV is very simple – just use your head"...giant puddles of water....flies, flies, flies....the hush in the dark, jam-packed National College auditorium before the start of the first film at the gay film festival; spicy hot *samosas* and juicy gossip in the interval... Bhudev standing on a stool feeding the fish in his large office fish tank while talking about post-colonialism.... a rainbow shining in a highway oil slick as my rickshaw speeds along with the driver humming *Allah Ke Bande Hans De, Jo Bhi Ho, Kal Phir Aayega.* ('Children of God, laugh a little, Whatever happens, tomorrow will come once again.')

I smile as I think that perhaps Gay Bombay is a little like Hotel California – I can log off/fly out any time I like, but I can never leave. It is the culture that is so firmly stuck to my skin that it cannot be washed away. As I wind up my formal research, I find myself deeply entangled in the mesh of relationships that I have established over the past two years. The project is as much a part of me, as I am of it. I am unable to let go.

I continue to read the posts on the newsgroup with delight everyday and often visit the website to see if there's anything new. I continue to be in touch with most of my interviewees over email and on the phone. With some of them I am counselor – Gul mails feeling miserable about his lack of success with men – and I soothe him that there is Mr. Right waiting for him, just around the corner. I follow up with Nihar about whether he is eating a big breakfast everyday, sleeping well and cutting down on the partying, and share his joy when he lands his dream job as a fashion stylist. I am excited for Bhuvan when his television script gets accepted and he gets to quit his job and live out his dream of becoming a full time writer. Not all my correspondence is hunky-dory – when I mail a whole bunch of people, including my new Gay Bombay friends about my National Public Radio interview regarding gay life in India being broadcast in the US, I get a mail from Senthil wondering whether I am promoting the gay cause or my own self. I think about this for some time and then reply that I am doing both – at least in my world, they are deeply interlinked.

Ye pal hai wahi, jis mein hai chhupi
Koyi ek sadi, saari zindagi
Tu na poochh raaste mein kaahe
Aaye hain is tarha do raahein
Tu hi toh hai raah jo sujhaaye
Tu hi toh hai ab jo ye bataaye
Chaahe toh kis disha mein jaaye wahi des
Ye jo des hai tera, swades hai tera, tujhe hai pukaara
Ye woh bandhan hai jo kabhi toot nahin sakta

'This moment right here, right now,
Encompasses an eternity,
Hidden within it is a lifetime.
Don't question your forked destiny,

Make sense of it. Choose wisely.
And then, whichever path you choose to walk on,
Know that it leads home.
What calls out to you isn't just a country; it's your homeland.
Your bond with it is eternal and unbreakable.'

I lie in bed and stare at the ceiling thinking that soon, like Mohan Bhargava in *Swades*, I too will have to make sense of my forked destiny. Do I want go back to India and "light a bulb"[98]? There are so many variables in play – material, emotional, the legal status of my sexual orientation in the two countries...I want to choose wisely after giving due consideration to all of them. The Indian Prime minister confirmed dual citizenship for all NRIs – Non Resident Indians – in 2004; perhaps I will choose to become one of them – another drop in the gigantic diaspora of 'Non-Returning Indians' that visit the home country every few years, armed with bottles of imported mineral water and energy bars to get through the bloody god-awful weather. (Uff... so hot, no?) Or maybe, like I already do online, I will figure out a way to be both here and there – in physical Bombay – as well.

Chapter 4
Media Matters

Press and television coverage of gay-related issues between 1991-2005; contemporary writing on Indian homosexuality and queer Indian cinema

I begin this chapter by critically examining the coverage of gay related stories by the Indian press between 1991 and 2004. My methodology consists of surveying over 300 press clippings sourced from the Quentin Buckle Library at the Humsafar Trust and several personal collections (most notably, the one maintained by Vikram Doctor), as well as over 200 web links. I focus on the English language press because it is what is predominantly read by the middle-class, both the subject and the context of this thesis. I emphasize stories that are Bombay-centric although I also draw on all-India stories, whenever needed. This is not a comprehensive survey and since I am scrutinizing only the English language press, the viewpoints expressed are certainly not exponentially applicable to the rest of India. However, in the face of the dismal lack of alternatives, I am hoping that this work may serve as the building block for the creation of an Indian gay news archive, which would include media coverage in Hindi and Indian regional languages besides English. Following my overview of the press coverage, I briefly touch upon the gay presence on Indian television in the past decade and Indian films released with specifically gay themes. I end the chapter with a summary of select gay themed books that have emerged from India over the past two decades, both fiction and non-fiction.[1]

My reasons for including this media overview are as follows:

1. It provides a compelling framework of cultural artifacts with which to construct a timeline of the important events and issues in post-liberalized Indian gay history; useful markers of the changing attitudes and beliefs of upper and middle class Indian society during that time span. This attitudinal change along with the discourse around homosexuality in the media has helped catapult gayness into English speaking Indian mainstream consciousness – and as this chapter shows, it has been an interesting progression.

2. I am in agreement with Appadurai's contention (1996) that since lives today are "inextricably linked with representations," it is vital to incorporate the "complexities of expressive representation" (such as the print articles, films, TV shows and books I have documented in this chapter) into contemporary ethnographies – and "not only as technical adjuncts but as primary material with which to construct and interrogate our own representations."[2] The media and cultural background provided in this chapter segues into (and contextualizes) my respondents' comments quoted throughout this thesis. We notice that specific themes raised within this chapter regarding issues about family, coming out, neglect of HIV, etc. constantly repeat themselves – both within my interviewee responses and my own memoryscape of experiences – and through these repetitions, a composite, fractal shape emerges of what is it like to be gay in contemporary urban Bombay.

Letting Go

S puts his hand over my hand in the car and together, we shift the gear stick into reverse. We are happy to have found a parking space near the Homi Bhabha Auditorium, located at the southern most tip of Bombay in Navy Nagar. The hall inside is packed to its capacity crowd of 1036 individuals. I often come to this part of the city to visit my friends living at the neighboring Tata Institute of Fundamental Research housing colony and to take a walk at the complex's private corniche. Today, it is a date – the culmination of a long courtship that involved phone calls, online chat and occasional meetings spread over the past one-and-a-half years. The event is a dance performance by a visiting French troupe – modern ballet set to traditional Bengali Rabindra Sangeet. We are surrounded by Bombay's glitterati, people I know vaguely, having interviewed many of them for Bombay Times.

Soon we will drive back to his empty home (parents out of town for the weekend) and he will make me a candlelight dinner (fresh candles, microwaved dinner), followed by a night of intense lovemaking, where I will agree to be penetrated for the first time in my life. While I am politically averse to top-bottom dichotomies, I prefer being on top in my personal sexual life. I feel safer, less vulnerable, and in control, something that I hate to lose. Thus for me to be penetrated:
1. The guy has to be extra-ordinarily special
2. I have to be seeing him with a long-term perspective
3. I have to trust him immensely
The three are naturally inter-related. I will also use a condom for a blowjob for the first time in my life, after looking at S's medical books about the consequences of not doing so. (The side effect of dating a doctor in training; it tastes ridiculous.)

I will wake up at six the next morning, next to a lover for the first time in my life. We will cuddle and have a round of sleepy early morning sex, following which I will quickly grab my clothes and run out of his house to join my building friends – who have rented a bus for the day to take us all to the amusement park Essel World. There I will giggle foolishly in the giant wave pool, and on prodding, pronounce mysteriously that the previous night had been the best night of my life.

I will bump into S outside another auditorium five years later, where he will offer to introduce me to his current boyfriend. I will politely decline and tell him to fuck off, but we will start emailing each other once again. I will stay with him when I visit Boston two years after that, when he will try to feel me up while we share a common bed. I will push his arm away gently and he will mumble sorry and slink away to sleep on the couch. We will not talk about the experience until two years later in my MIT dorm room, and then we will talk about everything and I will wish that things could be different. I will finally meet his boyfriend when I return to Bombay for my summer break and find him to be a wonderful, charming and utterly decent sort of chap. I will finally let go of S.

Press Coverage of Gay-related Issues Between 1991-2005

The coverage of gay related issues in the Indian English language press has commingled around five distinct themes, which I categorize as:

1. Being Gay in India
2. Gay Activism
3. Out Public Figures
4. Changing Public Perception
5. Globalization

Being Gay in India

Since 1991, newspaper and magazine articles dealing with the existence of homosexuality in India began to appear on a regular basis. All my interviewees considered this to be a positive marker of change. Those who were in their thirties and older spoke about their isolation while growing up, and the paucity of reference material available for them to access, as well as role models to interact with or emulate. They mined college reference libraries and international magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* for narratives that they could contextualize their sexuality in. They encountered very few gay people in their day-to-day lives and when they did, it was usually with a feeling of alienation.

> KABIR: THE COUPLE OF PEOPLE THAT WERE OUT WERE VERY OVER THE TOP, VERY EFFEMINATE, LIKED TO DRESS UP, AND WEAR EARRINGS. THEIR WHOLE LIFE SEEMED TO REVOLVE AROUND THE STATEMENT THAT I AM A HOMO AND THIS IS WHY I DRESS LIKE THIS OR ACT LIKE THIS. THERE WAS NO IDENTIFICATION. THIS WAS A STRUGGLE.

In contrast, for my respondents in their twenties, access to information about homosexuality was not that much of an issue – as there was a plethora of

press coverage about homosexuality in city tabloids like *Bombay Times* and *Mid-day*, national newspapers and a wide spectrum of magazines.

Some of these articles were positive and almost evangelical in their tone. Consider *Gentleman* magazine's 'Gay: Everything You Wanted to Know About Homosexuality but Were Afraid to Find Out,' published in August 1991. It's writer, after tracing homosexuality down the ages from Greek mythology to the *Kamasutra* and its existence in India, covers a gamut of issues ranging from theories on what makes people homosexual, the Kinsey report, the difference between homosexuality and being gay, and how one can't really recognize a gay person. He concludes by fervently declaring that "...nothing matters, not even the object of one's affections, whether it's man, woman, stone, tree, animal, music, ashtrays, penguins...nothing. Pure love – love for love's sake itself..."[3]

On the other hand, *Mid-day*'s 'I Want My Sex' (1993)[4] and *Sunday Mail Magazine*'s cover story 'Homosexuality: A Thorny Issue' (1991)[5] are uninformed, replete with negative stereotypes about homosexuality and gay men, and downright silly. The *Mid-day* piece talks about two different gay men – Shreyas and Rafiq. While the writer paints Shreyas as gay because of "his childhood fetish for wearing his sister's clothes," Rafiq has been abused as a child "at the hands of his homosexual uncle, which has led to his ultimate disorientation." The *Sunday Mail Magazine* article is no better – it laments that since India's "close-knit family structure" is so "different from the West, such inclinations in one's progeny [are] very traumatic for the parents" and suggests among others, psychoanalysis and

behavior modification theory as two possible treatments for the "habit". It goes on

to warn that "the 'gay' is more vulnerable" to AIDS because "most of them do not

stick to a single partner."

> KARIM: THESE CHANGES TAKE A LOT OF TIME. FIVE YEARS
> BACK, MAGAZINES WERE WRITING STORIES ON WOW,
> HOMOSEXUALS EXIST IN INDIA. NOW THEIR ARTICLES TALK
> ABOUT MORE IN-DEPTH ISSUES AND MORE INSIGHT ABOUT
> THE HOMOSEXUAL COMMUNITY. FOR A LARGE SEGMENT OF
> THE MEDIA TODAY, IT IS TAKEN FOR GRANTED THAT THERE IS
> NOTHING WRONG WITH BEING GAY. THE VERNACULAR
> MEDIA HAS ALSO CHANGED. FIVE YEARS BACK IT WAS
> DIFFICULT TO FIND A MENTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE
> VERNACULAR MEDIA EXCEPT IN SENSATIONAL CONTEXTS.
> NOW MORE VERNACULAR NEWSPAPERS ARE COVERING
> ISSUES OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN A FAIRLY STRAIGHTFORWARD
> WAY.

From the end of the 1990s, we begin to see an articulation of a wider range of

issues concerning gay life in India. There are many opinion pieces that argue for the

acceptance of homosexuality as a part of Indian society.[6] 1998's 'Sex Lies, Agony,

Matrimony' reflects the changing norm of counselors advising their gay clients to

"stay single and assert their identity" instead of being forced into an unwilling

heterosexual marriage. It also estimates the number of gay people in India to be 13

million and claims that 10.4 million of these are married[7]. The writer of 'Bi Bi Love'

declares that "eschewing labels like 'straight' 'gay' and 'bi'" might "be a move

towards simply being a sexual being."[8] 'Men on Call' takes its readers into the world

of Bombay's call-boys or male hustlers, "anywhere between 15 to 25 years" old,

who service both male and female clients, and use the internet and local classifieds

to conduct their trade[9]. 'I Want To Break Free' interviews parents of gay children

and articulates their reactions, fears and concerns about their children's

homosexuality. ("Love means acceptance. The bottom line is that I want my child to be happy. Unfortunately, the social reality makes this difficult.")[10] Other interesting articles relate to depression in the gay community,[11] extortion of gay people via the internet by blackmailing con artists[12] and the police,[13] efforts by gay support groups to explain that "love's not only straight" at Bombay colleges on Valentine's Day 2003[14] and coverage of the Indian Roman Catholic church's position on the possibility of homosexuality among its priests.[15] Unlike earlier stories, with their 'names have been changed' disclaimers and shadowy illustrations, many 'coming out' stories after 2000 have featured gay men and women confidently being quoted with their full names and accompanied by their real pictures.[16] The excellently researched 'Gay Spirit'[17] (2004) captures the confident tone of the emergent pan-Indian gay movement "revolutionizing minds" across the country.

During our conversations, most of my respondents told me that the increased media coverage had enabled them to feel more confident about their homosexuality – they considered it a validation of their existence, a visibilizing of what was hitherto invisible.

> GUL: ONCE I WAS ASKED IF I WAS GAY BY A FRIEND LOUDLY
> IN A RESTAURANT. I DENIED IT. TODAY IF SOMEONE SAID
> THAT, I WOULDN'T DENY IT.

Of course, not all the coverage was affirmative or balanced. Sensational news stories and 'scandals' involving homosexuality tended to be reported (and often misreported) by the press with relish. 'Gay Couple Stabs Each Other' describes the tragic suicide pact carried out to its conclusion by two men in 1992, "following the non recognition of their marriage by society."[18] In a similar vein,

'Lesbians' Death Wish' reports that 24 women, "mostly from marginalized communities, especially Dalits [lower caste Hindus], Adivasis [tribals] and Muslims" committed suicide in the south Indian state of Kerala between the years of 1998-2004.[19] In 2001, the offices of the Lucknow-based HIV prevention NGOs – Naz Foundation International and Bharosa – were raided by the police and nine outreach workers from the two organizations were arrested. It is shocking to note that every major Indian newspaper misreported this incident based on a PR feed provided by the Lucknow police. So the *Asian Age* story was titled '2 NGO-run Gay Clubs busted in Lucknow'[20] while *Indian Express*' headline ran as 'Police Busts Gay Clubs in Lucknow'.[21] The *Asian Age* story falsely reports that the police "seized pornographic literature and blue film cassettes" from the offices of the NGOs while the *Express* story claims that the workers were "charged with abetment of sodomy and criminal conspiracy" and quotes the Lucknow police chief saying that the gay clubs had a "membership of at least 500." On a positive note, these ridiculous allegations by the police coupled with the media's callous coverage of the incident led to the galvanizing of several voices of dissent from the country's LBGT activist community and thankfully, some of these found their way into mainstream media reportage[22]. (Some of my respondents declared that they were drawn to activism after reading about this particular incident.)

Another sensational story that rocked the Indian media and spurred the country's activists into speaking out against the insensitive coverage was the murder of USAID employee Pushkin Chandra in Delhi in August 2004, along with

his close friend Vishal/Kuldeep. The coverage only tends to highlight the police discovery of the naked bodies of the victims in Chandra's home, the recovery of "at least 100 nude photographs" of Delhi-based men that were "said to have taken part in several orgies with him" and the conjecture that Chandra was part of a "homosexual syndicate which went out of its way to rope in fresh members" and "force" these new recruits into photographed sex.[23] As Vikram Doctor wrote in a *Times of India* op-ed, "one wonders why the killers of Pushkin are still bothering to hide – the Delhi police working through their tame media contacts has given them their defense. They simply need to claim that they were lured into the gay sex networks that we are told trap young men like this and forced into doing what they did."[24] He adds that the murders should be seen against the backdrop of an increase in criminal extortion and blackmail and it is this that the police should "focus on, rather than taking the easy way out by blaming the victim and letting the villain off the hook." The Pushkin case has been the most publicized, but there are several less high-profile 'gay murder' stories that the media has had a field day reporting. (For example: 'Horror Story of Unnatural Sex and Murder.'[25]) However, 'Prisoners Turning Gay in Packed Cells'[26] despite its misleading title is well written and covers the debate over issuing condoms to male prisoners within jail premises in the western state of Gujarat as an HIV and STD prevention measure.

Gay Activism

The launch of Ashok Row Kavi's *Bombay Dost* in May 1990 was widely reported in the English language press. *Sunday Mid-day* provided an account of the

launch party of the magazine where "the editorial board of *Bombay Dost* went

public with their identities":

> At the bash was a prominent architect with his live-in
> lover, a senior chartered accountant. A lesbian couple.
> And assorted gays, of both sexes. And all spoke to the
> media with little traces of hesitation...[27]

Bombay magazine declared that the advent of *Bombay Dost* "usher[ed] in

the gay revolution" in the country and presented a humorous account of the

magazine editors' decision to mail out copies of the inaugural issue to select

"industrialists, businessmen, advertising and print media men," all "ostensible closet

queens," who, "because of their public stature may be reluctant to "be a part of the

movement" but might "at least, at some point in the future, send *Bombay Dost* a

few cheques."[28] The article goes on to describe a very clear future trajectory for the

magazine and its cause – and the press clippings collected over the years at the

Quentin Buckle library bear witness to the achievements of each of the goals

outlined by the magazine's founders in 1990. A parallel development was the

establishment of the public charity The Humsafar Trust in 1991, again spearheaded

by Row Kavi) with the mandate of working in the field of HIV/AIDS

awareness/prevention (see section on HIV/AIDS below). The various activities of

both organizations over the years are well documented, such as *Bombay Dost*'s

incorporation (1993),[29] the establishment of the Trust's permanent center on

October 31, 1995 (in collaboration with the Bombay Municipal Corporation, which

allotted it five rooms at its Municipal Health Building in North-West Bombay),[30] the

creation of the country's first voicemail service for Bombay's gay community[31] followed shortly by a sexuality helpline manned by trained counselors,[32] and the flashy inauguration of the spanking new drop-in center at the trust's premises.[33]

> JASJIT: I THINK WHATEVER ACTIVISM EXISTS IN INDIA IS TOO WHITE-COLLARED AND INTELLECTUAL. IT IS LIKE ANY OTHER SORT OF ACTIVISM, QUITE FRACTIOUS AND ILL CONCERTED AS WELL. I HAVE CONSIDERED GIVING INTELLECTUAL SUPPORT, ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF ELUCIDATING THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE – BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT I CAN DO BEST BEING A HISTORIAN.

Coverage of gay conferences and seminars increased significantly over the years, as the events themselves became more high profile and public in their nature. However some things remained the same. Thus if "secrecy was the hallmark of"[34] the first gay activists' meet organized by Humsafar and the Naz Foundation in Bombay in 1995, (an event attended by "over 60 delegates from various Indian cities as well as from London, New York and Colombo"[35]) the venue of a two-day workshop on 'Strategies to advance lesbian, gay and bisexual rights' conducted in Bombay in 1997[36] was hush-hush too, as was the location of the first Asian regional conference of the Brussels-based world wide International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) held in Bombay in 2002. ("The participants fear it will be disrupted..."[37])

> MIKE: A GAY ACTIVIST IN INDIA IS ONLY KNOWN AS A GAY ACTIVIST...HE LOSES ALL OTHER ASPECTS OF HIS IDENTITY INCLUDING HIS PROFESSIONAL ONE... I DON'T WANT TO BECOME AN ACTIVIST BECAUSE THE INDIAN PUBLIC IS VERY DELICATE...

The ILGA conference drew an unprecedented amount of media coverage – photographs and interviews with international delegates like ILGA Secretary-

General Anna Leah Sarabia De Leon and her partner Maria Victoria Dizon[38], Sri Lankan activist Rosana Flamer-Caldera[39] and Sandip Roy, the editor of the US based diasporic gay magazine *Trikone*[40] were circulated widely, as were quotes by UNIFEM's (The United Nation Development Fund for Women) Shelly Kaw,[41] Naz Foundation's Shaleen Rakesh,[42] Sangini's Betu Singh,[43] Aanchal's Geeta Kumana[44] and Nepal-based activist Sunil Pant.[45] The sponsors of the conference – UNAIDS (The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS), UNIFEM, UNDP (United Nations Development Program), IAVI (International AIDS Vaccine Initiative) and the MacArthur Foundation[46] – were afforded a significant amount of publicity as well and while the ubiquitous Humsafar naturally hosted the event (assisted by city-based lesbian support group Aanchal), the broadbased nature of the publicity garnered was significant in the public perception of gay activism in Bombay expanding beyond the Ashok Row Kavi/Bombay Dost/Humsafar-centric worldview.

Three other national gay conferences also drew media attention. The first was a National Law School of India public seminar on gay rights in 1997, held within the premises of the prestigious Bangalore institute, with the permission of the school authorities.[47] The second was a three day conference in Bombay in 2000, entitled 'Looking into the Next Millennium,' attended by activists from the country's LBGT communities, which discussed "the new emerging identities of people having same-sex relations and problems arising from re-allocation of genders, the human rights issues around sexuality, the sexual health issues which confront gay women and men and the looming epidemic of HIV/AIDS in India."[48] Finally, the International

Conference on Sexualities, Masculinities and Cultures in South Asia was attended

by over 200 delegates from all over the world in 2004 in Bangalore.[49] The World

Social Forum, organized in January 2004 in Bombay, was another venue for the

different Indian LBGT groups to espouse their cause in the full glare of the

international media present. From the drag show by a Malaysian transgender

performance troupe that had some nuns storm out of the event in disgust,[50] to the

perceived neglect by some city based gay and lesbian groups to their cause by the

Forum organizers,[51] the global media representatives converged in Bombay for the

event, covered it all.

> GOPAL: INDIAN GAY ACTIVISM IS A LATENT MOVEMENT
> WAITING TO EXPLODE INTO THE MAINSTREAM, WAITING FOR
> THE RIGHT TRIGGERS TO UNLEASH ITS ENERGIES.

India's first public gay demonstration was organized by the collective

AIDS Bhedbav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA, 'Campaign Against AIDS Discrimination') in

front of the police headquarters in New Delhi as a protest against raids by the Delhi

police on gay patrons of the city's Central Park. Photographs of the event were

circulated via the Press Trust of India (one of the country's major news agencies) to

most leading Indian newspapers. They show a group of activists holding up hand

made banners and posters with slogans such as "Human Rights is the Issue, Not

Sexuality", "Gay Manifesto: Gays of the World, unite. You have nothing to Lose but

your Chains" and "Down with Section 377."[52] There have been various debates in

English newspapers about the pros and cons of abolishing section 377 over the

past few years; the topic remains contentious.[53]

> RANDHIR: MOST OF THE GAIN THAT HAS HAPPENED ON

CHANGING SOCIETAL MINDSETS AND/OR BRINGING ABOUT A
BETTER STATE RESPONSE TO DIFFERENT SEXUALITIES HAS
BEEN BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE ACTIVISM OF PEOPLE WHO
ARE ETHER THEMSELVES NON GAY IDENTIFIED HOMOSEXUAL
PERSONS, OR WORK FOR THE INTEREST OF SUCH PEOPLE.

The first Indian gay 'pride march' was held in Calcutta on June 29, 1999, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York City. Although only 15 activists took part in the initial "friendship walk,"[54] it became a recurring annual feature[55] and the 2004 march – 'Walk on the Rainbow' – had 300 activists marching proudly through the city, escorted by the police,[56] followed by a posse of print and television news reporters. Bombay's first public demonstration was a public protest on September 27, 2001 against the arrest of the Naz Foundation/Bharosa HIV/AIDS outreach workers some months earlier, and it comprised protesters belonging to several city based gay, lesbian and human rights organizations (including Aanchal, Humsafar, Stree Sangam, Lawyers' Collective HIV/AIDS unit, Forum Against Oppression of Women and the Arawanis Social Welfare Society) gathering together at the city's historic Flora Fountain.[57] There have been sporadic marches and public protests in the city since, duly covered by the media, such as the candlelight walk to commemorate World AIDS Day 2003[58] or the 2004 march to protest the crusade of the political party Shiv Sena against the controversial film *Girlfriend*.[59]

One can estimate the extent of progress of gay activism in the country through the 1990s by comparing two press clipping – just six years apart from each other. 1994's 'Bringing Down Stonewalls' notes that "if one would look more closely, there is a quickening pulse towards a formation of a gay and lesbian

community in the country, which could, given a mass structure with aims and activities, turn into a movement."[60] The article makes several sharp observations about the potential roadblocks on the way to the formation of such a movement (an insular Indian gay community, class barriers, differences with the lesbian movement). Fast-forward to 'Action Stations' (2000): "The disorganized gay community joins forces, starting a series of support groups, help lines, websites and networking opportunities."[61]

An *Indian Express* article dated 17 July 1991[62] quotes an official from the Indian Council of Medical Research responding to a question of how he planned to work with the gay community regarding AIDS awareness. "There may only be about 60,000 of them in India...[and] if they die, not many tears will be shed." The article quotes Ashok Row Kavi's counter-assertion that using the Kinsey average of 5% homosexuals in any society, India would have "11 million permanent practicing homosexuals" and goes on to list the magnitude of the problem that confronts the country. The journalist telephones 11 city-based doctors to see if they know what AIDS stands for, and it is shocking to note that not even one of these can provide a completely correct answer – many of them simply hang up on him or refuse to answer.

> CHOLAN: I REMEMBER CLEARLY WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN, ROCK HUDSON DIED OF AIDS. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA WAS TALKING ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY ALTHOUGH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DISEASE. THERE WERE ACTIVISTS IN INDIA THEN – BUT THEY WEREN'T THAT PUBLIC AND YOU HAD TO LOOK AT THE WEST I SUPPOSE. HUDSON WAS THE ONLY ONE.

The apathy towards any gay involvement in the governmental efforts to battle HIV/AIDS continued in 1992 – an international conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific held in the country's capital, New Delhi, ignored homosexual concerns completely. The parallel AIDS meet organized by the international gay activists at a public park in the city was widely reported by the press.[63] Earlier that year, the World Health Organization at its annual AIDS congress in Amsterdam had cautioned the Indian government of "a possible outbreak of AIDS among the homosexual population of Bombay" with the congress director warning that "the fact that only very few HIV infected cases have been found so far in the gay population should not dull government's surveillance efforts".[64] Humsafar's 2004 study of 240 homosexual men in Bombay city, conducted with the help of the Indian Market Research Bureau reported that 20% of those surveyed were HIV positive, something that the press picked up on.[65] But my overall observation remains that the press coverage of HIV, whether gay-related or not, has been extremely disappointing in India. Given that the country now has the second highest number of AIDS sufferers in the world – official figures put the 2003 number at 5.1 million, only marginally behind South Africa's 5.3 million[66] (but most aid agencies say it is much higher and will reach 25 million by 2010[67]) – one sincerely hopes that they pull up their socks soon.

Out Public Figures

While the Indian media has often speculated about the sexuality of celebrities from the world of entertainment, business and even politics, very few of these have

actually unambiguously declared their homosexual orientation. Several of these celebrities live in pretty visible relationships with their same-sex partners, and are often seen burning up the dance floors of their city discotheques at gay parties and events. While they might not publicly deny their homosexuality, they don't acknowledge it either. For example – Sylvie, one of New Delhi's leading hair stylists, is "effusive about being a woman trapped in a man's body" and only appears in public dressed as a woman, but stops short of declaring her sexuality or sexual orientation.[68] The homosexuality of Rohit Khosla, India's first haute couturier, was only written about at his untimely death.[69]

> RUSTOM: CELEBRITIES [NEED] TO BE OUTSPOKEN... PEOPLE
> LIKE KARAN JOHAR [A BOLLYWOOD FILM DIRECTOR, WIDELY
> RUMORED TO BE GAY] HAVE NO FUCKING EXCUSE....

One of the first out Indian celebrities was the artist Bhupen Khakhar whose paintings (starting with 1981's provocative *You Can't Please All*, and including among several others, 1987's *Yayati* and 1995's *Old Man from Vasad Who Had Five Penises Suffered from Runny No*se) have become "as Hockney's did in the West, emblematic for a whole generation of homosexuals in India."[70] Khakhar's musings about his homosexuality in the press ("I told lies. I did not have courage to say I was going to meet my boyfriend. Gandhi spoke truth but I was coward";[71] "There's no escaping the fact that homosexuality is an integral part of human existence."[72]) forced "the vast terrain of half-urbanized modern India"[73] that his work drew from, to deal with the subject, albeit flinchingly. The fashion designer James Ferreira has been direct about his homosexuality. ("I am what I am and I've never been ashamed of myself. I've had very intense meaningful relationships with

men..."[74]) Another fashion designer, the Goa based Wendell Rodricks, caused a stir when he exchanged vows with his French partner Jerome Marrel at a celebrity-studded event on December 26, 2002.[75] A senior consular official from the French government conducted the ceremony at which the couple signed an official French Civil Solidarity Pact (PACS).

> OM: YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE IT OBVIOUS. MY BASIC POINT IS WHY DON'T YOU EXIST IN SOCIETY AND JUST BE A NORMAL PART OF IT? YOU YOURSELF BRING UP THE ISSUE OF BEING ABNORMAL AND THINGS LIKE THAT AND WHEN PEOPLE FROM OUTSIDE CALL YOU ABNORMAL YOU HAVE A PROBLEM.

Writers like Firdaus Kanga, R Raj Rao and Vikram Seth have all alluded to their own sexuality in their work, with Rao being the most publicly outspoken of the trio regarding his homosexuality and activist identity. ("The word 'activism' is not a dirty word for me as it is for other writers...I cannot stay in my ivory tower and ignore calls of help from gay men who are on the verge of committing suicide or are being hounded by cops or harassed by blackmailers."[76]) As a university professor, Rao has started the Queer Studies Circle at Pune University, where he teaches, and conducted informal courses on Queer Literature.[77] Other publicly out academicians include Somenath Banerjee, the Calcutta based transsexual senior professor of Bengali, who "walks into class dressed as a woman, complete with showy earrings, matching lipstick and eye make-up"[78] and Hyderabad based professor/poet/activist Hoshang Merchant ("As everyone knows by now, I am a homosexual. To write this sentence and to speak it publicly, which is a great liberation, is why I write."[79]) Makeup guru Cory Walia,[80] filmmaker Riyad Wadia[81] and the flamboyant actor

Bobby Darling[82] are some of the other celebrities that have created a stir with their confident public assertion of their homosexuality. This list would not be complete without Ashok Row Kavi – he has single-handedly carried the responsibility of being the "country's most public gay man"[83] for more than two decades.

Changing Public Perception

There are three major sex surveys that I would like to point to, which span the 15 years of my research interests. The *Debonair* magazine sex survey in 1991 presented "the country's first study of the sexual habits of Indian males."[84] Despite its relatively modest base size of 1424 respondents, the survey throws up some startling results with respect to homosexuality. For example, out of the respondents who have had sexual intercourse (81%), 36.8% report to have done so with another male. (This includes 32% of married men and 41.7% of unmarried men.) Other interesting statistics are that the wives of 31% of married men are aware of their homosexual behavior, and 17% of the respondents claim to engage in homosexual group sex! The widely publicized[85] Kama Sutra Sex Survey 2004[86] conducted in the top 10 cities in India (sponsored by Kama Sutra condoms) is more comprehensive – it includes both men and women and has a much larger sample (13,437 married and unmarried individuals aged 18 and above). 17% of the respondents acknowledge being attracted to a person of the same sex and within this category, 51% acknowledge having had sex with a person belonging to the same sex. While 43% believe that homosexuality is taboo, only 8% feel that it is normal to be attracted to a person of the same sex. Sandwiched between these

two reports is the *Outlook* magazine survey, conducted among 1,665 married men and women in eight cities in India in 1996, where 15% of the respondents admitted to having engaged in homosexual activities and 30% believed that homosexuality was "a normal practice."[87]

All these surveys were conducted in English, with highly educated urban respondents. (For instance, 67% of the *Debonair* respondents and 88% of the Kama Sutra respondents were university graduates.) Yet, as the editors of *Debonair* point out in the piece accompanying their survey, the results are extremely pertinent – they "reflect the behavior of an extremely important segment of the Indian population – the urban, middle and upper, socio-economic upwardly-mobile section." And within this segment, as these surveys so clearly point out: (1) Homosexual sex is alive and kicking, and (2) Views on it are in a constant flux. Indeed, the concept of masculinity itself is changing – a 2000 survey conducted by the *Week* magazine reports that 71% of the men polled (sample size 1300) wanted to be seen as macho – but the meaning of macho as constructed by the article accompanying the poll is quite surprising. "Macho is about all the things that macho was never supposed to be about... Modern macho is about being a better woman than a woman."[88]

The *vox populi* sections of newspapers and magazines reflect this changing spirit. In 1997, a *Mid-day* question – Should the law take any action against gays[89] – received an almost equally split response but respondents to a *Delhi Times* survey in 2004[90] about whether young Indians felt less conservative and more open about

sexuality were mostly in the affirmative and a *Bombay Times* survey[91] the same year

about how the respondents would react if they discovered that a friend was

homosexual received completely gay-positive reactions from those questioned.

> YUDHISTHIR: I THINK ACCEPTANCE BY YOURSELF DOESN'T COME FIRST. YOU ALWAYS LOOK TO SOCIETY WITHIN THE LARGER PICTURE AND REACT TO YOURSELF BASED ON OTHER PEOPLE'S POINT OF VIEW. HOW WILL YOUR FAMILY THINK? WHAT WILL YOUR FRIENDS THINK? THIS CAUSES YOU TO PRESSURIZE YOURSELF TO NOT EXPRESS YOUR SEXUALITY. AND THEREFORE COMING OUT IS A PROBLEM.

We can also find traces of the changing perception about homosexuality

among the advice given out by newspaper and magazine columnists to their

readers. Shobha Dé has constantly campaigned for the right of gay men in Indian to

exist with freedom in her capacity as society columnist (For e.g.: lauding the launch

of *Bombay Dost*[92] and the Wendell Rodricks commitment ceremony[93]) and agony

aunt.[94] Malavika Sanghvi[95] and Pritish Nandy[96] have both championed the gay

cause in their columns, as have Kiron Kher ("So what if he [one's child] is gay? He is

still very normal!"[97]), Dilip Raote ("Gay and lesbian activism will transform the 21st

century on much the same scale that Einstein and particle physics changed the

20th"[98]) and Mayank Shekhar ("They're different people. But what the hell? They

exist. That the government lives in denial is no reason why all should."[99]). Advice

columnists like writer Khushwant Singh,[100] sexologist Prakash Kothari[101] and

psychologist Radhika Chandiramani[102] always answer anxious readers' queries by

assuring them that homosexuality is as normal as heterosexuality.

On the flipside, Farzana Versey has permanently carried a torch for the

homophobes. Her 1990 columns in *Mid-day* are full of virulent gay bashing. Sample

these quotes: "Those who go about in queer clothes with uncalled for behavior have no right to talk of acceptance? How many of these guys would not laugh at a circus clown?"[103] "Homosexuality more often than not works on the concept of multiple partners."[104] "Instead of dumping the onus of sexual politics on heteros, it would help if gays took a look at their own sexual paranoia."[105] "...If there has been any infection at all, it has been one by a little virus that says 'we'll fight back.'"[106] In another column in 1991, she directs her ire at crippled gay writer Firdaus Kanga, urging him to "get over...his wheelchair, his homosexuality – for the purpose of his literary endeavours."[107] The vitriol continues in her 2000 piece 'The Gay Glut' with epithets like "cocky community" and the by now familiar diatribe about homosexuals being "the only people whose identity depends on their sexuality" and initiating "young boys, who probably do not know which way they swing" into the "gay cult".[108] Other columnists like Kanchan Gupta for *Pioneer* share Versey's distaste for homosexuals and express it in equally reprehensive language. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is cheered ("Serves the buggers right, too!"[109]) and gay relationships are mocked.

> Imagine having a gay couple as your neighbour in the claustrophobic confines of a high-rise housing complex. Their sweet little adopted child, back from a friend's birthday party and eager to show off a gift, shrieks: 'Pappa*ji*, where is Mummy*ji*?' Daddy gay, who has just had a romp in the bed, sings out: He's in the loo, darling!'[110]

Globalization

MIKE: I USED TO THINK OF MYSELF IN ARCHIE COMICS... WHEN YOU SEE ARCHIE AND VERONICA SIPPING FROM THE SAME SUNDAE, I WOULD PICTURE MYSELF WITH WHATEVER

BOY I WAS IN LOVE WITH INSTEAD OF ARCHIE AND
VERONICA, WITH A HEART SILHOUETTE BEHIND US.

Lawrence Cohen has argued (and I am in agreement) that the Indian fashion

and beauty industry boom of the 90s led to the framing of the effects of

consumerism and globalization as something 'gay'.

> Gay designers are depicted as the new Indian
> *ubermenschen*. [Supermen] Refigured male flesh, no
> longer poor or Brahmanical, is continually on display.
> Fluff pieces in the media appear and reappear, querying
> scholars and others on the new sexuality. One the one
> side is a new narcissism and an implied retreat from
> family values. On the other is a global competitiveness,
> if not in the Olympics then in an infrastructurally more
> achievable masculine performance. If the luminous
> figure of Fashion India is the international beauty queen,
> India having garnered many titles in the 1990s, her
> flame less ignites the fuse of male pulchritude than
> illuminates the mirrored surfaces of this new
> masculinity. And this masculinity is frequently framed as
> 'gay', not gay as sexual orientation but gay as trope for
> the consumption that produces a global style.... But
> there is a second way, consumption as a threat, a
> haunting by something else. In the meeting of the
> two...some possibility continuously hovers.[111]

In 1980, Vijay Tendulkar's lesbian themed play *Mitrachi Goshta* ('A Friend's

Story') stopped its Bombay run after just 25 shows, "because people were simply

not interested."[112] Eighteen years later, the situation was a lot different when

Mahesh Dattani's *On A Muggy Night in Mumbai* had its premiere performance in

Bombay on November 15, 1998. The *Fire* controversy was blazing across the

country (see the section on queer films below) and the *Sunday Times of India*

contextualized this play and *Fire* by framing their openly gay and lesbian themes

within a debate on globalization. In a double spread special titled 'Liberalism: Can

We Handle it?' the newspaper stated that it wanted to present "both sides of an issue that must be addressed: the pleas of gays for acceptance as normal human beings with merely another kind of sexual orientation, and the arguments of those who see this an aberration which cannot be allowed to warp a society already struggling with confusing influences."[113] More recently, the definitive 'pink' paper – the respected financial daily *Economic Times* – chooses to frame globalization by looking at whether Indian work standards in the tech industry met up to global requirements when it came to issues of sexual orientation.[114] But this is rare – a more typical representation of globalization and gayness in the Indian press would be through the prism of the burgeoning gay party scene. Though veering towards the stereotypical views of gay people as effeminate bitchy drag queens, the early reportage often comes across as hilarious and harmless and even positive at times. ("I ask myself, so what's the big deal anyway? I live my life my way, why shouldn't Sanjay, okay, Mallika if you will – do likewise?"[115]) Over the years, the jibes stop and the coverage turns more pragmatic. The Gay Bombay parties are well received ("For those with closed minds: no, this is not sleazy. It's a party, that's all."[116]); after 2000, the monetary clout of the country's upwardly mobile gay population becomes the subject of a series of 'Pink Rupee' articles. ("The business pie has a creamy pink slice and everyone wants a piece of it...pink nights, pink clubs, pink lounge bars and of course pink lifestyle products are the rage..."[117])

ORMUS: IF ANYTHING IN INDIA HAS BECOME 'EXTREMELY' GLOBALISED, IT'S GAY CULTURE. GOING TO A GAY PARTY INVOLVES DEFYING THE GREATEST TABOOS THAT INDIAN SOCIETY HAS LAID DOWN, AND ONCE THAT MOMENTOUS STEP HAS BEEN TAKEN, IT'S QUITE UNDERSTANDABLE THAT

MOST PEOPLE REACT AS IF THEY HAVE BEEN CATAPULTED INTO THE WIDE BLUE YONDER.

HUSAIN: THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES WHO APPRECIATE INDIA'S CULTURES, TRADITIONS AND LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING THESE PEOPLE.

Remote Control

July 25, 2000. I am in the middle of my dotcom madness and the city around me is going mad too. I have an important appointment with M that must not be cancelled. My driver thinks we are nuts to be out on a day like this, because there is a little bit of rioting going on by Shiv Sena supporters. Their boss, Bal Thackeray, the self-described 'remote control' of Bombay, finally gets arrested today for his role in inciting the Hindu-Muslim Bombay riots of 1992 and 1993, and is promptly released a few hours later after the judge shuts the case because the statute of limitations relating to the charges against him had expired. Until his release, Bombay is on tenterhooks. Most of the city has shut down voluntarily, A few public buses that have ventured out have been burned, after their passengers have been made to disembark; trains too have been forcibly stopped with the evacuated commuters being made to trudge their way home by road. My staff has all gone home. It is eerie. We are driving through a ghost town. The Sena goons have promised that Bombay will burn, and blood will flow on the streets if their boss in indicted – it isn't an empty threat, giving their impressive CV with regard to the same. I want to make sure that I'm out of the way when that happens. Preferably in bed, comfortably entwined with a sexy Muslim guy. M.

Television Coverage

SENTHIL: THE ADVENT OF CABLE TV – *SANTA BARBARA* AND *BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL*.... FIRST TIME SEEING BARE-CHESTED MEN.... AND THEN *BAYWATCH* REVOLUTION.... THERE WAS BBC NEWS WHERE I SAW MEN KISSING ON THE STREET. THERE WAS *OPRAH* WHERE I SAW YOUNG GAY TEENAGERS OF COLOR COMING OUT. THERE WAS ANOTHER PROGRAM WITH MUSCULAR MEN, WHO LATER ON CAME OUT [IN] DRAG ON THE SHOW. IT WAS VERY AFFIRMING AND VERY NICE.

While the satellite television revolution enabled the broadcast of Western TV channels into Indian homes from 1992, Indian gay related issues remained largely invisible until 1995 when a huge controversy erupted around the Star TV talk show *Nikki Tonight*. Ashok Row Kavi, invited on the show as a guest, called Indian

independence hero Mahatma Gandhi a "bastard" on the episode of the show aired

on May 4, 1995, a remark that Kavi states was edited completely out of context.[118]

The Indian parliament reacted strongly to the program and Gandhi's great

grandson Tushar Gandhi filed a suit for damages. The channel responded by

yanking the show off the air and issuing an apology to its viewers. In a related

incident, Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan stormed into Kavi's home and punched him

repeatedly over his remarks made about Khan's mother, the former Bollywood

actress Sharmila Tagore.[119]

> RUSTOM: THAT'S WHEN [ASHOK ROW KAVI] CAUGHT MY
> ATTENTION AND IRRITATED ME A LOT – I THOUGHT, HOW
> IRRESPONSIBLE, AND SINCE THEN, THIS IMPRESSION OF
> ACTIVISTS HASN'T GONE AWAY... – HE IS LITERALLY INDIA'S
> DE FACTO GAY SPOKESMAN – HE SHOULD BE MORE
> RESPONSIBLE.

Ashok Row Kavi has remained a permanent fixture on the few talk shows

and special reports telecast dealing with gay and lesbian related themes over the

years. (A symptom of both, the media's failure to tap into other activists in the

community, as well as the disinclination of other activists to be spokespersons for

their constituencies, at least on national television, though this is now beginning to

change). Thus he appears on a Star News special report (telecast date: September

9, 2003) along with lesbian activist Geeta Kumana, giving his reaction to the

government's non-favourable response to removal of section 377, and the next day

on a SAB TV talk show hosted by actress and right-wing politician Smriti Irani –

Kuch Dil Se ('From the Heart') – discussing the issue of married gay men. He is

present once again as part of a panel discussion on the film *Girlfriend* on

Doordarshan Marathi (telecast date: June 25, 2004) where he draws the ire of the

Shiv Sainiks[120] in the live audience for calling the Sena's cultural policing of films like

Girlfriend "a Taliban-like act."[121]

> NIHAR: WHEN CABLE TV STARTED, I SAW MY ONE BIG ICON ON MTV AND TURNED INTO A MADONNA WANNABE. SHE INSPIRED ME SO MUCH THE WAY SHE LIVED HER LIFE, SAID WHAT SHE WANED TO, I DISCOVERED HER IN MY TEEN YEARS AND STARTED READING ABOUT HER – SHE HAD ALREADY ESTABLISHED HERSELF AS A FEMINIST ICON BY THEN, BUT SHE INSPIRED ME TO BE BOLD AND SAY MY MIND. STAR MOVIES HAD JUST STARTED THEN.... I SAW BETTE DAVIS, AND THEN I SAW MARILYN MONROE. LAILA ALI, TINA TURNER, SYLVIA PLATH, JACKIE COLLINS... DO YOU SAY THAT I HAVE BEEN TOO ANGLO SAXONISED? I DON'T THINK SO... MY FIRST ICON WAS SRIDEVI...

There has been an increase in gay related news stories on all the major TV networks, especially around controversies like the *Fire* and *Girlfriend* protests and the 2004 gay double murders in Delhi. The special reports on homosexuality and gay rights in India produced by the television networks have ranged from uninformed and insipid (Zee News – 'Homosexuality in India', telecast date: December 5, 2003) to energetic and encouraging (CNBC India – 'Tonight at Ten', telecast date: August 25, 2004; Zoom TV – 'Just Pooja', telecast date April 16, 2005)

Just as they have done in print, India's gay celebrities have shied of talking to television media about their sexuality. The media, by and large, has tacitly complied with the subterfuge. Thus one sees the rather funny situation of an episode of the Star World talk show *Rendezvous With Simi Garewal* (telecast date: September 20, 2002), where the host interviews the high profile gay fashion designer couple Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla about everything – meeting each other for the first time, partnering each other at work, living with each other, tiffs and quarrels – everything except their homosexuality. The couple also co-anchor a reality show together (Lakme Fashion House, the first season was telecast between January to April 2005) where again, their coupledom is obvious, and the

participants and invited guests all clearly treat them as a couple, but it is never explicitly stated.

> ORMUS: I FEEL TELEVISION HAS HAD A MAJOR ROLE TO PLAY, WITH SERIALS LIKE *WILL AND GRACE* AND *FRIENDS*. ADMITTEDLY THIS CHANGE IS TAKING PLACE IN THE YOUNGER GENERATION, BECAUSE THEY ARE THE ONES WHO ARE MOST EXPOSED TO THIS 'WAVE OF DEPRAVITY FROM THE WEST'. ONE CAN ONLY WISH THAT SUCH WAVES ARE MORE FREQUENT AND VOLUMINOUS. THAT SAID, INDIA STILL REMAINS INDIA. A CURSORY SURVEY OF PEOPLE FROM MY OWN AGE-GROUP WOULD REVEAL VERY DEEP SEATED PREJUDICES AND MISCONCEPTIONS. BUT THERE MOST CERTAINLY IS A BREATH OF FRESHNESS.

In late 2003, the popular Sony soap opera *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* (There's No One Like Jassi) was in the news[122] because of one of its characters – Maddy, a gay fashion designer with over the top mannerisms and a penchant for bullying Jassi, the show's main lead. Episodes of the show telecast on December 1, 2003 and December 2, 2003, featured a gay club, a gay kiss, and a bet between Maddy and his boss (who visits the gay club searching for Maddy), which the boss eventually loses. The penalty: the boss dresses up in drag (in the episode telecast on January 19, 2004) and accompanies Maddy to a party as his "baby doll"!

Contemporary Indian Writing on Homosexuality

> KARIM: IN INDIA, YOU GET A WIDE VARIETY OF BOOKS. GAY CLASSICS LIKE THE ARMSTEAD MAUPIN SERIES, MARY RENAULT'S *THE PERSIAN BOY* OR JAMES BALDWIN'S *GIOVANNI'S ROOM* WERE ALL AVAILABLE IN BOOKSHOPS IN MADRAS. SOME OF THEM WERE GOD-AWFUL BORING...NOBODY SHOULD HAVE TO READ *THE WELL OF LONELINESS*! I WASN'T LOOKING FOR ANSWERS. THE BOOKS JUST CONNECTED ME WITH A LARGER GAY WORLD, WHICH I DIDN'T HAVE ANY CONNECTION WITH GROWING UP IN MADRAS OR CALCUTTA... [BUT] THERE WAS A LIMIT WITHIN WHICH I COULD IDENTIFY WITH THE PROTAGONISTS IN THE NOVELS; THEIR REALITY WAS SO DIFFERENT FROM MY REALITY. WHAT I DIDN'T FIND...WERE NARRATIVES IN AN INDIAN CONTEXT.

In July 1991, a tiny boxed advertisement appeared in the inside pages of the *Times of India*, which read: "Book on Gays: A Delhi journalist, Mr. Arvind Kala, is writing a sympathetic book, 'The World of Indian Gays'. He invites gays to talk to him in confidence about their feelings and emotions. Telephone: 230247"[123] A year and 112 interviews later, Mr. Kala had churned out his book. Now titled *Invisible Minority: The Unknown World of the Indian Homosexual,*[124] the far-from-sympathetic account was published to almost universal denouncement as a "badly written"[125] piece of work, intended perhaps for "the round eyed, half-price scandal seeker"[126] instead of a more serious audience. Jeremy Seabrook's *Love in a Different Climate* (1999) turned out to be an infinitely better book produced using a similar methodology. (The author spent some months in 1997 interviewing 75 'men who have sex with men'[127] in Delhi. Most of the interviews were conducted in one of the city's public parks – a popular cruising ground and the subjects formed a cross section of Delhi's homosexual population.)

Seabrook's book is elegant, intelligent and reflexive – his sensitivity to the testimony of his subjects and perceptive analysis is striking compared to the gross crudeness of Kala's effort. (Seabrook's attempt appears nobler too – his inspiration for writing stems out of the HIV prevention work being carried out by the Naz Project in Delhi while it seems apparent that all Kala wants to do is milk a sensational topic for some quick bucks.) Unfortunately, *Love in a Different Climate* is not available in India; I wish the same could be said for Kala's book. Three other books conspicuous by their absence from Indian bookshelves are *Sakhiyani:*

Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India (1996), *The Man Who Was a Woman and Other Queer Tales* (2002) and *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex* (2003). Vanita (2000) also mentions Leslie de Norhona's *Dew Drop Inn* (1994) and P Parivaraj's *Shiva and Arun* (1998),[128] neither of which is available within the country.

There have been three significant anthologies of Indian gay and lesbian writing published so far. First off the block in 1993 was Rakesh Ratti's (Ed.) *A Lotus of Another Color: An Unfolding of the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Experience.* The book is primarily concerned with issues concerning the South Asian LBGT diaspora living in Western countries and aims at increasing their visibility in "both the South Asian and gay and lesbian communities"[129] they inhabit. It consists of essays, poems, autobiographical and fictional short stories and interviews with out South Asian celebrities like activist Urvashi Vaid and filmmaker Pratibha Parmar. The two Penguin India releases in 1999 – *Yaarana: Gay writing from India* and *Facing the Mirror: Lesbian Writing from India* follow more or less the same formula, but with contributors that reside mainly in India.

For many years now, R Raj Rao (poet, professor, activist) has been the public face of gay Indian literature. His searing collection of short stories *One Day I Locked My Flat in Soul City* (1995) contains several angst-ridden gay-themed pieces. An obsessive and masochistic lover pining for his former flame (now turned straight), a patient narrating his wild sexual fantasies in a psychoanalyst's chamber, a homosexual rape in a police station, a gay man who has a sex change to capture the heart of his beloved and upon failing, decides to turn lesbian, a murderous rioter

who decides to suck off his victim instead of killing him... Rao's world is melancholic and gritty, inhibited with characters that are both sad and mad. In 1996, six of Rao's poems from his still-in-progress *BomGay* were filmed by documentary filmmaker Riyad Wadia as India's first gay film – *BOMgAY*. In 2003, Rao released his first novel, *The Boyfriend*, which was widely publicized as India's first gay novel in English. (Authors like Vikram Seth,[130] Vikram Chandra[131] and Firdaus Kanga[132] had all written about gay themes, but Rao's work was the first to be fully pivoted around homosexuality.)

The Boyfriend is bleak, hard-hitting and darkly funny. Rao is uncompromising in his examination of Bombay's gay subcultures and the thorny issues of caste, class and religion that are stirred up when forty-something freelance journalist Yudi picks up Milind, a nineteen-year-old Dalit (lower caste) boy at a railway station public toilet and embarks on a tempestuous love affair with him despite the odds being heavily stacked against its success. The book is peppered with a band of distinctive characters only R Raj Rao can conjure up – the stubborn fag-hag Gauri, AK Modeling agency's pumped up gigolos, the dance club Testosterone's feisty queens, the blackmailing cop Dyaneshwar.... The book literally throbs of Bombay – one can feel the crush of the sweltering train journeys up and down the city's longitudinal rail corridors, taste the grime of its putrid slums, witness its furtive sexual encounters in public spaces and hear the earthy vernacular slang used by its homosexual inhabitants....[133]

Ruth Vanita's two books – *Same Sex Love in India* (2000, co-authored with

Saleem Kidwai) and *Queering India* (2002) – are worthy of canonical status among the body of Indian LBGT writing. Vanita's agenda for *Same Sex Love* is simple: to "help assure homoerotically inclined Indians that large numbers of their ancestors throughout history and in all parts of the country shared their inclination, and were honoured and successful members of society who contributed in major ways to thought, literature and the general good."[134] The book has a grand sweep, which extends across ancient, medieval (Sanskritic and Persian-Urdu) and modern Indian texts (some of them in English, but most of them translated from different Indian languages like Tamil, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Bengali, Marathi and Oriya). *Queering India* is completely contemporary – comprised of academic essays divided into three sections: 'Colonial Transitions,' 'The Visions of Fiction' and 'Performative Pleasures in Theatre, TV and Cinema.

The excellent report *Less than Gay: A Citizens' Report on the Status of Homosexuality in India* by the New Delhi-based AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA). There was a 10-year gap until the next widely circulated LBGT community report – 2002's *Humjinsi: A Resource Book on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights in India*, published from Bombay.[135] The rise in Bangalore based LBGT activism in the past few years has resulted in three major publications. PUCL or The People's Union for Civil Liberties in Karnataka (the south Indian state of which Bangalore is the capital) has published two reports documenting various types of harassments against India's different sexual minorities. The 44-page 2001 report, titled *Human Rights Violations Against Sexual Minorities in India*[136] is divided into four sections.

Section one provides an overview of the status of sexual minorities in India. Section two lists various discriminations faced by LBGT people by the state. (legal, system, police, etc.) Section three lists societal discriminations (family, workplace, public spaces, the medical establishment and the popular media) while section four deals with the impact of discrimination on the individual self. The organization's 2003 publication titled *Human Rights Violations Against the Transgender Community*[137] is more specifically focused on *hijra* and *kothi* sex workers being victimized by the Bangalore police and other authorities. Finally, 2004 witnessed the publication of lawyer and human rights activist Arvind Narrain's much-needed monograph *Queer: Despised Sexuality, Law and Societal Change.* Narrain is part of a small but growing tribe of recent National Law School of India (Bangalore) graduates committed to applying their legal background to queer rights and legal advocacy. Important sections of his monograph include an overview of the legal discourse surrounding queer sexuality in ancient, medieval and colonial India, the contemporary context in which the legal opposition to discrimination against queer sexuality in India is being played out (constitutional challenge to section 377, campaign for progressive law reform, building a database of human rights violations perpetrated by the state against queer subjects) and a valuable resource list of groups working on sexuality issues throughout the country.

O Brother! Where Art Thou?
The Freshlimesoda years are probably the most stressful years of my life. Between 1999 to 2001, I go through a tumultuous rollercoaster of a ride. I leave my newspaper job to start my youth magazine as a partnership with a friend, which then collapses due to ego clashes between the two of us and I buy him out. I take the idea corporate and exult in the company's rapid growth and joint venture agreement with one of the world's largest media

conglomerates only to preside over its equally spectacular demise a few months later into the rubble of the dotcom crash. After the crash, I am forced to deal with a messy aftermath that includes a protracted closure of the company involving several months of legal wrangling with my erstwhile joint-venture partner, while surreally seated in their very own office as their newly absorbed employee aiming to expand their business into new directions. I am a financial and emotional wreck. I cannot trust anyone any more. People that had crawled out of the woodwork to embrace me during my dotcom-celebrity page-turning days vanish once they learn that I am not rich any more.

When I'm not working, I'm with 14-year-old Mahavir and his family. They have welcomed me into their fold as an elder brother to Mahavir ever since we bonded together on the sets of a film that I worked on two years ago, for which I had helped cast Mahavir in the lead role. I enjoy the affection, but sometimes feel stifled by the demands on my time that accompany it. My friends wonder why I am spending my spare time babysitting a 14-year old and I can sense that his friends feel the same. But I am feeling vulnerable and defeated and Mahavir is very affectionate – he hugs me all the time, and tells me that he loves me. I can de-stress when I am with him, his life and his needs are paramount, and my professional worries seem a universe away. He is opinionated, smart and sensitive and my desire to be a parent gets articulated during the time I spend around him. He is an only child, just like me, and I understand his need for constantly being the center of things, the yearning to not be alone. I want to expose him to art, to literature, to grow up thinking differently about life, to have the kind of childhood that I never managed to have. (Yes, I am scarily turning into an archetypal Indian parent.)

Mahavir is curious about sex, and his parents, especially his mother, are frank with him while discussing the topic. In our private moments together, he asks me about masturbation and related issues, and I try my best to answer his questions honestly – at the same time, substituting 'girl' for 'guy' in my own personal narrative, when questioned. His parents are very encouraging – they don't think that it's weird that a 24-year-old man and a 14-year-old boy would want to spend so much time together with each other. I try my best to be straight acting – but it's a small world that we move around in and eventually, they question me about the rumors they have heard about my sexuality. I deny them, and they choose to believe me.

But it's hard for Mahavir – his friends start to tease him, first about having a gay 'brother', and then, about being gay himself. I try to convey to him the importance of being his own person, of not being swayed by the silly jibes of other people, and tell him that their comments stem out of jealousy because of his film actor status, but I know I am fighting a losing battle. He just wants to fit in, and needs definition from me – maybe he has made up his mind and wants me to come out to him, so that he can take a stand on where he wants to position himself in my life. I am too chicken. My moralizing about the larger picture is not the solution but I am scared of losing him if I do come out.

I realize that the loss is inevitable in any case. I am fed up about lying and scheming so that my gay life does not seep into our happy bubble. After breaking up with S, I haven't had the time to date anyone seriously, and I'd like to get back to that. Mahavir badly wants to be accepted into the 'normal' world of his friends — his association with me is an impediment, as is his status as an actor. He needs to lose both to succeed. It's a slow and wrenching separation and the break is still not complete. First, the hugs stop, then he stops telling me he loves me and calling me bhaiya *(brother). We begin to find excuses not to spend weekends with each other, go for our weekly Bollywood fix with our separate groups of friends. Eventually, I stop staying over at his home, and we float into our own hermetic worlds as, perhaps, it was always meant to be.*

My friendship with his parents continues and it is strange to hear about his life whenever we meet. I learn that he is doing badly academically, has started smoking and coming home late at nights, drunk, and switches girlfriends every few months. He is turning into a typical South Bombay rich brat (car, chauffeur, cellphone, etc.) and they are divided about how to deal with it. I offer no suggestions — he is alien to me now.

Queer Indian Cinema

Riyad Wadia's *BOMgAY* (1996) is acknowledged as India's first gay film[138] while *Gulabi Aaina* ('The Pink Mirror', 2003) has the distinction of being India's first *kothi* film.[139] Among the other handful of other non commercial gay films made in India over the years, one can count Tirthankar Guha Thakurta's *Piku Bhalo Achhey* ('Piku is Fine', 2004; a partly-fictional Bengali self-acceptance narrative), Ligy J. Pullappally's *Sancharam* ('The Journey', 2004; a lesbian love story set in the south Indian state of Kerala) and T. Jayshree's *Many People, Many Desires* (2004, a documentary about the LBGT community in Bangalore). However these films have only been screened privately or at festivals (they were either denied a censor certificate or did not bother applying) thus limiting their audience reach, despite the favorable publicity they received.

The films that *have* been seen by large numbers of people in India, are not

surprisingly, from Bollywood.[140] Bollywood cinema has a long tradition of having comic sequences or songs featuring cross-dressing male stars (Think Amitabh Bachchan in a sari in 1981's *Laawaris* – 'The Orphan') or any number of songs featuring *hijras*. It is now quite trendy to read Bollywood films as 'gay' or 'queer'. Hoshang Merchant mentions the *Andaz* ('A Matter of Style', 1949) and *Sangam* ('Confluence', 1964) love triangles where "the real love plot is...*dosti* or *yaaarana* [friendship] between the two heroes.... The female lead is there only to lessen the homosexual sting";[141] Shohini Ghosh reads *Dosti* (1964) – dealing with "the intense friendship between two poor and physically-disabled young men who struggle to survive in the city" – as an "allegory of homosexual love expressed through the metaphor of physical disability."[142] R Raj Rao, Gayathri Gopinath and Ashok Row Kavi have all queered Bollywood in a similar vein.[143] But this 'queering' approach is not my concern here as I am only interested in examining contemporary Indian films (filmed and screened in India) from 1991 onwards, that are either explicitly gay themed, or have strong and visible LBGT characters.

In 1991, *Mast Kalander* ('Intoxicated') featured Bollywood's 'first'[144] out and out 'gay' character Pinku. If Hollywood's first gay characters were either comic or villainous, Pinku was both and the critics had a field day!

> Pinku [is] a new generation gangster. In his flaming yellow or pink suits, Pinku is both pansy and comic rolled into one. A gay little tune strikes up whenever he enters. And just to make really sure that you are left in no doubt about him, Pinku in his opening scene runs his fingers over his father's brawny body and asks *'Daddy, hamara body aapke jaise strong aur muscular kyoon nahin hai?'* ('Daddy, why isn't my body as strong

and muscular as yours?') When Pinku isn't plotting fell murders and kidnappings, he pleads for a motorbike ('Daddy, I want to live dangerously'), or chases men...And when all the thugs are finally rounded up in the police lock up, Pinku exults at what he sees as a heaven-sent opportunity.[145]

The gay sidekick emerged as a staple comic character from the 1990s onward, in films like *Hum Hain Rahi Pyaar Ke* ('Companions on the Road of Love', 1993), *Raja Hindustani* ('Indian King', 1996) and *Taal* ('Rhythm', 1999); offset by extremely rare instances of somewhat complex gay characters in films like *Bombay Boys* (1998) and *Split Wide Open* (1999). There were also 'sensitive' *hijra* portrayals in films like *Bombay* (1995), *Tamanna* ('Desire', 1997) and *Darmiyaan* ('In-between', 1997), a villainous *hijra* turn in *Sadak* ('Street', 1991), and a reality-inspired *Shabnam Mausi* ('Aunt Shabnam', 2005; the biopic of a high profile Indian *hijra* who was elected as a member of the legislative assembly in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh[146]). But it took 2003's *Kal Ho Na Ho* ('If Tomorrow Does Not Come'), with an arguably funny gay subplot between the two lead actors,[147] along with a slew of releases in the same year with both disparagingly camp/comic (*Out of Control*, *Masti* [Mischief], *Mango Soufflé, Market*) and somewhat non-stereotypical (*Rules*, *Chameli, Hyderabad Blues 2*) characterizations to generate chatter about gay Bollywood once again.[148] One is heartened to observe *Rules* director Parvati Balagopalan assert:

> The gay couple was part of our script from the beginning. The movie spoke about various aspects of love and homosexuality is one of them. The movie was a discourse on love and we wanted to treat all kinds of love equally. There was no criticism, because there was

no sensationalism at all. It was treated the way any other normal relationship would be.[149]

The lesbian-themed films *Fire* (1998; two sisters-in-law neglected by their respective husbands find comfort in each others arms) and *Girlfriend* (2004; obsessive lesbian ready to do anything to win her 'girlfriend' back from a man) generated a tremendous amount of controversy on their release. The critically acclaimed *Fire* was cleared by the Indian censors and quietly ran to packed houses all over the country for three weeks in 1998, before the Shiv Sena – the fundamentalist Hindu-revivalist party then in power in Maharashtra decried that it was anti-Indian, anti-Hindu and anti-marriage, and hence should be opposed. They did so in their customary violent style – by having goons storm the cinemas that were screening the film, smash their windows and threaten their managers.[150] The Muslim lead actress of the film – Shabani Azmi, a member of the upper house of the Indian Parliament was heckled and cinema legends like Dilip Kumar (Muslim by birth) that supported the film were harassed. A Shiv Sena mob led by a state level minister even protested outside Kumar's house clad in only their underwear, claiming that if he could support a perverse film like *Fire*, their act was perfectly decent too.[151] Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray continued the religious spin on the issue by saying he would stop the protests if the filmmaker renamed the two protagonists Shabana and Saira (both Muslim names and a jibe on the first names of Shabana Azmi, and Dilip Kumar's Muslim wife, Saira).[152] The violence spread to other cities, the issue was debated in the country's parliament and the Indian censors decided to pull the film from release for a second review. This drew the ire

of filmmaker Mehta and others in the cultural community[153] – and there were several counter protests held in the country. Finally, after five weeks, the censors re-released the film without a single cut and it continued its successful run at the Indian box office. The entire drama was played out in the full glare of the country's print and TV media.[154]

The Shiv Sena followed a similar modus operandi of disrupting screenings and vandalizing cinema halls so that the 2004 release *Girlfriend* might be pulled out of the theatres. Only this time, they had the gay and lesbian activists protesting simultaneously with them! Both sides protested vehemently against the film – the Sena used its 'contrary to Indian culture' argument once again,[155] and the activists were equally riled at the sleazy portrayal of the lesbian in the film as a "psychopathic sexually abused man-hating murderer."[156] However the film continued its successful run in the theatres without any interruption.

I was in India for a short trip in March 2005, when *My Brother Nikhil*, a Bollywood film dealing with the trials and tribulations of a gay champion swimmer who is found to be HIV positive (based on the real life story of Dominic D'Souza) hit the screen. My curiosity was piqued by the clever TV promos, featuring a host of celebrities asking: "I care for *My Brother Nikhil*, do you?" When I went to see the film, I was blown away completely. As the *Outlook* magazine film critic wrote, the debutant director Onir had managed to tackle "homosexuality without treating it as an ugly joke, a dirty alliance or an aberration," in itself a cause for celebration.

The gay relationship here is not designed to shock
the audience or make them feel queasy but is so

"normal" that the two lovers seem just like any other
couple: intimate yet jealous and insecure, happy but
quarrelling, sharing and facing up to an imminent loss.
It's the love and faith that matters whether it is man-
woman, man-man or woman-woman.[157]

Most of the mainstream English press was similarly deferential in the way

they treated the film's gay theme.[158] There were also no angry protests from the

cultural police and no theatre vandalism.[159] But more than the press reactions and

the absence of a voluble public outcry, what struck me most as I watched the film

in a houseful multiplex in South Bombay, was the reaction of the audience. They

really seemed to *get* it – there were no hoots, no uncomfortable coughing when the

couple was together. I was accompanied by a bunch of straight friends for *My

Brother Nikhil* – and while they'd been uncomfortable discussing my homosexuality

before, now they had a context to ask me all the questions that they had wanted to.

As I walked out of the film screening, I could see and hear animated conversations

being carried out among the other viewers about different aspects of the story, and

the homosexuality of the protagonist… it was an extraordinary feeling.

BOMgAY and *Gulabi Aaina* – a Close Reading

BOMgAY – India's first 'gay' film – was first screened in 1996, while *Gulabi Aaina* –
the country's first *kothi* film debuted in 2003. I'd like to offer some comments on the
prevailing gay-*kothi* divide in India via a close reading of both these works.

BOMgAY consists of six short poems written by R Raj Rao, set to striking visuals
and sequentially linked with inter-titles to construct a "quasi-socio-political frame."[160]
This 'frame', written in academic language, muses on the position of the gay 'self'
in Indian society, privileges coming out and embracing one's 'gay' identity and
denounces the closet as a place for 'hypocrisy' and self-denial'. The full text reads:

In 1991, the National Family Health Survey estimated that over 50 million Indian men have sex with other men. Of these, more than 12.5 million men are exclusively homosexual. At the heart of Indian society is a belief that a compromise brought about by a 'collective' living is far more desirable than the stridency of 'individual' expression. A notion of 'self' is coterminous with the socialized self. The individual that seeks to speak finds solace in the ambivalent anonymity of the underground. Unfortunately, fear and debasement become the close companions of pleasure and self esteem. The purity of love subverted, the twisted soul escapes into a world of fantasy. The individual spirit purges itself by reveling in its victimization. Emboldened by the inadvertent structures of urbanism, a band of victims strive to create a society that respects the individual. An alternative 'collective' is born, and with it the commoditization of its myriad ideologies. The love that dare not speak its name now sits across the table and debates its cause. The protagonists are self-respect and accountability. The antagonists are hypocrisy and self-denial.

Wadia clearly states that the film is not intended to be a realistic portrayal of the overall Indian gay scene. For him there is "no such thing as an Indian gay community and all that *BOMgAY* is attempting to do is "portray the emergence of a small gay community that dwells in Bombay and who choose to interpret the word 'gay' as practiced and loosely defined by the cultural social and ideological expressions as seen in the western hemisphere."[161] This westernized slant is evident in all aspects of the film, whether in its very name, the fact that it is entirely in English, the pink triangle symbolism of the opening titles' stylish imagery (with text in neon green/white/pink edgy Courier New set against a stark black background), the jazz that serves as the film's music score, or the funky MTV-style camera work, lighting and snappy editing.

The title of the film is especially significant – as I have mentioned earlier, in 1995, the name of Bombay city was controversially changed to 'Mumbai' by the communal government in power. Insisting on Bombay, but queering it with a bold pink 'g' and an inverted triangle below it is Wadia's way of reclaiming a lost heritage as well as mapping a rapidly emerging new space. Only in this case the signs are coded in Western-influenced gay iconography, and their significance tends to be lost on those who are not appropriately 'gay', which in India, as I have already stated, is largely an upper-middle-class, English speaking, privileged identity position to adopt. Wadia's team on *BOMgAY* consisted entirely of acquaintances (gay and

straight) from the Bombay advertising scene, who belonged to this upper-middle-class milieu, and the film is undoubtedly a reflection of their collective sensibilities.

The characters of all but the first vignette ('Opinions') belong to the upper classes, and even here, the middle-class bachelor is shown in a dominant class position – leisurely reading the morning newspaper as he supervises the maidservant washing his clothes. In the other vignettes, the protagonists are either tie-wearing office yuppies ('Underground'), pumped-up college students indulging in orgiastic fantasies in beautiful Victorian libraries ('Lefty'), a gay couple in a slick apartment, decorated with marble, risqué art and cool blue lighting ('Enema'), wealthy foreign tourists visiting the city's landmark 'gay' locations ('BOMgAY') or fabulous jewelry-wearing aesthetes dining in a penthouse overlooking the city's skyline, on wine, pasta, mushrooms and zucchini, food alien to most average Indians. ('Friends')

The nudity in the film is graphic. *BOMgAY*'s library sequence, where naked muscular long-haired men eat fried eggs off the protagonist's chest and fuck him repeatedly, never ceases to draw a collective gasp from audience, no matter where it is screened, as do the constant anal references in the writing. ("Goo has it's uses;" "your elixir is an enema, administered nightly;" "constipation is an occupational hazard;" "underground or tube, its fault lines are anal.") The film is clearly a provocation – a political and social manifesto, a declaration of a 'gay' lifestyle and an open call to elicit a reaction from those that "agree to disagree"[162] as well as its opponents.

Gulabi Aaina's director Sridhar Rangayan (founder-trustee of The Humsafar Trust as well as Executive Editor of *Bombay Dost*) has been at the epicenter of Indian gay activism for the past decade. His inspiration from the film came from the Bollywood-inspired drag numbers that he had seen performed at parties in Bombay city over the years. Rangayan was disturbed that the opportunities for Indian drag queens to perform were diminishing, ironically as the number of gay parties occurring in the city continued to increase. He decided to make a film that "portray[ed] drag queens with empathy and celebrate[ed] their life,"[163] with characters that were "completely Indian and rooted in its culture, paying homage to Indian Bollywood divas and songs and speaking in Hindi!"[164]

The story revolves around four characters, the two drag queens Bibbo and Shabbo, Mandy, and Sameer. Bibbo is a fashion designer and she considers Shabbo, a performing artist, as her daughter. Mandy, the new queen on the block, is a westernized gay teenager being groomed by Shabbo into becoming more 'Indian'. The straight-appearing Sameer is an aspiring actor, hoping to get a break in the film industry due to Bibbo's contacts as a costume designer to the stars. Most of the action of the film deals with the machinations of the two queens and young Mandy to get the attention of the hunky Sameer.

Rangayan's emphasis on the vernacular pervades all aspects of the film. Unlike the corporate executives of *BOMgAY*, the two queens here are lower-rung workers within the Hindi film industry. They use public transport and prefer "rum and cola" to the more exotic cocktails that Mandy wants to conjure up for them. They aspire to branded products and place a premium on powder "imported from Paris", but economically use homemade face packs and local cosmetics for their daily use. Not only do they embrace middle-class conventions, they subversively sneer at any attempts at being too elite, or Westernized. The English-speaking Mandy is used as the recipient of their jibes; his ignorance of *kothi* culture provides the queens an opportunity to explain its intricacies to him.

The film is shot in a TV sitcom, soap-operatic style, using all the mainstream clichés currently in vogue within the Indian television industry – the constant use of slow motion at dramatic moments, the extreme close-ups, the absence of long shots, the jarring background music, the over-emphasized facial expressions and gestures, the standardized pace and timing of each scene, are all conventions that any soap viewer in India would be familiar with. The partial nudity in the film is very conventional. There is one shower scene of the muscular Sameer in which the camera pans over different parts of his body, but never on his buttocks or genitalia (à la *BOMgAY*), instead lingering for the longest time on his firm chest, in a manner not unlike the conventional representations of heroines (and of late, the heroes as well) in Bollywood films. In terms of structure, the plot follows the clichéd Bollywood filmy norms of introducing the characters, quickly alternating between humor, pathos, song-and-dance sequences and romance, introducing conflict, resolving it and having a happy ending.

One should note that Rangayan and his entire film crew have their roots in the commercial Indian television and film industry, which by and large is separated from the advertising industry that *BOMgAY* had its roots in, along class lines. Rangayan has added to the televisual conventions a generous spattering of Bollywood-inspired song and dance sequences, camp mannerisms and colorful bitchy dialogues, full of terms and nuances familiar to *kothis*. He also raises (centrally, albeit superficially) the issue of AIDS/HIV, which is something that *kothis* and other MSM in India are supposed to be at a much higher risk for than gay-identified men.[165] *Gulabi Aaina* thus becomes as equally a significant manifesto for *kothis* as *BOMgAY* is for India's gay-identified males.

The film's exhibition over the past two years at venues throughout India sharply brought out the *kothi*-gay divide. I was present at its premiere screening in Bombay in 2003 and found the audience completely polarized. The South Bombay 'gay' crowd hung around with each other making snide remarks about the film and its vernacular drag lingo, while the *kothis* and their friends raved to each other and the director about how good it was. My ex-boyfriend, V, who had accompanied me for the screening, was extremely uncomfortable at its in-your-face-take-it-or-leave-it

portrayal of the *kothi* lifestyle. ("Can you imagine showing this to the outside world? They'll think that all gay people are so weird.")

Despite seeming to be radically different, I suggest that these alternative points of view (presented within these films and reiterated via their reception by their gay and *kothi* constituencies) really speak *to* each other. We can see this conversation take place through the similarities between *Gulabi Aaina* and *BOMgAY.*

Both films make strong political statements for the case of their protagonists, though *BOMgAY* does it more explicitly than *Gulabi Aaina.* Both films are unapologetic and in fact quite celebratory about their sexuality. Rangayan says, "The characters [in *Gulabi Aaina*], whether they are drag queens, gay or bisexual, offer no apologies for being what they are. They do not curse their fate and grovel at anyone's feet because they are homosexuals."[166] Likewise, Wadia said that he "was clear about one thing when we started the ideating process [for *BOMgAY*]: we were not going to fall shy or act coy just to please some societal norms. We were going to make a short film as we saw it.... an 'important' work of 'socio-politics' that 'needed' to be made."[167]

There is a near absence of women characters in both these films. In *BOMgAY*, the only female characters are the maidservant and neighbors that appear in the first vignette ('Opinions'), while *Gulabi Aaina* has absolutely no female cast members. Thus both films are situated in completely self-contained universes, whether gay or *kothi.* It is significant that these self-contained universes also completely exclude any presence of the protagonists' blood family members. The familial relations in both *BOMgAY* and *Gulabi Aaina* consist of affinity groups made out of one's own choice. (Singledom, friends and lovers in *BOMgAY*; the non-patriarchal mother-daughter family of drag queens in *Gulabi Aaina.*) I find this affirming, even though it contrasts with the ground realities that I observed, experienced and recorded from my interviews in the field. (As we shall see in chapter 5, for most homosexuals in India, whether gay identified or *kothi*, family plays a huge role and coming out is more often than not, not a viable or desirable option; they live with the constant tensions that arise due to the negotiation of a dual existence.)

I am not sure whether the class-positioning of both these films is as crystal clear as it initially seems. Despite *Gulabi Aaina*'s avowed vernacular slant, it is ultimately set in the upper middle class. The queens constantly use English slang while addressing each other, even as they deride Mandy's English accent. When they are planning a date for Sameer and Mandy at the end of the film, their plan consists of "a table for two," "a candle light dinner" and "a disco" And if there is an Indian drag *mujra* (courtesan dance) at the beginning of the film, there is a Western drag cabaret number towards its end. Bibbo's home is decked with feathered boas, red lace curtains, swathes of gold lamé, posters of almost nude macho hunks, and images of Ardhnareshwar (an incarnation of the Hindu God Shiva as half man-half

woman) on the walls. The villa is palatial by Bombay's space-crunched standards; full of potted plants, marble, cabinets filled with artifacts, it certainly does not look like a place where a film-industry worker could typically afford to live. It is a flamboyant middle-class drag queen's camp fantasy, ultimately as unreal in its possibility as the images of oversized penises in the bathroom of the protagonists in *BOMgAY* 's 'Enema' vignette.

Likewise, despite *BOMgAY* 's overt snobbery, its underlying basis is the poetry of Raj Rao – which arises from a very strong lower-middle-class ethos. While most of the poems are translated into upper-class settings on screen in *BOMgAY*, this does not mean that middle and lower middle class characters and settings are evaded completely. Thus in 'Underground', we see the characters of Raju ("19, office boy in Bora Bazaar"), Gulab ("22, waiter at Satkar") and Pandu ("50, coolie at VT Station"), and the harsh world of hustlers and stinky railway station toilets while 'Opinions' gives us a glimpse of life in a middle-class city chawl.[168]

Ultimately, both films are a blend of fantasy and reality – the very real existence, as well as the imaginative possibilities of two significant subsets of Bombay's queer population. What I find satisfying is that neither of them offers an ultimatum to the audience to force its particular version of Indian homosexual identity down their throats. Instead, they both offer viewers choices: of characters, situations and viewing positions. Thus if *Gulabi Aaina* has its ethnic queens as its stars, it also has a very comfortable Westernized Mandy assert, "I am gay," and an equally comfortable bisexual Sameer.

Both films also tackle at various levels, serious issues faced by the homosexual community-at-large in India. Homophobia and gay bashing are graphically depicted in *BOMgAY*, while the specter of HIV raises its head in *Gulabi Aaina* (though one is disappointed by the superficial way that it is handled and its repression at the film's ending as something to be tackled "some other day"). Both films offer sharp critiques of the sexual hypocrisies of straight society.[169] They are also self-critical – *BOMgAY*'s narrator derides himself for being a post-colonial pimp for the sex tourists from abroad to whom he shows Bombay's exotic gay locales. Likewise, Shabbo and Bibbo's bitchy commentary to each other is laced with venomous truths about their promiscuity, their manipulations of men and their past mistakes.

An inability to get a censor certificate for public viewings in India is another aspect that binds these two films together. While *BOMgAY* did not bother applying to the censors, *Gulabi Aaina* was refused "even an adult certificate, because the censor board termed it "full of vulgarity and obscenity."[170] Thus the question of their widespread distribution is moot in any case and the only audiences that will possibly see both these films are those attending the homosexual community screenings and who probably already identify with either of the cinematic representations and positions or are at least familiar with them, and the film-festival

cognoscenti. The chance of either of these films reaching the heterosexual mainstream seems remote.

In the light of the above observations, I posit that instead of positioning the two films *against* each other, we read them *with* each other, as initial pieces in the mosaic of Indian homosexual representation that has only started to be created. Rather than polemic positions, what both these films offer us are just two different shades in the entire spectrum of queer cinema that is possible in such a multi-layered society like India. We could similarly think of the *kothi*/gay divide as not really a divide but just as diverse family members dealing, in their own ways, with separate, but connected issues. (More on this divide and the different ways in which the two constituencies *do* work together in the next chapter.) I am in no way suggesting that the issues at stake are not contentious or urgent. They clearly are, as we see throughout this thesis. Yet, I am more inclined to concur with Nayan Shah's viewpoint when he writes that "we need not fear that differences or a lack of predetermined 'unity' will produce irreconcilable divisions. It will help us develop communities which are stronger and more self-affirming."[171] On this path to self-affirmation, it is my opinion that *BOMgAY* and *Gulabi Aaina* at least, walk together, hand in hand.

Chapter 5
Straight Expectations

Interviews, interpretations, interventions

In this chapter, I have clustered the responses of my interview subjects around key themes that pervade this thesis and which I will further address in the concluding chapter. I conducted 32 interviews, of which, seven were conducted exclusively online, five were conducted both online and offline and three were begun online but completed offline. The remaining 17 were both arranged and conducted completely offline. As I have mentioned earlier, I have used pseudonyms to disguise my interviewee names and/or email/newsgroup identities or chat handles. I have also used gender appropriate pronouns while describing the respondents, based on their declared gender orientation. Wherever I have used online/offline conversation or interview excerpts, I have either cut and pasted them verbatim from my saved records, or reproduced them within quotation marks. I have not edited the excerpts for grammatical or spelling errors; I want their original flavor to be retained and reflected within this thesis. (For an overview of my interviewee profiles and select demographics, please refer to Appendix A.)

Being Gay in India

> Becoming gay or, rather, becoming aware of being
> gay is an organic process. More men in India are seeing
> themselves and their lives reflected in this idea, and the
> individual testimonies often give a hint of the evolution
> within people's lives of that consciousness.
> (Jeremy Seabrook, 1999)[1]

Many people that I interviewed considered their homosexuality to be normal,

natural and just another personal choice. It was something that was intrinsic, "as much a way of life as brushing your teeth in the morning or breathing." (Bhuvan) Others were grappling with self-acceptance.

> MOHNISH: I AM GAY THOUGH I WOULDN'T LIKE PEOPLE TO CALL ME GAY, HOMO, QUEER, ANYTHING; IT IS STILL CONSIDERED ABNORMAL. I DON'T WEAR THE LABEL WITH PRIDE.

> ORMUS: TO SOME EXTENT, ASKING ME WHAT MY PERSONAL VIEWS ON HOMOSEXUALITY ARE IS EQUIVALENT TO ASKING A JEWISH MAN IN A 1940S GERMAN CONCENTRATION CAMP ABOUT HIS VIEWS ON JUDAISM. DESPITE THE COMPLETE ACCEPTANCE OF ONE'S OWN NORMALITY, THE MANY WHIPS OF THE NAZI COMMANDANT CANNOT BUT CARRY THEIR OWN STING. NEVERTHELESS, THE MOMENTS WHEN I WISH I WEREN'T GAY ARE GROWING FEWER AND FEWER. THE PATH THAT I MUST FOLLOW, THOUGH ONE THAT WILL VERY FORESEEABLY BE STRUNG WITH OBSTACLES, IS ONE WHOSE ABILITY TO INTIMIDATE ME GROWS LESSER EVERY DAY.

For some respondents, being gay denoted a political stance or signified a social identity. A few considered it to be just a desire, or equated it with the sexual act: "Just sex, over and out. I know what I want. Seven inches and above." (Harbhajan) For others, it extended beyond their sexual urge into what Adam (2000) describes as the "potential for emotional involvement and relationships."[2] Thus Asim, Mike, Yudhisthir and Mohnish portrayed being gay as being comfortable with one's own self, a state of mind, a spirit of being, a way of life, something that was both emotional as well as physical, as opposed to 'homosexuality' which was something just physical. Some respondents didn't see the point in differentiating between the terminology of 'homosexual' and 'gay' (Nihar: "Gay, queer, homosexual, potato, *batata*, its all the same"; Rahim: "it's just men doing other men"), but for others, 'homosexual' was a significant boundary that had to be

crossed on the way to being considered 'gay'. Jasjit differentiated between sexuality as a practice and as a lifestyle when he defined homosexuality as "an innate personal trait that may or may not be translated into a conscious lifestyle decision."

Most respondents noted that being gay in India carried its own unique set of connotations and experiences, mainly because of the cultural, social and religious structures, and family pressures that insist on conformity to traditional patriarchal, heteronormative values. Still, almost all were confident that India was becoming more open to the idea of homosexuality, although they qualified that this change was confined largely to urban areas, and came accompanied by many riders.

JASJIT: OPEN IS A DECEPTIVE WORD IN MY OPINION – THE PARADIGMS OF SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE IT CONNOTES ARE ESSENTIALLY ROOTED IN WESTERN THINKING AND BASED ON INDIVIDUALISM AND RATIONALITY. PEOPLE IN INDIA HAVE VIEWED IT DIFFERENTLY...

VIDWAN: TO A LARGE EXTENT THE INDIAN WAY OF LOOKING AT QUEERNESS IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY THE WEST SEES IT. THERE SEEMS TO BE A LOT MORE ACCEPTANCE OR AT LEAST TOLERANCE OF QUEERNESS IN INDIA AS LONG AS IT DOES NOT COME IN THE WAY OF HETEROSEXUAL PROCREATIVE ACTIVITY. THE RECENT VISIBILITY GIVEN TO AN OVERTLY POLITICIZED SEXUAL IDENTITY IS WHAT IS EXTREMELY UNNERVING FOR MANY WHO SEE THEIR PRESENT POSITIONS IN SOCIETY COMPROMISED BY A QUESTIONING OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY. AND YET, THERE IS CHANGE, MUCH OF IT POSITIVE – A LOT OF IT, COMING FROM THE ENGLISH MEDIA. IN URBAN HIP CULTURES, HOMOSEXUALITY IS FINE, AND SO IS HAVING GAY FRIENDS, BUT SOME OF THE OLDER ATTITUDES PERSIST, SOMETIMES UNKNOWINGLY.

Many respondents echoed Vidwan's assertion that gay men in India could easily compromise with straight society by existing "within the confines of a heterosexual framework" (Pratham). However, for others, this "silent acceptance"

(Rahim) was a mirage, "an existence in invisibility," (Senthil) that would be shattered with increased visibility, which in turn would almost certainly lead to "more pronounced homophobia." (Nihar).

> JASJIT: BEING GAY AND INDIAN WOULD IN A TRADITIONAL CULTURAL SENSE MEAN HAVING SEX WITH A MEMBER OF SAME SEX MORE AS A 'HOBBY' OR 'PASSION' (HINDI 'SHAUK'), RATHER THAN TO TURN IT AN IDENTITY ISSUE, WHICH IS A POST-MODERN VIEW OF HOMOSEXUALITY SO FAR AS INDIA IS CONCERNED. THUS, MANY INDIAN GAYS WOULD HAPPILY GET MARRIED AND HAVE FAMILIES. FAMILIAL GENDER BIAS AND THE GENERAL LACK OF INDIVIDUALISTIC THOUGHT ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO WOMEN HELP SUPPORT SUCH A SITUATION. ALSO, THE GENERAL MASS OF GAY INDIANS ARE QUITE UNAWARE OF THE HISTORICITY OF THEIR SEXUAL PREDILECTION AND SO IS THE SOCIETY AT LARGE – SO THE MAIN HOMOPHOBIC AGENDA FOR INDIANS CAN BE THAT BEING GAY IS ESSENTIALLY A WESTERN (LESS CHAUVINIST) OR ISLAMIC (MORE CHAUVINIST) PHENOMENON AND IT NEVER EXISTED IN INDIA. THERE MOST CERTAINLY IS A UNIQUE GAY CULTURE. INDIVIDUAL TRAITS, WHICH IN TURN ARE CONVERTED INTO SOCIAL TRAITS THAT FOSTER AND CHERISH IT, ARE NARCISSISM, CHAUVINISM, ESCAPISM AND INDIVIDUALISM. OF COURSE THERE CAN BE MANY MORE, OFTEN HAVING THEIR OWN DIALECTIC (THESIS-ANTITHESIS-SYNTHESIS), RHETORIC AND POLITIC DYNAMICS.

> RAHIM: A LOT OF GAY MEN ARE FINDING COMFORT IN THAT SPACE, WHICH SAYS, DO EVERYTHING, BUT BE QUIET. IF YOU ARE GAY, REMAIN GAY. IT'S OKAY. JUST DON'T WALK ON THE ROAD WAVING A FLAG. I HAVE A FRIEND, A GAY COUPLE, WHO HAVE BEEN LIVING FOR TEN YEARS IN A BUILDING SOCIETY. EVERYONE IN THE SOCIETY AND THEIR WORKPLACE KNOWS THAT THEY ARE A COUPLE BUT IT IS NOT TALKED ABOUT. IT GIVES THEM A GREAT SENSE OF COMFORT THAT WE ARE NOT A HOMOPHOBIC SOCIETY. THESE GUYS HAVE FOUND COMFORT IN A SOCIETY THAT IS WILLING TO OVERLOOK THEIR RELATIONSHIP AS LONG AS IT IS NOT ACKNOWLEDGED. WE ARE NOT A HOMOPHOBIC SOCIETY AS LONG AS EVERYTHING IS QUIET. THE MOMENT I GET UP AND SAY I WANT AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT I AM GAY AND AT PAR AS ANYONE ELSE IN SOCIETY IS WHEN THE PROBLEM COMES UP.

However it would be a mistake to assume that this 'contract of silence' existing in India is similar to the situation that prevailed in the West in the early and

mid 20th century, where typically the gay son would leave home as soon as he could, "both to move to a larger city and to keep his secret from kin." (Sanders 2004)[3] In India, leaving home is an option that is rarely exercised, but even if this happens (as with Bhuvan, Yudhisthir and some of my other interviewees), the shadow of family continues to loom large in influencing the lives and decisions of gay men.

> JASJIT: A PERSON'S EXISTENTIAL NOTIONS ARE STILL ROOTED INTO THE FAMILY AS OPPOSED TO THE INDIVIDUAL. SO THE FAMILY'S ROLE ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO IDENTITY-BASED ISSUES LIKE 'COMING OUT' FOR EXAMPLE CAN BE CRUCIAL.
>
> RANDHIR: THE MANIFESTATION OF THIS IN THE LIVES OF SAME SEX ATTRACTED PERSONS IS MOST PROFOUNDLY FELT IN THE AREA OF (HETEROSEXUAL) MARRIAGE WHERE THE PERSON OFTEN CANNOT RESIST THE FAMILY PRESSURE AND DOES CONCEDE TO GETTING MARRIED, THUS LIVING A DUAL LIFE AFTER THAT.

Pattanaik (2002) attributes the unique marriage pressure on Indian gay men to the overwhelming influence of they "Hindu way of life" in India.[4]

> For the sake of social stability, scriptures demand unquestioning obedience to sacred duties (*Dharma*) that are determined by one's inherited caste (*Varna*) and one's stage in life (*Ashrama*). One's duty, or rather a biological obligation, common to all castes, is to produce children, so as to facilitate the rebirth of ancestors and keep the cycle of life rotating.... The Hindu way of life also acknowledges the human need to earn a living (*Artha*) and enjoy life (*Kama*). However the right to worldly goods and worldly pleasures comes only *after* worldly duties are performed. Thus marriage is transformed into a key to worldly life. Unless married, the Hindu man has no right to own property or to perform religious rituals. He has no right to indulge his senses. The unmarried man is given two choices: remain a chaste student (*Brahmachari*) or turn into a celibate hermit (*Sanyasi*)... All hell breaks loose in a

Hindu household not so much when a son or daughter displays homosexual tendencies, but when those tendencies come in the way of heterosexual marriage.... Non-heterosexuality is ignored or tolerated as long as it does not upset the heterosexual world order.[5]

Indications of this tremendous pressure to conform to social norms were made visible to me in the case of the three married men who were a part of my survey. They all stated that they had got married as they felt that there was no other alternative. From among the others, I was struck that although only 21 years old, Iravan was already feeling the burden of this pressure when he insisted during our conversation that he had no choice but to get married. "I am an only child and I have to do the best for my parents. I know that I am going to get married. [But] I don't know if I will be able to overcome my sexual attraction to men."

This pressure, as Vidvan pointed out, is even more intense when the gay person is effeminate and thus visibly marked different, "Because sexuality is never very overt, but gender often tends to be so, effeminate men and butch women often face greater hurdles than others in queer circles. Also, many are often willing to compromise for this acceptance, like getting married out of family pressure, while the family remains silent over many continuing relationships." Rebellion against this pressure can sometimes mean banishment (Queen Rekha revealed that her decision to come out as *kothi* led to her estrangement from her family), but in most cases, the child is not thrown out, but pressurized to change his/ways in order to maintain the family *izzat* (honor).

On the issue of coming out, my understanding is that although all respondents had shared information about their homosexuality with their friends to some extent or another, most equated 'coming out' with coming out to their families. Here, the first obstacle as Ormus lamented, was that "in India, there does not exist a respectable vocabulary for homosexuality. If I were to come out to my aunts and uncles, I have no idea what words I would ever use." Gul, Nihar and Om shared with me their deep desire to come out, but only after they graduated and achieved financial independence from their families, as they were apprehensive about their reactions. For Ormus, Divakar, Taksa and Husain, fear of confrontation with their families led to their eliminating all traces of their homosexuality within the family presence. Even in situations like Mohnish's where he acknowledged that his family might be understanding ("they are broadminded, liberal, discuss homosexuality often"), there was still a fear that "their condition would be quite miserable…if they found out that their own son was gay."

On the other hand, for openly out respondents like Kabir, Cholan, Rahim, Karim, Harbhajan and Mike, the family helped serve as a vital source of support.

> MIKE: I'VE BEEN RAISED IN A PSYCHIATRIST'S HOUSE. SO THERE HAVE NEVER REALLY BEEN ANY ISSUES OR TABOOS. SOME OF MY PARENTS' CLOSEST FRIENDS ARE GAY, SO IT WAS MUCH EASIER FOR ME TO ACCEPT MYSELF AND TO REALIZE THAT I'M NOT A GENETIC DEFECT OR SOMETHING.
>
> CHOLAN: MY FATHER'S FIRST REACTION WAS, 'LETS CHALLENGE THE LAW.' HIS SECOND REACTION WAS, 'I WANT TO READ SOME BOOKS ON THIS TO UNDERSTAND IT BETTER.' HIS THIRD REACTION WAS, 'YOU KNOW I'VE BOUGHT A SMALL FLAT IN BOMBAY, IT'S NOT READY BUT WHEN IT IS, I THINK YOU NEED YOUR OWN SPACE AND I

THINK YOU SHOULD HAVE IT.' HIS FOURTH REACTION WAS, 'I
WANT TO MEET OTHER PARENTS.' I DON'T KNOW ANY OF MY
FRIENDS WHO'VE HAD SUCH A COOL EXPERIENCES WITH
THEIR PARENTS. SIX YEARS AGO, THEY ASKED ME, 'CHOLAN
YOU ARE OF MARRIAGEABLE AGE, IF OUR FRIENDS ASK US,
WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO SAY?' I TOLD THEM TO SAY
WHATEVER THEY THOUGHT WAS APPROPRIATE. THEY SAID,
'WE WANT TO TELL THEM THAT YOU'RE GAY.' I WAS LIKE,
WELL THAT'S THE ULTIMATE EMPOWERMENT, IF YOU CAN BE
SO MATTER OF FACT ABOUT IT.

Yudhisthir described his coming out as a "necessity" due to the extreme anxiety that he was experiencing while being in the closet, which was affecting his health and studies. "I was a nervous wreck. After coming out, the headaches have gone, and the anxiety levels are lower. I am not compulsive or neurotic any more." Harbhajan, who was married and forced to come out due to blackmail threats he was receiving from one of the male prostitutes he frequented, received rock steady support from an unexpected source – his wife.

SHE WAS RELIEVED. OUR RELATIONSHIP FINALLY MADE
SENSE TO HER, THAT THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH
HER. SHE SAID THAT SHE DIDN'T HAVE A PROBLEM BUT WE
SHOULD KEEP IT WITHIN OURSELVES. THE FIRST TWO YEARS
AFTER I CAME OUT TO HER WE DECIDED NOT TO HAVE A
CHILD BUT THEN DECIDED THAT WE WANT TO BE TOGETHER
AND WE WANT TO HAVE A CHILD TOGETHER. WE HAVE BEEN
MARRIED FOR SEVEN YEARS NOW AND HAVE A DAUGHTER. I
NOW TELL HER EXACTLY WHAT GOES ON IN GAY BOMBAY
MEETINGS, FILM SCREENINGS, PARTIES, EVERYTHING. SHE
EVEN MAINTAINS ACCOUNTS FOR THE [GAY BOMBAY]
GROUP. I AM SUCH A LUCKY BASTARD. I DON'T KNOW WHY I
HAVE GOT ALL THIS LUCK, I DON'T DESERVE IT.

Gopal's insistence on speaking to the press about his homosexuality was a contentious issue with his family. "They say, ok, you are gay; why do you have to be in the press? Others can do it. My answer is that yes, there are others doing it too. And many more are required as well." Other respondents like Husain and Pratham walked a tight rope while negotiating space for themselves and their

homosexuality within their family systems – a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy that ensured that everyone was happy. Pratham revealed, "There has been silent support – by which I mean I have never been forced in marriage. They are aware that my partner lives with me. My sister and nieces in the US always bring or send gifts for him." For Murgesh and Asim, tacit acceptance by the family had led to their making professional or personal sacrifices that they said they were perfectly happy making.

> ASIM: TO ME, NOT GETTING MARRIED WAS A FAR MORE IMPORTANT ISSUE. I WAS VERY CLEAR THAT I WAS GOING TO FIGHT DESPERATELY FOR THAT. I WASN'T READY TO PICK ANOTHER FIGHT ABOUT WHERE I WAS GOING TO WORK. I GAVE IN ON THAT [AND JOINED THE FAMILY BUSINESS] BECAUSE I NEEDED TO PROTECT MY SEXUALITY BY NOT GETTING MARRIED.

> MURGESH: IF YOU FEEL YOUR FAMILY IS SACRIFICING IN ACCEPTING YOU (PRIDE, SOCIAL STATUS, ETC) – YOU CAN ALSO SACRIFICE. MOST OF MY FAMILY KNOWS – ALTHOUGH WE DON'T DISCUSS IT. I AM WILLING TO MAKE THE SACRIFICE OF NOT BEING OUT COMPLETELY FOR THEIR SAKE.

As it could be expected, the geographical location of the respondents influenced greatly their capacity to network and meet other gay people. For the respondents living outside India, coffee shops, bars, cafés, pubs, malls, gay video parlors and the internet were all possible venues for interaction. For those within India, parks, public toilets, trains and railway stations and other cruising areas, the internet and Gay Bombay parties were some of the options listed. Taksa even provided a detailed statistical breakdown of the people he met while in Bombay: "Internet: 70%; railway stations in Bombay: 3%; through other people: 25%; gay group meetings: 2%."

Family Ties

Coming out to my mom is an anti-climax. I don't plan it – it just...happens. She is on one of her regular visits from Bahrain and I am throwing one of my trademark tantrums. I suddenly blurt out that I am gay. She says that it's fine but I still haven't told her what I'd like to eat for dinner that night. I feel cheated that my giant revelation has been brushed off with a non sequitur. What the...? It seems so ridiculously stupid to have carried such a heavy burden for all these years, no?

It is left to my dad to make up for the lack of histrionics on my mom's part, and he doesn't disappoint. I wait until I am at MIT and the LBGT film festival that I am organizing gains worldwide publicity. Since, I really don't want him to read about my homosexuality on the BBC's homepage, I call him up long-distance to break the news. He goes through the routine of shock, disbelief, denial, etc. I'm relieved that at least one of my parents is a stereotype – having two perfectly understanding parents would be too much to handle. (I'd have to find a new source for my existential angst!) He expresses his disappointment that I might not get married, something he has looked forward to. I remind him that I am in Massachusetts and that I could certainly get married here...to another man. He hangs up.

It takes him three months to call me back, and he wants to talk about the weather, the fluctuating fortunes of the Indian cricket team, the stock market, anything but my homosexuality. I am cruel – I don't let him off. I remind him that I am gay and that he can't pretend that our previous conversation never happened. He asks me to be realistic and not expect him to change overnight. The negotiations have begun! When I meet him next in Bombay, I tell him about my thesis research, the people I encounter, and the places I go to, and he listens impassively. It's more than what I had imagined a few months ago. Baby steps...

Gay Bombay: Access and Impact

My respondents came to know about Gay Bombay by reading about it in city newspapers like the *Bombay Times,* searching for, or stumbling upon it on the internet, and through word of mouth publicity. Some accessed the group exclusively online (either because they were apprehensive, married, lived out of Bombay or simply did not have the time to attend any of its offline manifestations) and for these individuals, the website and newsgroup engendered a kind of "immobile socialization"[6] – enabling them to feel connected to the Gay Bombay

community at large. Those that lived in Bombay and were comfortable attending the local events equated Gay Bombay primarily with the city based events, and not with the list or website. Even here, there was a split between those who thought of it as primarily a party space and those who thought of it as a space for other kinds of community events.

For the newsgroup subscribers, the reasons for signing up were varied. For some it was just curiosity, for others, a way to know more about the emerging gay world in India. Vidvan said that he was "fascinated at being able to interact with other gay people in Bombay, while being anonymous at the same time." The respondents from out of India looked at the group as a connection to their home country. Thus Husain had experienced a "craving for my countrymen" and could "relate better to men who think and act more in line with my culture and traditions." For activists like Randhir and Gopal, the possibility of advocacy and working for the issue of LBGT rights was the lure. For Murgesh, it was the chance to share his poems and romantic musings with other gay people. "It's a ready made market – I would post my work and receive all 'oohs' and 'aahs' – People would write back and say, its so lovely…. it felt good. I felt euphoric." Often, it was simply a search for empathic gay friends.

Respondents like Kabir and Asim, who'd had their fill of Madh Island parties and cruising and dancing at Voodoo through the 80s and the 90s, accessed the various Gay Bombay spaces out of a sense of "wanting to do more for the community" (Kabir). "You see younger people and you don't want those who are

fifteen to have the same experiences as you did and make the mistakes you made." Asim found the sense of community he obtained through Gay Bombay as a progression from his promiscuous earlier days in which "being homosexual was just about partying and sex."

Once the respondents had signed up for the online group, they continued to subscribe for a variety of reasons. For Karim, Pratham, Randhir and Queen Rekha, it had become a community that they were deeply involved in and knew the other members. "It's a largely non cruisy, moderately intelligent e-list," said Randhir. "I continue to visit it mostly to update myself on what's happening and also to update others with information that I may be privy to. I also like to read up on the various articles that get posted there regularly." It was also important to know "who's bitching about who..." (Vidvan) For Husain, Jasjit and Taksa who lived out of India, the chance to keep in touch with the happenings back home and participate in the discussions were the biggest draws, so that when they visited Bombay on their holidays, they could plug into the offline community easily. In contrast, Mike who lived in the US, declared that he had unsubscribed from the newsgroup and only occasionally visited the Gay Bombay site. His main interest in the group was the parties that he attended whenever he was in Bombay but he was beginning to find even these to be boring.

```
Mike says: (4:54:12 PM)
going  every  fortnight  for  the  event
gets very boring

Parmesh says: (4:54:18 PM)
why is that?
```

Mike says: (4:54:31 PM)
same people, trashy place, waste of
money

Mike says: (4:55:39 PM)
and at Gay Bombay, theres a 90-10
trash-cuties ratio

Mike says: (4:56:43 PM)
i think Gay Bombay is more about
shedding inhibitions, learning to love
sleaze

Mike says: (4:56:53 PM)
and having a good time

Parmesh says: (4:56:57 PM)
in terms of activities

Mike says: (4:57:01 PM)
dancing

Parmesh says: (4:57:07 PM)
you see it primarily as a party
organization

Mike says: (4:57:29 PM)
i know they have other events too

Parmesh says: (4:57:36 PM)
yes

Mike says: (4:57:43 PM)
but i would get bored at those events

Parmesh says: (4:57:49 PM)
why

Mike says: (4:57:59 PM)
because they're more for people who are
coming to terms with their sexuality

Parmesh says: (4:58:03 PM)
ah

Mike says: (4:58:05 PM)
ie phase 1

```
Parmesh says: (4:58:11 PM)
and you are in?

Mike says: (4:58:20 PM)
probably phase 3
```

For those respondents who accessed Gay Bombay offline, a pleasant first experience was the main motivating factor for them to keep on returning to the group's events. Gul utilized the 'Neighborhood Watch' service provided on the Gay Bombay website and mailed one of the volunteers who had contacted him and encouraged him to come for the meeting. When Gul subsequently expressed his apprehension about going for the Gay Bombay party the week following the meeting, the volunteer kindly told Gul that he could attend the party along with him and his boyfriend. Before attending his first meeting, Harbhajan was nervous that his married status might be a problem for some of the other members. Their unequivocal acceptance of him into their fold was a huge relief. "From then on, I attended each and every meet." Bhuvan established at his very first meeting that this was a group he could "relate to."

BHUVAN: THESE ARE THE KINDS OF PEOPLE I WANT TO BE WITH. ISSUES BEING DISCUSSED IN SUCH A NON-PERSONAL WAY. THERE WAS A STUDENT, WHO HAD JUST DIED, PEOPLE HERE WERE REMEMBERING HIM WITH ENOUGH SENSITIVITY, WITH DUE RESPECT TO HIS MOM. IN A WAY IT WAS COMFORTING THAT IF I CHOSE THIS PATH, AFTER I DIE PEOPLE ARE THERE.... WHEN SOMEONE IS SO SENSITIVE ENOUGH TO SEE ISSUES CLEARLY WITHOUT GETTING FILTERED, THAT'S WHEN YOU KNOW THE PERSON IS SENSIBLE, AND WHEN YOU HAVE ONE MORE SENSIBLE PERSON LIKE THAT IN A GROUP, GOOD, IF YOU LOOK UP TO THAT, YOU WANT TO BE LIKE THAT, THEN YOU WANT TO COME BACK AND GAIN THAT KIND OF KNOWLEDGE. AT [MY FIRST] PARTY I SAW THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE SCENES, SAW HOW SENSIBLE AND SENSITIVE THEY ARE WHAT KIND OF THOUGHT PROCESS GOES BEHIND THE SCENE. THESE ARE RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE.

My interviewees came up with a wide range of positives attributed to Gay Bombay's presence. Pratham though that it had resulted in making people more "individualistic and helped them live a gay lifestyle," Karim felt that it had "literally changed the life of so many people" – helped many people come out, given younger people confidence, and enabled at least some people to withstand marriage pressure.

> ASIM: PEOPLE FROM MY PAST WILL TELL ME THAT I WAS DULL. PEOPLE TODAY SAY I AM ONE OF THE MOST TALKATIVE PEOPLE AROUND. PROBABLY THIS HAS BEEN DUE TO THE FACT THAT I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO FIND A COMMUNITY AND EXPRESS MYSELF FREELY. MAYBE MY PREVIOUS RESERVE WAS A SHELL IN WHICH I USED TO KEEP MYSELF. YES, I HAVE NO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FACT THAT GAY BOMBAY HAS HELPED ME. I KNOW TODAY THAT MY DEGREE OF OPENNESS COMES TO A LARGE EXTENT FROM MY INTERACTIONS WITH GAY BOMBAY.

For Taksa and Mike, the online world of Gay Bombay had not emphasized individual differences as much as diminished them. On the other hand, Queen Rekha and Gopal commented that the group may have had a negative impact on the lives of homosexuals in India, either because, they have "made it easier to stay closeted" (Queen Rekha) or, as Gopal wrote, "often consciously, encouraged the evolution of a gutless, closeted, urban gay male who is mainly a sexual creature. Through mutual complicity, they have sanctioned and strengthened language, class and gender barriers between emerging gay cultures."

"The catch phrase for Gay Bombay is that 'come to the meets, it is people like us,' said Senthil. "What does people like us mean? Middle class, working, having jobs, English speaking not doing drag – 'normal' people. [Gay Bombay is] creating normativity in the gay scene by excluding others... people who are

effeminate, from a working class background... "

Community

The interviewees reported experiencing community differently. For some, it indicated the network of friendships they had been able to form through Gay Bombay, both online and offline, for others, just being a part of Gay Bombay itself gave them a feeling of community.

> NACHIKET: GAY BOMBAY IS A COMMUNITY, BOTH ONLINE AND OFFLINE. IT IS NOT A PICKUP SPACE, LIKE A LOT OF OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN OTHER CITIES. IT ACCOMMODATES A DIVERSE RANGE OF VIEWS, FROM THE TRULY OBNOXIOUS AND HOMOPHOBIC, TO THE MAINSTREAM, TO THE LIBERAL. IT IS AN INTERESTING SPACE TO BE.

Woolvine (2000) contends that gay men in the West generally tend to break down *Gemeinschalft/Gesellschaft* distinctions in their organizations,[7] and membership within a gay organization – social or political – tends to result in both primary and secondary groupings. The scenario in India is clearly different; as per my observations, the primary affiliation group for most respondents was their own blood family. Though many of them did form pretty "intimate secondary relationships"[8] (Wireman, 1984) within the various Gay Bombay spaces, with "informal, frequent and supportive community ties"[9] (Wellman and Gulia, 1998) binding these relationships, the group functioned more as a neo-tribe – with partial and shifting affiliations; it "did not have a complete and total hold" over them. (Charles and Davies, 1997)[10]

There were different reasons provided for attributing 'community' to the Gay Bombay experience. For Vidvan, Om, Isaac, Asim and Bhuvan, the wide range of safe spaces engendered by Gay Bombay were the "locus for 'expressive' and 'emotionally reciprocal' behavior." (Woolwine, 2000)[11] The group functioned as a 'third space' for its members, a place other than home or work (Oldenburg, 1991) that provided them the capacity to just be 'themselves' without any fear of discrimination. I noticed that the constant interaction between members online and offline had produced a kind of community feeling and loyalty to the group. Individuals like Rustom and Husain who primarily accessed the group online described this community feeling as an ability to recognize the names of regular posters; (Rustom: "They are becoming personalities or individuals in my mind") while Kabir and Harbhajan pointed to the range of regular social events that Gay Bombay organized as well as the services provided like 'Neighborhood Watch' as an indication that Gay Bombay was a vibrant and thriving community.

KARIM: IT IS A COMMUNITY – BUT IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT EVERY GAY PERSON HAS TO BE FRIENDLY WITH EVERY OTHER GAY PERSON. IN MANY CASES WE DON'T EVEN GET RECOGNITION FROM GAY PEOPLE. BUT A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO COMES FOR OUR PARTIES FEEL THAT THERE IS A CERTAIN KIND OF COMMUNITY THEY ARE BEING A PART OF AND THEY HAVE A CERTAIN LEVEL OF APPRECIATION FOR WHAT GAY BOMBAY DOES. IF SOMETHING AWFUL HAPPENS WOULD THEY COME TOGETHER IN SUPPORT? I DON'T KNOW, PERHAPS NOT. THAT'S SOMETHING THAT CAN ONLY BE TESTED. WE'VE REACHED OUT TO A WIDE RANGE OF PEOPLE – WITHIN THAT THERE WOULD BE SOME PEOPLE WHO ONLY THINK OF US AS PARTY ORGANIZERS, BUT THERE ARE STILL ENOUGH PEOPLE WHO WOULD THINK THAT IT IS A COMMUNITY....

Karim also drew on Granovetter's notion of strong and weak ties[12] (1973) to reason that the success of GB as a community lay in its online origins.

KARIM: WE ALWAYS THINK OF A COMMUNITY AS ONE WITH STRONG LINKS. STRONG LINKS HAVE PROBLEMS – LOT OF BONDING AND LOT OF FIGHTING ALSO. WEAK LINKS ARE USEFUL BECAUSE THEY PROVIDE A CERTAIN CONTINUITY BUT THEY PREVENT PEOPLE GETTING BORED OR BECOMING TOO MUCH OF A BURDEN. PURELY BY CHANCE, WITH THE INTERNET WE HAD A TECHNOLOGY THAT WAS GREAT AT PROVIDING WEAK LINKS – IT WASN'T OPPRESSIVE OR PUSHING ITS ATTENTION ON US ALL THE TIME. IT WAS THERE AND WE COULD FOCUS ATTENTION ON IT WHEN WE WANTED TO.

Both Vidvan and Karim touched upon the 'imagined' nature of Gay Bombay, as a part of a larger imagined gay community in India. Vidvan emphasized: "Even if there is no such thing as an Indian community right now, it is important to address yourself as a community, in the very process of calling yourself a community, the community gets formed." Karim agreed and stated that from the point of view of the organizers...

WE'RE OUT TO CREATE A *GAY* COMMUNITY. GAY BOMBAY IS JUST INCIDENTAL. A FACILITATOR. WE WANT PEOPLE TO FIND THEIR OWN LEVEL OF COMFORT. THERE IS A REAL BENEFIT IN PROVIDING DIFFERENT SPACES FOR PEOPLE TO FIND THEIR OWN LEVEL OF COMFORT...HOPEFULLY WITHIN THESE SPACES THEY WILL MOVE ON TO LARGER EDUCATION WITHIN THE GAY COMMUNITY...AS IN, THINKING OF THEMSELVES AS A GAY PERSON – WE DON'T PARTICULARLY WANT PEOPLE TO THINK OF THEMSELVES AS 'A GAY BOMBAY PERSON'.

Woolvine (2000) has described the 'divided community' as the corollary to imagined community;[13] several of my respondents articulated this division and simultaneously emphatically denied community status to Gay Bombay.

BHUDEV: NO. I AM BECOMING VERY DISILLUSIONED. ACCORDING TO ME, THERE ARE NETWORKS FOR MEN FUCKING MEN. WAY ACROSS CLASS AND GENDER. I DON'T THINK THERE IS ANY TOGETHERNESS.

Randhir, Nihar and Cholan felt that community was too big a word to

describe gay Bombay and called it "a reasonably successful group," "a driving force" and "a loose collective" respectively. Mike contemptuously referred to it as "scattered cliques who refuse to recognize each other in public." For Pratham and Jasjit, it was a virtual community rather than a real world one, while Gopal indicated that it was more of a "social network" since "a dozen people do not make a community; there has to be a much larger number of people who relate to each other and have characteristics, needs, desires, goals, etc. that coincide to a high degree." Rustom and Yudhisthir concurred and referred to the *hijra* community as a case in point.

> YUDHISTHIR: I THINK A COMMUNITY NEEDS TO HAVE A DEEPER SENSE OF BONDING, WHICH GAY BOMBAY DOESN'T HAVE. THE *HIJRA* COMMUNITY HAS A TREMENDOUS SENSE OF BONDING. IF YOU TALK ABOUT PEOPLE WHO DO DRAG OR THE TRANSVESTITE POPULATION, THEY ARE A COMMUNITY BUT GAY BOMBAY IS A GROUP, A BIG SOCIAL GROUP... CATERING TO PEOPLE WHO WANT TO DO THINGS OTHER THAN SEX.

Globalization and Locality

All the respondents agreed that globalization had had some impact on their lives and on the larger gay scene at large within India. Many respondents praised the international media that were available in India post 1991 as the harbinger of a liberal worldview towards homosexuality.

> Mike says: (5:21:30 PM)
> i was the first gay person that some of my friends knew or well, knew that was gay, and now having a gay friend is 'cool'
>
> Mike says: (5:22:50 PM)

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just because its happens on will and
grace

Mike says: (5:23:10 PM)
of course, my social circle is not
representative of the bulk of the
country

Mike says: (5:23:59 PM)
but the fact that i can go home and
'not tell the truth' to fewer people
makes a difference

Mike says: (5:24:04 PM)
i can be myself
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Queen Rekha pointed out that globalization had provided her with employment in the call center industry. For Nihar and Senthil, globalization presented an opportunity for the young Indian gay movement to learn from the legal, media and social battles already fought in the West. Nachiket theorized that "globalization and the rising middle class" led to "increased travel, increased opportunities... as more and more material desires get satisfied, your aspiration levels increase in terms of finding your identity and expressing it and being honest about it." My interviewee responses seemed to confirm his hypothesis.

Travel was a theme that came up again and again in many of my interviews with respondents located in India. Whether this referred to travel to Bombay from a smaller city in India (Om, Nihar, Senthil), or to travel out of India for study (Murgesh, Mike, Cholan, Rustom), leisure (Harbhajan, Asim, Karim, Gul) or work (Nachiket, Cholan, Bhudev) – all the respondents spoke about it as a positive experience in helping them learn more about themselves and their sexuality.

NIHAR: WHEN I CAME TO BOMBAY [FROM BHOPAL], IT WAS GAY EL DORADO... IF I HADN'T GOT IN TOUCH WITH THE GAY

> WORLD, I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO LIBERAL. I WOULD HAVE
> BEEN A PRUDISH PERSON – SOMEONE WHO GETS
> SCANDALIZED EASILY.... STRANGELY, IT WAS MY FATHER
> WHO WANTED ME TO COME HERE. HE SAW WHAT A SISSY I
> AM – HE WANTED ME TO BE IN THE BIG BAD WORLD AND
> LEARN THINGS OF MY OWN. I THINK IT WAS A GOOD
> DECISION!

Some of the older interviewees described themselves as 'passport princesses' – privileged gay men who could travel abroad to experience a gay lifestyle there (which they equated with being out, gay parties and activism). Among this generation, Murgesh and Cholan spoke of leaving India in search of their gay identity, but returning in disappointment – their experiences in foreign lands were an affirmation of their separateness from Western gay culture instead of the utopia they had hoped to find.

> MURGESH: I DECIDED THAT THERE IS NO WAY I CAN FIND AN
> IDENTITY IN INDIA. SO I SAID, OKAY, I CAN BE GAY IN
> AMERICA. THIS WAS 1978. I KNEW THERE WAS A MOVEMENT
> IN THE WEST – AND I WANTED TO BE PART OF IT. BUT WHEN I
> WAS THERE, MY CULTURAL IDENTITY, WHICH I THOUGHT
> WAS NOT SO IMPORTANT BEFORE GOING TO THE U.S.,
> BECAME A BIG STRUGGLE. I COULDN'T ADJUST TO A
> WESTERN LIFESTYLE. IN THOSE DAYS, UNLESS YOU WERE IN
> A BIG CITY, YOU WERE INVISIBILISED UNLESS YOU DID NOT
> ASSIMILATE. AND FOR ME, I DID NOT WANT TO. I WAS
> MISSING INDIAN FOOD, INDIAN FILMS, AND MUSIC. MAYBE IF I
> HAD FOUND SOMEONE IN THOSE VULNERABLE YEARS, I
> WOULD HAVE SETTLED DOWN IN THE U.S. BUT SINCE IT
> WASN'T THE PARADISE THAT I HAD THOUGHT IT WOULD BE
> AS FAR AS BEING GAY WAS CONCERNED, I RETURNED.

> CHOLAN: I WENT TO CHRISTOPHER STREET. I WENT TO THE
> CASTRO. I KNEW I WANTED TO COME BACK AND TELL MY
> DAD AND BE HONEST TO PEOPLE THAT MATTERED.
> WHETHER THERE WOULD BE SPACES OR NO SPACES, IT
> DIDN'T MATTER. I WAS LOOKING FOR SPACE WITHIN FAMILY. I
> WASN'T LOOKING FOR SPACES LIKE CHRISTOPHER STREET.

In contrast, younger interviewees, already exposed to the international gay scene through TV and the net, used their travels abroad to either access support

and counseling services that were difficult to find in India (Rustom), or voraciously consume the gay pop culture that they were already vicariously previously clued in to (Gul) – and both these acts served as confidence building measures for living out a gay lifestyle *in* India on their return.

> GUL: IN AMERICA, THE WORD 'GAY' IS SO OPEN ON AMERICAN TV – I SAW *QUEER EYE, BOY MEETS BOY, THE REAL WORLD, QUEER AS FOLK*. BEING GAY IS OK. I WENT TO SAN FRANCISCO; SAW CASTRO, THE RAINBOW FLAGS AND ALL THAT. THEN THERE WAS LAS VEGAS, SEX AND SLEAZE... WENT TO NEW ORLEANS. I WENT TO ALL THESE BARS. I WENT AND SAW A DRAG SHOW, A STRIP CLUB. THE COOLEST THING IS THAT YOU CAN FEEL THEIR DICK – THEY COME IN FRONT OF YOU AND YOU CAN FEEL THEIR DICK. THEY WAVE IT IN FRONT OF YOU – ALL HARD. THE GO AROUND AND YOU CAN FEEL THEM FOR A DOLLAR. THEIR DICKS, BALLS, EVERYTHING. I HAD A GOOD TIME. I WAS LIKE, THIS IS HOW A GAY BAR SHOULD BE LIKE. WHEN I CAME BACK, I WAS MUCH MORE CONFIDENT. I WAS GOING FOR GAY BOMBAY EVENTS REGULARLY. NOW IT IS A LIFESTYLE FOR ME.

Many respondents indicated that the internet was extremely crucial in helping them formulate their own personal conception of an imagined gay world.

> BHUVAN: IF THE NET WEREN'T THERE, MY LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN HELL. EVERY STEP OF MY DISCOVERY PROCESS – HAS BEEN TOTALLY INTERNET DRIVEN. WHEN I WENT ONLINE I STARTED KNOWING GAY PEOPLE AND REALIZED THAT THEY ARE NORMAL PEOPLE, THEY HAD DECENT LIVES, THEY WERE EDUCATED...BUT STILL THEY WERE GAY. I CAME TO KNOW THAT I LIKED THIS. I CAN LOOK AT MEN AS SEXUAL PARTNERS. I STARTED EXPLORING THE NET. EVEN IN READING PORN STORIES ON NIFTY.ORG, IF THEY ARE NOT ENCOUNTER STORIES, THEY ARE RELATIONSHIP STORIES, AND I GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT TWO GUYS CAN LIVE TOGETHER BE HAPPY TOGETHER. THERE IS A POSSIBILITY FOR A HAPPY LIFE APART FROM THE 'FAMILY, FAMILY' THAT I'VE BEEN TOLD ABOUT. SO WHAT I WISH IS NOT A PATH TO DOOM AS PEOPLE CLAIM. BUT RATHER IT CAN BE SOMETHING ENRICHING, SOMETHING THAT I LOOK FORWARD TO.
>
> YUDHISTHIR: THROUGH THE NET, WE INTERACT WITH GAY PEOPLE IN SO MANY DIFFERENT CITIES. WE COME TO KNOW THAT IT'S NOT SUCH A BAD THING BEING GAY... I MYSELF AM NOT A PARTICULARLY POSITIVE GAY GUY. I'M A

> MELANCHOLIC GUY, KIND OF PESSIMISTIC. I HAVE
> DISCOVERED THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE GAY AND BE
> DEPRESSED; YOU CAN BE GAY AND CHEERFUL.

> PULKIT: IT HAS BROUGHT A FEELING OF SAFETY, WHICH
> WASN'T THERE INITIALLY. BROUGHT ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY
> OF PROTECTING YOURSELF WHILE TRYING TO CONNECT TO
> OTHERS.

However, respondents like Gopal, Vidvan, Randhir, Queen Rekha and Jasjit

also implicated the internet and globalization at large for further dividing the rifts

between those who identified as gay and those who identified as *hijra/kothi/*MSM –

largely on class lines.

> VIDVAN: BECAUSE OF THE ANONYMITY IT OFFERS, [THE
> INTERNET] IS PREFERRED AS A MEANS OF INTERACTION, BY
> THOSE WHO CAN AFFORD IT OR UNDERSTAND HOW TO USE
> IT. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS USUALLY INCLUDES ONLY THOSE
> WITH SOME DEGREE OF A WESTERN ENGLISH EDUCATION,
> AND THOSE FROM THE UPPER OR UPPER-MIDDLE CLASSES.
> MANY OTHER QUEER MEN HAVE TO CHOOSE THE
> TRADITIONAL MEANS OF INTERACTION, ESPECIALLY SEEKING
> RECOURSE TO CRUISING AREAS. THIS RESULTS IN A CLASS-
> BASED (AND OFTEN CASTE-BASED) MEANS OF INTERACTION.

> GOPAL: FUNNILY, I AM TOLD THAT IN THE PHILIPPINES,
> BECAUSE OF THE INTERNET, IT HAS ENCOURAGED AN
> EXPLOSION OF OUT GAY CULTURES, STORES, RESTAURANTS
> AND HANGOUTS. IN PLACES LIKE INDIA, IT HAS JUST HELPED
> PEOPLE TO FIND FUCKS, REMAIN IN THE CLOSET, GET
> MARRIED, AND GET ON WITH THEIR LIVES.

> RANDHIR: 'GAY' PEOPLE NOW HAVE A BETTER AND MORE
> VARIED CHOICE OF BARS, PUBS, AND DISCOS, SO THEY CAN
> BE 'JUST LIKE THEM' MORE EASILY. IT'S NEVER BEEN BETTER
> FOR THEM SINCE GLOBALIZATION. NOW THEY CAN SAVE
> MUCH MORE BY GOING ON FEWER FOREIGN TRIPS THAT
> THEY WERE COMPELLED TO GO TO EARLIER 'JUST TO BE
> GAY'. FOR THE NON-GAY IDENTIFIED, THINGS HAVE ALSO
> CHANGED. NOW WORK IS HARDER TO FIND, THINGS ARE
> MORE EXPENSIVE, AND THERE ARE THAT MANY MORE
> GIZMOS ON THE SHELVES TO ASPIRE FOR. SO MANY MORE
> ARE GETTING INTO SEX WORK, GETTING INFECTED BY HIV,
> ETC.

Pratham was concerned that globalization had resulted in a change of

aesthetics for Indian gay men: "We all want our men to look like Western role models. There was a time when all our men would have mustaches, now nobody wants them. I wonder how people... can train their mind to like only a certain kind of person?" Gul, who was very conscious of his weight, echoed Pratham's views: "Look at me. Nobody wants to be with a fat guy sexually. Even in parties, they see me dancing and move away. I've thought you only needed to have a hot body to find people."

The best term to summarize the relationship between globalization and Gay Bombay would be 'glocal'. (Robertson 1995)[14] Due to its usage of the internet as its major conduit, Gay Bombay is "simultaneously more global and local, as worldwide connectivity and domestic matters intersect." (Welman and Gulia, 1998)[15] Karim contended: "To a large extend you could say that it is a global gay identity. We have in Gay Bombay taken many images, stereotypes, inspirations, whatever, from the gay movement worldwide..." But at the same time, he noted, as did Vidvan and Husain, that the group's tradition of respecting Indian culture and family ethics gave it a strong Indian flavor. This included sometimes, subversion as well. "Gay Bombay has often taken uniquely Indian festivals such as *Holi, Raksha Bandhan,* and the *Iftaar*[16] and subverted them." (Vidvan) For Pulkit, the Indianness of Gay Bombay was not a response to or a subversion of "Western notions of being gay;" rather it was more an appropriation of "Indian notions of what it means to be straight," while for Rustom, it was not as much an issue of subversion as of synthesis.

RUSTOM: WE ALL ARE IN THIS MICRO STRATA OF SOCIETY. WE'VE GROWN UP WATCHING AMERICAN TV SHOWS, AMERICAN MUSIC, AMERICAN MOVIES. BUT I WILL NEVER

ACCEPT IF SOMEONE TELLS ME THAT BECAUSE ENGLISH IS YOUR FIRST LANGUAGE, YOU ARE NOT INDIAN. I THINK THAT IDEAS OF FAMILY, NOTIONS OF SACRIFICE, STORIES MOVIES BOOKS, ETC.... ARE ALL THINGS THAT YOU SUBTLY IMBIBE AS YOU GROW UP. SO DOES GAY BOMBAY HAVE SOMETHING DISTINCTLY INDIAN ABOUT IT? YES OF COURSE, THERE IS SOMETHING DISTINCTLY INDIAN ABOUT THOSE WHO TAKE PART – BECAUSE THEY ARE INDIAN. THERE HAS TO BE. I DON'T THINK THEY DISSOCIATE THEIR GAY IDENTITY WITH NOT BEING INDIAN – I DON'T THINK THERE IS AN ASSOCIATION OF BEING GAY WITH BEING WESTERN. AS A PROUD HOMOSEXUAL AND ALSO A PROUD INDIAN, HOW CAN YOU DISSOCIATE THE TWO?

Many respondents agreed that Gay Bombay could be considered to be a part of a larger global gay community.

BHUVAN: I SEE THAT A PERSON SITTING IN ATLANTA WHO HAS NEVER BEEN TO BOMBAY IS STILL A PART OF THE COMMUNITY. A PERSON WHO...COMES TO BOMBAY AND WANTS TO SEE IF THERE IS A GAY SCENE HERE, GOES TO THE WEB AND DOES A SEARCH AND COMES TO KNOW.

PRATHAM: THE GAY BOMBAY LIST EXPOSES THE SUBSCRIBER TO A WIDER WORLD, INFORMS YOU OF THE FRESH DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LIBERATED PARTS OF THE WORLD AND AT THE SAME TIME ALLOWS EACH MEMBER TO GROW AND EVOLVE AT HIS OWN PACE.

For Nachiket, Gay Bombay was "a part of the global movement in terms of a broad search for identity, but he asserted that the variables in India were different from the variables in other developed or even developing countries. "At the broad macro level there are similar issues but the specific issues are completely different." Jasjit pointed out that "most 'gay communities' would see each other as a part of a 'global' political agenda and Gay Bombay being bereft of any such, wouldn't qualify on those terms," while Vidvan questioned the very notion of a 'global gay community.'

Identity and Negotiation of Self

For some respondents (Kabir, Mike, Nihar and Yudhisthir), being gay was the most important marker of their identity. For, Yudhisthir it was a "big stressor" that consumed a large part of his life. Kabir felt that it had "affected and impacted every area" of decision-making.... "My family, friends, lifestyle, work... my planning, financial sorting, insurance, the way I live my life, the way I spend my money, the lifestyle I have... I live alone, I know I will not have kids to save for their education...." The majority of my respondents though described being gay as just one part of their overall identity – and not the major part at that. Thus Murgesh described his identity as the intersection of his family positioning, caste and artistic affiliations. For Bhuvan it was a composite of his physical location and his sexual preference "I associate with the city on a personal level. Wherever I will be, I will be a gay Bombayite." Nachiket revealed an obsession with corporate success to be the most striking component of his identity. "The focus of my life is my career. I like to lead. My aim in childhood was to be on the cover of a magazine." Isaac expressed similar views. "'Gay' should be my second identity, an important part, but not the major part. I would be happy if I was identified more with being a business tycoon first and then gay." Pulkit chose to define himself politically, as "a left centrist" and Asim highlighted his membership within the Parsi (Zoroastrian) community as something that he derived his identity from and also something that he felt he needed to keep separate from his gay identity.

I DO A WHOLE LOT OF WORK WITHIN THE COMMUNITY, WHICH HAS NO CONNECTIONS WITH THE FACT THAT I AM GAY BUT WHICH WOULD PROBABLY CREATE PROBLEMS FOR

> ME WERE I TO COME OUT. I WORK WITH A WHOLE LOT OF PARSI KIDS. A LOT OF PARENTS MAY HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THE FACT THAT I AM GAY. BUT ITS SOMETHING I WANT TO DO FOR THE COMMUNITY AND AS LONG AS I KNOW THAT I AM GOING TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE TRUST THEY HAVE PUT IN ME. I DON'T SEE WHY IT'S RELEVANT TO KNOW ABOUT MY SEXUALITY...I WANT TO DO MY BIT FOR THE COMMUNITY AND I AM.

Queen Rekha said the only construct that she was comfortable with identifying was her religion.

> I USED TO IDENTIFY AS A QUEER BLACK CATHOLIC (OR A CATHOLIC *ZENANA KOTHI*). HOWEVER, SINCE I'VE BEGUN TO REJECT THE QUEER/STRAIGHT AND BLACK/WHITE DICHOTOMIES AS ARTIFICIAL CONSTRUCTS, I HAVE BEGUN TO FEEL EXTREMELY UNCOMFORTABLE DESCRIBING MYSELF AS ANYTHING MORE OR LESS THAN ROMAN CATHOLIC...I MEAN I INCREASINGLY SEE GENDER AND RACE AS INCIDENTAL, OVERLAPPING AND IRRELEVANT (SHADES OF A CONTINUUM)...AND I'LL BE DAMNED IF I CAN EXPLAIN THAT IN A LUCID OR COHERENT FASHION...

Many respondents reported the existence of gay friendships as an important component of their gay identity. Murgesh drew comfort from the fact that he had an increasing circle of gay friends as the years went by.

> MOHNISH: MAYBE PART OF MY GAY IDENTITY IS HAVING MORE GAY FRIENDS. BEFORE I USED TO HANG OUT WITH STRAIGHT FRIEND MORE, NOW I HANG OUT WITH GAY FRIENDS MORE. SEX IS NO LONGER THE ONLY THING. WHEN I AM MEETING A GAY GUY FOR WHATEVER REASON, SEX IS NOT THE MAIN CRITERIA ALL THE TIME. EVEN ON CHAT, THESE DAYS I PREFER MEETING GUYS ALONG WITH MY FRIENDS. I SAY, OK, THERE ARE SOME OF US FRIENDS HERE, WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN US FOR COFFEE? BEFORE IT WAS A SEX ACT OR A CHAIN OF ACTS, NOW IT IS AN IDENTITY.

Cholan, who identified as queer, confessed feeling strangely disconnected from the "gay world" as most of his friends were straight and most of his interests were not "conventionally gay." "I am a big sports fan, I love cricket. I prefer rock and roll, Bruce Springsteen to Kylie Minogue."

With regard to gay identity theory in particular, there have been two main schools of thought. The first comprising linear stage models, such as those provided by Cass (1979) and Sophie (1986) typically construct gay identity as something that is acquired at the end of several stages, starting with apprehension and questioning and ending with a full and complete acceptance and pride.[17] Within this model, the essence of an individual's identity would be, to borrow a phrase from Giddens, "the capacity to keep a particular narrative going."

> The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events, which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self. (Giddens, 1991)[18]

Several of my interviewees (Mike, Pratham, Karim, Rustom, Mohnish, Murgesh, Senthil, Yudhisthir) structured such a linear story of their selves and narrated a step-by-step discovery and acceptance tale of their gay identity to me.

The second school of thought is derived from Butler's conceptualization of identity as a performance that can be played with, within constraints.[19] I found the Gay Bombay newsgroup to be an excellent site to observe the performative aspects of my respondents' identities. Many of them used their own names while accessing the newsgroup. This would not be typical of the list per se, but has to be contextualized by the fact that my interviewees included the organizers, list moderator and other regular posters who were comfortable with their real names being known. But I was surprised to note that individuals who considered themselves pretty closeted in the offline world also posted using their real names.

For example, Nachiket, who was married, with two kids, but identified as gay, posted using a combination of his first name and surname. ("I could have chosen any other name. But I have chosen this. It's simple; I am not cheating on anyone or hiding anything. What would happen?") When the respondents did chose nicknames, they did so primarily to "preserve anonymity" (Harbhajan); however as Donath points out, "it is important to distinguish between pseudonymity and pure anonymity.

> In the virtual world, many degrees of identification are possible. Full anonymity is one extreme of the continuum that runs from the totally anonymous to the thoroughly named. A pseudonym, though it may be untraceable to a real-world person, may have a well-established reputation in the virtual domain; a pseudonymous message may come with a wealth of contextual message about the sender... (Donath, 1998)[20]

Donath further suggests that each part of the message (the account name, the voice, the language, the signature) provide a great deal of information about the sender's identity. I could verify this from observing the interviewees that I connected with both online and in physical Bombay. Gopal ranted about the "gay" centeredness of the group and parties consistently, online as well as in his face-to-face interview to me. Randhir was as serious and queer activism focused in person, when I met him in Bangalore, as he was over email – on the newsgroup too, he constantly posts about the various human rights organizations he is in daily contact with regarding abuses against homosexuals in different parts of the world. The Gay Bombay administrators Pratham and Karim were authoritative in their comments to

me over email and in person, staunchly defending their vision of Gay Bombay. Ormus' newbie status within the group was obvious in his online interview as well as at the Gay Bombay meets I observed him at – his language was earnest and he tried hard to be proper – and his posts to the newsgroup didn't have the casual familiarity that regulars like Queen Rekha, Karim or Randhir had managed to cultivate, even as they disagreed with each other on several points.

The choice of my respondents' online nicknames typically resonated with their own sense of self or certain affiliations they wanted to highlight. For Husain, and Murgesh their IDs were a combination of their religious and Indian identities; Queen Rekha chose her nickname as a tribute to an iconic lesbian filmmaker, Cholan's online ID was the title of his favourite Bruce Springsteen song, and there were many nods in the direction of famous poets, fashion designers, and characters from literature and cinema.

> MURGESH: I DON'T USE MY REAL NAME... [FOR] MY ONLINE POSTS BECAUSE IT IS A MUSLIM NAME. MUSLIMS MAKE UP 16% OF THE POPULATION IN BOMBAY – IF I HAD A COMMON NAME LIKE 'RAVI' – FROM 84% THERE CAN BE SO MANY 'RAVIS'; BUT WITH A NAME LIKE MINE, IT IS DIFFICULT – I THOUGHT PEOPLE WOULD KNOW. I USED THE NAME OF A MUSICIAN. I CHOSE A MUSLIM PSEUDONYM HERE – I WAS CLEAR THAT PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW THAT THERE ARE MUSLIM GAYS AS WELL.... I CONTINUED USING THE NAME DUE TO VANITY...AND IT STUCK FOR MANY YEARS.

Unlike Murgesh, who had affiliated himself to one online nickname and cultivated it over the years, respondents like Nihar and Mohnish shifted between using multiple nicknames while posting to the group.

> NIHAR: I ENJOY HAVING MULTIPLE NICKS. THEY ARE JUST
> DIFFERENT NAMES. I LIKE PLAYING WITH WORDS. BUT I
> DON'T HAVE MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER.

Some respondents stated that their identities were the same online and offline. But the majority reported consciously activating a change in their online persona and performing it with pleasure. Gul and Nachiket used their online selves to be more bitchy and flirtatious, something that they could not imagine doing offline because of shyness (Gul) or being in the closet (Nachiket). Pulkit, the list moderator, presented himself as a "champion of the smaller voices." Asim said that he had actively cultivated a fixed online persona – "bastard".

> I TEND TO BE VERY VIOLENT AND OPPRESSIVE IN MY
> WRITING THAT I AM NOT IN REAL LIFE. I TAKE STRONG
> POSITIONS ON THE LIST, WHICH I PROBABLY WOULDN'T BE
> RIGID ABOUT IN REAL LIFE. IT'S A REASONABLE FIXED ONLINE
> PERSONA – BASTARD. IT DEFINITELY COMES ON WHEN I AM
> ONLINE, WHEN I POST.... I TAKE PLEASURE WITH MY ONLINE
> PERSONA. I ENJOY PERFORMING. PEOPLE EXPECT
> SOMETHING OF MY WRITING....

Judith Donath (1998) has observed with regard to newsgroup behavior:

> There is no editorial board ensuring the standards of reliability; each posting comes directly from the writer. Thus the writer's identity – in particular, claims of real world expertise or history of accurate online contributions – plays an important role in judging the veracity of an article... Identity also plays a key role in motivating people to actively participate in newsgroup discussions.... reputation is enhanced by contributing remarks of the type admired by the group.[21]

Within my interviewees, I noticed that Yudhisthir and Karim, both professional writers, were conscious of the popularity of their online identities – their popularity was reflected in the special treatment accorded to them by the rest of

the group as "high status participants."[22]

> YUDHISTHIR: I LOVE WATCHING FILMS SO I WRITE A LOT ABOUT FILMS. NOT JUST GAY FILMS BUT ALSO FILMS IN WHICH SOMEONE HAS PERFORMED WELL, OR LOOKS GOOD, OR IS SPECTACULAR THAT I THINK PEOPLE ON THE LIST MAY LIKE TO READ ABOUT. I AM A BIT OF A SOCIAL COMMENTATOR... I TRY AND DO ADVERTISING CONNECTS ALSO... PEOPLE KNOW ME BECAUSE OF MY POSTS, IF I WOULD GO TO A MEET AND SAY MY NAME, IT WOULD BE RECOGNIZED. IN A WAY MY PERSONA HAS BECOME BUILT...

> KARIM: AS A NEWSPAPER WRITER, YOU'RE TAUGHT TO WRITE SHORT CRISP SENTENCES, AND THAT HELPS YOU TO POST ON EMAIL FORUMS. I WROTE SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN MOST PEOPLE, SO I FOUND LOTS OF PEOPLE READING MY POSTS, AND THAT WOULD SPUR ME TO POST A LOT. IN CERTAIN WAYS, I WAS PROVOKING THE LIST, BRINGING UP ISSUES, CONSTANTLY WRITING ON THEM. THE EMAIL LIST WAS A SPACE WHERE I COULD USE MY WRITING SKILLS. IT MADE ME FEEL PRETTY GOOD.

I discovered that significantly, for several respondents, the real issue was about identity in gay versus straight settings rather than online versus offline identities. Several of my interviews spoke about having distinct gay identities that they revealed or 'performed' in settings in which they were comfortable.

> ISAAC: WITH GAY PEOPLE, I BITCH WITH CLOSE FRIENDS, I TRY TO BRING OUT GAYNESS IN ME, MANNERISMS, TALKING; WITH STRAIGHT PEOPLE I AM NORMAL. WITH GAY PEOPLE I AM IN A GAY MOOD – TALK FOR FUN.... WITH STRAIGHT PEOPLE I AM CONSCIOUS THAT I DON'T TALK TOO MUCH ABOUT GAY THINGS.

> OM: I DO CHANGE MY MANNERS IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS. [THIS IS] HYPOCRISY AS IT EXISTS IN INDIA AND I AM A PART OF IT.

> BHUVAN: I DON'T THINK OF IT AS HYPOCRISY. YOU EXPRESS YOURSELF NATURALLY, BUT SENSIBLY. YOU DON'T QUESTION ACCEPTABILITY. IT'S LIKE GOING OUT FOR A BLACK TIE DINNER, HOW DO YOU ACT? BEING WITH STRAIGHT PEOPLE IS SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

> PARMESH: I SEE....

> OM: LIKE THIS INTERVIEW WITH YOU. IF IT WERE A STRAIGHT
> PERSON SITTING RIGHT THERE, I WOULD NOT BE AS VERBAL
> OR AS OPEN AS I AM WITH YOU RIGHT NOW.
>
> BHUVAN: ME TOO
>
> OM: ITS VERY OBVIOUS. EVERYBODY DOES IT.

Nihar expressed pleasure at being able to perform his identity playfully within the Gay Bombay spaces. He identified as androgynous: "I feel an electricity of masculine and feminine energy in perfect harmony – it gives me such peace – I feel so fulfilled."

> I DIDN'T CONSTRUCT THIS ANDROGYNOUS IDENTITY. IT WAS
> ALWAYS THERE. NOW I CHOOSE TO ENACT IT. WHEN I WORE
> HOT PANTS TO A PARTY RECENTLY, I HAD BLEACHED MY
> HAIR, AND I WORE BOOTS AND A SLEEVELESS T-SHIRT. THE
> NEXT DAY I CALLED UP THIS FRIEND OF MINE, AND HE TOLD
> ME THAT SOME PEOPLE THOUGHT I WAS A BRITISH DYKE. I
> LOVE IT. I LOVE CONFUSING PEOPLE... I LIKE DRAMA – I LIKE
> BEING FLAMBOYANT. I LIKE DANCING, WEARING SKIMPY
> CLOTHES, DESIGNING SEXY OUTFITS FOR EVERY PARTY,
> MAKING AN ENTRY, PUSHING LIMITS AS FAR AS I WANT TO.
> ALL MY LIFE I WAS ASEXUAL. NOW I AM REVELING IN MY
> SEXUALITY. IT GIVES ME ENERGY...BEING ANDROGYNOUS
> GIVES ME THE FREEDOM TO PLAY CRICKET AND DO
> EMBROIDERY AT THE SAME TIME. IN ANY CASE, WHAT IS
> MASCULINE OR FEMININE? A BABY DOESN'T CHOOSE TO BE
> WRAPPED UP IN A BLUE TOWEL – WE DO THAT. IT IS
> CONDITIONING. I ENJOY BREAKING THE BOUNDARY –
> PLAYING WITH BOTH THE BALLS IN MY HAND...

Kabir, Asim, Murgesh, Mike and Yudhisthir also stated that they tended to become more camp in the company of friends or in gay settings. Queen Rekha described consistency itself as "the refuge of a fool" and further added: "I'm a drag queen, honey! I perform ALWAYS..." In contrast, Ormus who had been an effeminate child while growing up said that he tried hard to perform being non-effeminate. For him, both his online and offline identities were a reflection of this

quest. "I ABSOLUTELY wanted to change, I wanted to fit in and I don't think my current self is a put-on."

Conflict

For a long time Humsafar was the only gay related organization in Bombay. Humsafar's open-to-all Friday meets were very well attended by the city's gay identified men. However, the organization's increasing foray into HIV and health related activism alienated these men. "They were not willing to serve as volunteers," recounted Senthil, "but *kothis* and *hijras* were." Also as Pulkit recalled, there was a growing sense of discomfort among the gay identified men who attended Humsafar events about its overtly camp nature: "I noticed that if you go to Humsafar, you have to behave in a certain way. If you are not effeminate, if you don't have a limp hand, if you don't refer to each other as 'she' instead of 'he', you don't feel you belong, you are like an outcast." These two factors resulted in the Humsafar space being used more and more by *kothis* and *hijras* – while the gay men started to access the nascent Gay Bombay spaces as alternative and more comfortable environments. Eventually, there was an almost complete absence of a gay presence from Humsafar events like the Friday meets while Gay Bombay supported events and activities began to flourish.

During my initial interactions with my interviewees online and the observation of some of the newsgroup postings, I had already had a preview of some of the simmering tensions between members loyal to both organizations. On my visit to physical Bombay, I discovered that there was cordiality on the surface. But the

moment I scratched just a little, the emotions poured out fast and hard. The contentious relationship between these two organizations was by far the most polarizing subject of discussion for my interviewees. It was more intriguing because a lot of the current Gay Bombay regulars had cut their teeth organizing Humsafar events or editing *Bombay Dost* in the early 1990s, or used the Humsafar space to come out, and even among the younger lot, there were many who were affiliated to both organizations. There were six key flash points that emerged during my conversations and I want to discuss each of them separately.

Straight Acting Men Versus Effeminate Men, Drag Queens and Hijras

Several individuals I spoke to had based their gay identity and sometimes, their entire life, battling the notion that a gay person is "a pansy effeminate guy" (Isaac). They prided themselves on the fact that they were "just like everyone else and were deeply vested with creating "a culture where it is okay to be 'straight acting' gays" (Asim). Indeed, as Pulkit stated, Gay Bombay was formed on the very premise of creating a space for "middle class straight acting men. It was for the people who get embarrassed when they walk with a very effeminate man in public, and who don't like it when they are referred to in the female pronouns, as she or as mother or sister." For these men, Humsafar's in your face championing of camp behavior ("Being gay and queeny with a mission," as Isaac put it) was a negation of everything they had tried so hard to not be, and a threat to the 'straight-acting' image that they had tried to cultivate and project of themselves and the gay community, either overtly or implicitly.

This discomfort with effeminate behavior was translated into the strict no-drag policy framed by Gay Bombay for its parties. Only recently revoked, the policy came in for some fierce criticism, both from within Gay Bombay and outside. In fact, matters came to a clash on New Year's Eve of 2004, when The Humsafar Trust decided to have a competing drag friendly party in the suburbs in response to Gay Bombay's no-drag city based party, offering tickets at a substantial discount to Gay Bombay's prices, and including incentives such as special rates for college students. The spat even made it to the pages of some of the country's newspapers.[23]

Karim justified the reason for the policy's existence and subsequent withdrawal.

MOST OTHER GAY GROUPS HAVE PRIVATE SPACES – OFFICES AND FACILITIES – WHERE THEY CAN RETREAT AND DO DRAG. WE ARE A CURIOUSLY PUBLIC GROUP – WE MEET IN PUBLIC SPACES, HAVE PARTIES IN PUBLIC SPACES, EVEN THE MEMBERS' HOUSES THAT WE HAVE OUR MEETS IN ARE APARTMENTS IN LARGE RESIDENTIAL COMPLEXES. THE FACT THAT WE ARE A PUBLIC GROUP HAS INFLUENCED OUR POLICIES. A LOT OF GUYS ARE VERY PHOBIC ABOUT DRAG – WE DID FEEL IT WAS BETTER TO DISCOURAGE DRAG FOR GUYS WHO WERE COMING FOR MEETINGS THE FIRST TIME...THIS COINCIDED WITH THE FACT THAT IT WAS DIFFICULT TO DO DRAG IN PEOPLES HOUSES – OR EVEN IN NIGHTCLUBS THAT ANYWAY WERE WARY OF HOSTING GAY NIGHTS FOR US – THEY WOULD SAY YES AS LONG AS YOU ALL ARE DECENTLY DRESSED WHICH MEANT NO DRAG. SO FOR PRACTICAL REASONS WE PUT IN THE 'NO DRAG' RULE. IT WAS NOT SOMETHING THAT WE WERE COMFORTABLE WITH. WE'VE GOT A LOT OF FLAK FOR IT AND DESERVEDLY SO... WE'VE WITHDRAWN IT NOW BECAUSE BY NOW, THE GROUP AND MOST PEOPLE WHO COME TO THE GROUP CAN DEAL WITH IT AND EVEN PRACTICALLY NOW WE ARE WELL ESTABLISHED AND NIGHTCLUBS KNOW US AND WE HAVE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MANAGEMENTS. BUT EVEN BEFORE WE DROPPED THE 'NO DRAG' RULE OUR POSITION WAS THAT IF SOMEONE HAS THE BALLS TO COME DRESSED UP IN DRAG, THERE IS NO WAY THAT WE WILL TURN THEM AWAY.

Gopal, Bhudev and Rahim considered this change to be progressive but they pointed out that Gay Bombay's acceptance of drag was only for Western style drag. Thus a Malaysian drag group that came down for the WSF was invited to perform at a Gay Bombay party but Indian drag groups have been constantly ignored at such events. "Indian drag, *lavni,* is down-market," jibed Rahim. "Malaysian drag is upmarket because it is foreign."

There was great divisiveness within the group when it came to the issues of *hijras* – like Isaac, a large number of individuals felt that "eunuchs and gays are two different identities" and that Gay Bombay's mandate was only to cater to gay people. Karim explained that while they were "supportive and friendly to everyone," the founders had "consciously defined a narrow focus [for Gay Bombay] – gay men." However others like Senthil felt that it would be a smarter move to expand this vision to included non-gay identified sexual minorities, out of self-interest, if nothing else.

> SENTHIL: THIS IS THE PROBLEM OF GROUPS LIKE GAY BOMBAY; THEY DON'T REALIZE THAT SOMEDAY THERE COULD BE BACKLASHES.... IF THERE IS A GAY BOMBAY PARTY TOMORROW THAT GETS RAIDED, THEY WILL NEED HELP FROM ALL THESE PEOPLE – THE ACTIVISTS, THE PEOPLE WHO MARCH – ITS NOT THE GAY MEN, HONEY, IT'S THE *KOTHIS* AND *HIJRAS*...

Class Differences and Language Barriers

The responses of my interviewees provided an indication of the "vast social gulfs across which people in India must face each other." (Seabrook, 1999)[24] They all agreed that Gay Bombay was an organization that catered to a narrow English

speaking, upper middle class segment of the homosexual population, though Karim was insistent on emphasizing that this still constituted a considerable amount of "diversity within a band – actually a fairly wide range of people." This stratification was a source of comfort for many of my interviewees who were upfront in stating that their interactions with those beyond their class boundaries were limited. Pratham said: "Though I would not like to admit it, I prefer to hang out with people more or less from the same socio-economic background. I don't treat them differently but beyond 'hi' and 'hello' I am not too comfortable spending time with self identified *kothis*." Jasjit was quick to clarify that his stance did not indicate that he was a "class-chauvinist."

IT JUST MEANS THAT EACH INDIVIDUAL REVOLVES AND INTERACTS WITHIN THE RIGID AREA OF HIS CLASS WITH A FEW GREY SHADES ABOVE AND BELOW THAT SOCIAL STRATUM AND IT TAKES A LOT OF EFFORT TO BREAK THESE BOUNDARIES, UNLESS THERE IS AN OVERWHELMING REASON TO TRANSCEND IT. I IDENTIFY MORE WITH URBAN, MIDDLE-CLASS, INTELLECTUAL PEOPLE AND DO TEND TO GET MY OWN PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STIMULI RESPONDED BY THEM, SO THERE ISN'T MUCH REASON FOR ME TO LOOK BEYOND THAT GROUP.

NIHAR: PEOPLE CRITICIZE GAY BOMBAY FOR BEING A SEGREGATED GROUP OF UPPER MIDDLE CLASS PEOPLE – THE BOURGEOISIE.... BUT CLASS DOES SET IN – YOU CAN'T AVOID THAT. BIRDS OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER AND THAT'S WHERE THEY ARE COMFORTABLE... THE KIND OF PEOPLE THAT ARE MEMBERS OF GAY BOMBAY...THEY ARE ENGLISH SPEAKING UPPER MIDDLE CLASS.... I COULD HOLD A CONVERSATION WITH THEM AND WOULDN'T NEED SOMEONE TO INTERPRET THINGS.... THEY COME FROM THE SAME LEVEL OF CULTURE...THAT'S WHAT MAKES A COMFORT ZONE FOR PEOPLE LIKE ME...REGULAR COLLEGE GOING BOY, SOMEONE WHO IS WORKING IN A CALL CENTER... BY CULTURED I MEAN SOMEONE WHO IS WELL READ AND HAD AN ENGLISH EDUCATION AND CAN TALK ABOUT ART AND MUSIC AND SHIT LIKE THAT – SOMEONE WHO HAS HAD HINDI EDUCATION IS CULTURED TOO, BUT IN A DIFFERENT CONTEXT. IF SOMEONE CAN'T TALK IN ENGLISH, THEN THERE WOULD BE A COMMUNICATION GAP. I

AM MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE IN ENGLISH. I'M NOT SAYING THAT THE NON ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BE CATERED FOR – I'M JUST SAYING GAY BOMBAY SHOULDN'T CHANGE...IT'S A POLITICALLY INCORRECT THING, I KNOW.

ASIM: PERSONALLY I DON'T HAVE ANY APOLOGIES... WHEN YOU SAY THAT YOU ARE ELITIST AND CATERING ONLY TO A CERTAIN SEGMENT, YOU ARE IMPLYING THAT THE SEGMENT DOESN'T NEED SUPPORT. THIS IS BULLSHIT.

Viewpoints like the above came in for strong criticism from respondents also affiliated with Humsafar.

BHUDEV: PEOPLE'S DISCOMFORT HAS A LOT TO DO WITH CLASS AND OPENNESS OF TALKING. BECAUSE [HUMSAFAR] IS SO OPEN, PEOPLE ARE AFRAID. ACCESS TO SOME OF [GAY BOMBAY'S] PARTIES IS ACCESS WITH MONEY. THEY KNOW THAT THEY ARE MIXING WITH THEIR OWN CLASS; HERE YOU DON'T KNOW WITH WHOM YOU ARE MIXING. THAT SCARES THEM. AGAIN IT IS CLASS POLITICS. WHEN THEY COME HERE AND HEAR THE GUYS TALKING OPENLY ABOUT THE PEOPLE THEY HAVE FUCKED, THEY HAVE NEVER HEARD THIS TALK. THE WHOLE DISCOURSE OF OPEN SEXUALITY THAT IS REALLY PART OF THE INDIAN STREET SCENE, IS NOT PART OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES.

Rahim pointed out the hypocritical nature of some of the prejudices expressed by the members of gay Bombay – while there was resentment among Gay Bombay people to interact socially with people from the non English speaking classes, many of them had no qualms in exoticizing them in their sexual fantasies or even picking them up for random sexual escapades, when they desired so.

Differing Views of Activism

Om, a 22-year-old student and a regular Gay Bombay party presence, shared his experience about volunteering at the Humsafar stall at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Bombay in early 2004.

DURING WSF, HUMSAFAR HAS PUT UP A STALL ON GAY ICONS. THERE WAS NO BIAS ABOUT THESE ICONS THAT THEY HAD CHOSEN, BUT GAY BOMBAY CHOSE TO IGNORE IT. IF THE PEOPLE FROM GAY BOMBAY MET PEOPLE FROM HUMSAFAR, THEY JUST SAID HI AND WALKED BY. THERE WERE TALK SESSIONS HAPPENING AND OTHERS WHERE I DIDN'T SEE PEOPLE FROM GAY BOMBAY AT ALL.

Similarly, Rahim, who worked full time at Humsafar, was very anguished by Gay Bombay's lack of active interest in anything political. He presented three accounts of his experiences and observations:

1.[THE TWO NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTIES THE PREVIOUS YEAR, ORGANIZED BY GAY BOMBAY AND THE HUMSAFAR TRUST, HAD COLLECTIVELY DRAWN AROUND A THOUSAND PEOPLE.] BUT THE FACT REMAINS, WE ARE ONLY ASSEMBLING PEOPLE FOR PARTIES. WHAT I AM SEEING IS THAT PARTIES ARE HAPPENING FOR SO MANY YEARS, BUT PEOPLE ARE NOT GOING BEYOND THAT.

2.[HUMSAFAR HAD APPROACHED SOME OF ITS YOUNGER GAY IDENTIFIED VOLUNTEERS THAT ALSO ACCESSED THE GAY BOMBAY SPACES TO FORM A SELF-HELP SUPPORT GROUP CATERING TO THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS.] WE'VE BOUGHT AN LCD PROJECTOR AND A SCREEN – THEY CAN HAVE SCREENINGS, DISCUSSIONS, PLANNING OF MEETINGS, ETC. WE CAN OFFER ALL THE SPACE HUMSAFAR HAS AND FACILITIES. NOW BEYOND THAT, I AM CONVINCED THAT AN 18-YEAR OLD SHOULD SHOW MORE ENERGY THAN A 40 OR 50-YEAR-OLD. WHERE IS THE ENERGY? I TOLD THEM 3 MONTHS AGO – BUT THEY STILL HAVEN'T COME BACK.

3.[HUMSAFAR STARTED A PROGRAM CALLED HUMSAFAR DOST, WHERE THEY HAD ASKED INDIVIDUALS TO CONTRIBUTE A THOUSAND RUPEES PER ANNUM, OR US$ 23, AT MID-2005 CONVERSATION RATES, AS A DONATION FOR VARIOUS HUMSAFAR HEALTH PROGRAMS.] THAT IS EIGHTY RUPEES PER MONTH FOR SOMEONE LIKE YOU AND ME – OR THE COST OF A CIGARETTE PACK. TODAY, HUMSAFAR DOST HAS THIRTY-EIGHT MEMBERS, AND OF THESE THIRTY-EIGHT, TWENTY-TWO ARE LIVING IN THE US. HERE, WE HAVE APPROACHED AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE, BUT THEY DON'T WANT TO GIVE EVEN A THOUSAND RUPEES PER YEAR. PEOPLE ARE SPENDING ON THEMSELVES, THOUSAND BUCKS PER NIGHT EASILY. BUT NOT TO CONTRIBUTE FOR THE WELFARE OF THE COMMUNITY.

Rahim and Bhudev were both skeptical of activism over the internet. Rahim noted that there were "thousands of mails being exchanged on the net" regarding article 377, but when the case came up in the Delhi court, only a few well known activists were present. Bhudev insisted that the real activism was on the ground, "not in cyberspace which...dominates Gay Bombay." "Gay Bombay is having rights without responsibilities," he continued. "It is a dream factory. Their parties are like Bollywood."

> THIS CLASS TALKS ABOUT IDENTITIES IN VIRTUAL SPACES, WHERE THEY CAN BECOME URVASHI@HOTMAIL.COM AND GO ON TO INDIATIMES TO CHAT AND SEE A MAN WITH A WEBCAM SHOWING HIS COCK... HERE, I AM SMACK HERE... I AM GETTING THE LUMPS OF SHIT. IT IS SO MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO GO ON A PLATFORM WITH THE VHP [VISHWAN HINDU PARISHAD OR WORLD HINDU COUNCIL] OR FIGHT THE SHIV SENA ON A BLOODY TV SHOW THAT TO HAVE DISCUSSIONS LIKE THIS IN DRAWING ROOMS OR ON THE NET.

"So what?" countered Isaac. " I feel that if I become successful in what I do and I am also out as gay, then it will give it more credibility than if I go and become a full time gay activist." On a related, but different note, Nachiket, who was married and closeted, argued that he was as much an activist as Bhudev – albeit, in a different setting and armed with a different strategy. Despite being closeted, he attributed a large part of his confidence to "being a member of an online community where I know that there are at least two thousand people more like me."

> I HAVE GREAT RESPECT FOR THE OUT ACTIVISTS LIKE BHUDEV. ACTIVISTS DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE PEOPLE WHO ARE MAKING CHANGES ARE NOT THE ONES ONE THE STAGE. SO YOU WILL NEVER FIND ME AT A MARCH. BUT I AM MAKING CHANGES. IN THE SPACES I WORK IN. SO SOME DAYS BACK, THE PERSON WE OFFERED A JOB TO WAS A MAN WEARING EARRINGS. WE OFFERED HIM THE JOB AND

THE PERSON WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN HIS BOSS AND THE PERSON WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN HIS BOSS'S BOSS WERE EXTREMELY COMFORTABLE WITH HIM. HE DIDN'T JOIN US ULTIMATELY, BECAUSE HE GOT A BETTER JOB, BUT I WOULD COUNT HIS SELECTION AS AN ACHIEVEMENT. SO PEOPLE LIKE ME ARE THE ONES MAKING THE CHANGES. THAT IS WHAT IT BOILS DOWN TO. IRONICALLY, IF I WERE OUT AT MY POSITION IN THE COMPANY AND IN MY PROFESSION, I WOULD BE AN OUTCAST. BECAUSE I AM IN, I AM GIVEN ADMISSION INTO INNER CIRCLES AND GIVEN OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE CHANGE. I BELIEVE I AM AN ACTIVIST IN MY OWN WAY. FUNDAMENTALLY BUSINESS IS NOT GOING TO CHANGE IF YOU ATTACK IT FROM THE OUTSIDE. YOU HAVE TO EARN YOUR STRIPES AND BE IDENTIFIED AS A PART OF THE BUSINESS IF YOU WANT TO MAKE ANY CHANGES. OTHERWISE YOU ARE JUST ONE OF THE LOONIES GOING AROUND. I THINK THE OTHER TYPE OF ACTIVISM IS IMPORTANT TOO – BUT BY ITSELF, IT IS NOT ENOUGH. FRANKLY, THE AWARENESS DOESN'T COME WITHOUT PEOPLE LIKE HIM, BUT CHANGE DOESN'T COME WITHOUT PEOPLE LIKE US. IT CUTS BOTH WAYS.

For Nachiket, as for many of my interviewees, Gay Bombay's appeal lay in the fact that it was not an activist organization. Karim explained: "Our strength is not in gay activism and marching on the street, which is great, and some of us do want to do that. But for the larger group, it is in creating safe spaces and helping gay people come into the community."

Harbhajan pointed out that the parties that Gay Bombay organized at different venues all over the city were a kind of activism in their own way – "an eye opener for the hotel manager and staff." Pratham opined that it was futile to just pick up political causes "to feel better about what we do...."

WHAT DOES ONE MEAN BY ACTIVISM? A GUY PROACTIVELY COMING TO A PARTY IS AN ACTIVIST TOO. EVERYONE IS AN ACTIVIST. PLACES LIKE HUMSAFAR ARE POLITICAL ACTIVISM. POLITICAL ACTIVISM IS NO LONGER THE CENTER OF THE WHOLE HOMOSEXUAL IMAGE NOW. AT ONE POINT, FROM AN OUTSIDER'S POINT OF VIEW, POLITICAL ACTIVISM THAT HUMSAFAR DID OR THE WORK DONE WITH HOMOSEXUALS WAS WHAT WAS THE DEFINING VIEW. NOWADAYS WHEN THE MEDIA WRITES ABOUT THE GAY

COMMUNITY, IT IS NOT NECESSARILY ABOUT ACTIVISM, IT IS
ABOUT PARTIES AND OTHER THINGS. SO I SUPPOSE THE
PUBLIC PERCEPTION HAS BECOME BROADER.

But Senthil, while agreeing with Pratham and Harbhajan that being social was its own kind of activism, was perplexed as to how this could not translate into a political statement. According to him, this extreme aversion to political activism was a myopic position to adopt and emblematic of the intrinsic failure of the middle class that most of Gay Bombay's members counted themselves as members of.

THIS IS THE BIGGEST CRITICISM OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES
THAT GAY BOMBAY IS A SYMBOL OF. IT IS SO AVERSE TO
THE IDEA OF POLITICS. THERE'S A MORAL JUDGMENT
AGAINST IT THAT IT'S WRONG. IT'S NOT FOR US. IT'S
AGAINST EVERYTHING WE ARE ABOUT. IT'S WRONG IF YOU
LIVE IN A SPACE, AND WANT IT TO EXIST AND GROW,
POLITICAL GROUPS HAVE TO HAVE A SAY IN IT.... LET'S NOT
BE AVERSE TO IT. YOU CAN'T BE ANTI-POLITICS.

The Importance of Coming Out, Closeted Men and Married Gay Men

Most of the respondents were appreciative of Gay Bombay's non-judgmental policy with regard to their status as out or closeted. As Karim noted, "We can't force guys to come out of the closet, lead an open gay lifestyle; we can just help guys help themselves. We can just create spaces for them." However, critics like Gopal and Rahim argued that this policy coupled with the social focus of the group was creating a feeling of complacency among people who accessed its spaces – and falsely leading them on to believe that they were out just because they had attended a gay event in a safe space, when in fact, it was nothing more than a 'High Tech Closet'.[25] The challenge, as Rahim noted, lay in being visible "outside the safe spaces we have created for ourselves" and this was simply not

happening with Gay Bombay. He was critical that several people from Gay Bombay had posted excitedly on the group about attending events like San Francisco Pride and New York Pride, but the same people, when called, refused to show up at a Humsafar led silent walk in Bombay to commemorate World AIDS day. "A gay man from Bombay, dancing on the streets of San Francisco or New York is going to make no difference to Bombay. I need a few faces to be seen at a certain place, where showing a few faces would make a difference. But I don't see this."

Humsafar was also presumed to be too harsh towards married gay men. One of my married interviewees recounted his experience of going to one of Humsafar's events and then receiving a call from them the following day asking him not to come to any future events because of his married status. He contrasted this with Gay Bombay's acceptance of him into their fold. Karim explained Gay Bombay's approach to this issue.

ONE OF THE POSITIONS THAT THE GROUP DOES TAKE IS THAT IT IS WRONG TO BE MARRIED TO SOMEBODY [IF] THE WOMAN DOES NOT KNOW ABOUT YOUR SEXUALITY. IF SHE KNOWS AND IS OKAY WITH IT, THEN ITS DIFFERENT. MOST OF US ARE QUITE WILLING TO BE SYMPATHETIC AND TO BE FRIENDS WITH SUCH GUYS, BUT THAT SYMPATHY SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN TO IMPLY THAT ONE APPROVES OF WHAT THE MARRIED GAY GUY HAS DONE, AND TO SUGGEST THAT GAY GUYS MARRYING WOMEN WITHOUT COMING OUT TO THEM IS IN ANY WAY THE RIGHT COURSE OF ACTION TO TAKE. GUYS WHO DO THIS KNOW THAT WE DISAPPROVE, SO THEY DISTANCE THEMSELVES FORM THE MEETS. THEY MAY STILL COME FOR THE PARTIES – A LOT OF MARRIED GUYS COME FOR THE PARTIES. BUT THEY KNOW THAT THEY AREN'T 100% WELCOME AT THE MEETS.

HIV

Several respondents, including Isaac and Asim, attributed Gay Bombay's

tremendous success to its no-sex policy. Pulkit too indicated that this policy though an indicator of the group's "prudish values that come from the straight community," had served it well. However for the respondents that were involved in voluntary HIV prevention work like Bhudev, this attitude was "anti sexual" and more devastatingly, "HIV phobic." "They don't like to talk about sex. For them gay is a lifestyle." This squeamishness with anything sexual meant that health issues like risky behavior and the huge HIV crisis that the community was facing were being swept under the carpet. Rahim was very concerned.

THE DIFFERENCE THAT I SAW ON MY VISIT TO THE US AND IN INDIA IS THAT IN THE US, AN AVERAGE MIDDLE CLASS GAY MAN IS VERY AWARE OF HEALTH ISSUES AND HIS RISK BEHAVIOR. IN BOMBAY, I DON'T THINK IT MATTERS. FOR ME WHAT WAS MOST SHOCKING WAS THAT LAST YEAR, WE DID A HUGE STUDY – A 10-MONTH STUDY. THE FINDINGS OF THAT STUDY, INCLUDING THAT OF A LARGER SURVEY WE HAVE CONDUCTED FOR FOUR YEARS INDICATE THAT 17-20% OF THE GAY MEN IN THE CITY ARE HIV POSITIVE, THIS IS A VERY HIGH FIGURE, BUT IT HAS BEEN STABLE FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS. *MID-DAY* CARRIED A HUGE STORY SAYING 20% OF BOMBAY'S GAY MEN ARE HIV POSITIVE. BUT THE FIRST REACTION FROM THE GAY COMMUNITY IN BOMBAY WAS ANGER. OUR WHOLE IDEA OF THE SURVEY AND FINDINGS WAS TO TAKE THIS ISSUE TO THE MAINSTREAM SOCIETY, NOT CREATE SENSATIONAL HEADLINES. BUT OK, ON SECOND THOUGHTS, MAYBE I SAID, PEOPLE WILL NOW GET UP AND REALIZE. BELIEVE ME, FOR THE TWO WEEKS FOLLOWING THE SURVEY, THROUGH INTERNET LISTS... I HAD 120 REQUESTS FOR THE COPY OF THE STUDY, AND NOT ONE REQUEST FROM BOMBAY. I WAS SO DEMORALIZED. WHY AM I DOING WHAT I AM DOING WHEN PEOPLE DON'T GIVE A FUCK? WHEN NOBODY IS BOTHERED.

A LARGE AMOUNT OF WORK THAT HAPPENS AT HUMSAFAR CENTRES AROUND THE LOWER INCOME GROUP MSMS – BUT THE SURVEY AND STUDIES THAT WE HAVE CONDUCTED HAVE LOOKED AT DIFFERENT INCOME GROUPS. THE FEAR IS THAT IF YOU ARE A PART OF HIGHER INCOME GROUPS IN BOMBAY, YOU MAY THINK THAT HIV IS SOMETHING THAT ONLY LOWER INCOME MSM PEOPLE IN BOMBAY HAVE, BUT IT IS NOT TRUE. I WAS TALKING TO AN 18-YEAR-OLD WHO IS A GAY BOMBAY REGULAR AND I ASKED HIM HOW OFTEN HIV

WAS DISCUSSED AMONG HIS FRIENDS. HE SAID NEVER. NOW IF FOR AN 18-YEAR-OLD TODAY, IT IS NOT AN ISSUE AT ALL, THEN IT IS VERY DANGEROUS. ARE WE GROWING UP WITH A GENERATION THAT IS IMMUNE TO THE DANGERS POSED BY HIV OR ARE WE GROWING UP WITH A GENERATION THAT IS JUST NOT AWARE? BOTH ARE SCARY.

ONE OF THE POINTS RAISED BY GAY BOMBAY PEOPLE WAS THAT IF THE PREVALENCE RATE IS SO HIGH, WE DON'T SEE SO MANY PEOPLE DYING. BUT I AM SEEING. WHAT YOU ARE NOT SEEING, I AM SEEING. DO YOU REALIZE THAT THERE MAY BE PEOPLE WHO COME TO GAY BOMBAY MEETS AND PARTIES TO SOCIALIZE, BUT THEY COME TO ME BECAUSE THEY ARE POSITIVE? HE IS STILL GOING TO THE GROUP AND DANCING AND TALKING. BUT HE HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO TELL THE GROUP HIS STATUS. SO THAT IS A DRAWBACK ON THE PART OF GAY BOMBAY. FORGET THE FEAR THAT HE MAY BE INFECTING OTHERS.... THE RIGHT MESSAGE HAS TO GO THROUGH.

Registration

The people that I interviewed affiliated with Humsafar were disappointed that Gay Bombay had not got itself registered formally as a charitable organization. This, they felt would give them official stature in the eyes of the law, and also enable them to be part of initiatives like INFOSEM (Indian Network for Sexual Minorities), an umbrella groups of organizations working all over India on issues of sexuality, health and human rights. However, the members of Gay Bombay's core group were reluctant to do so for a variety of reasons – first and foremost, the unpopularity of this measure among most of its members and secondly, even if the group wanted to be registered, it would have to do so under a health agenda, like Humsafar, as there was "no standard in Indian law" (Harbhajan) that would recognize Gay Bombay's profile. Karim stated that the group had no pressing needs for registration of any kind.

WE ARE NOT AN AMBITIOUS GROUP. WE ARE ALSO SELF-SUSTAINABLE. PRESSURE OF LOTS OF EXTERNALLY FUNDED GROUPS IS THERE TO PERFORM, HAVE LONG-TERM PLANS, ETC. BY FUNDING AGENCIES NATURALLY. WE DON'T HAVE FUNDING AGENCIES. WE HAVE VERY FEW EXPENSES – A SMALL MARK UP ON SOME PARTIES GOES TO FUND OUR ACTIVITIES LIKE WEBSITE, ETC. NO LONG-TERM PLANS AND AMBITIONS.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

While the points of disagreement were many, I also saw enough indications that bridges between the two organizations and the viewpoints they represent could, and indeed were being built. To start with, most of the interviewees, even while expressing critical views, were deeply appreciative of the work being carried out by both organizations. David Woolvine (2000) has called this 'tactical pragmatism' – or the "ability to distance [oneself] from [certain] organizations and from some of the goals or tactics of the organizations while at the same time supporting the organizations."[26]

GUL: I THINK HUMSAFAR IS GOOD – AT LEAST THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE FIGHTING FOR US. I DON'T THINK I COULD DO THE SAME. I DON'T HAVE THE BOLDNESS AND STRENGTH THEY HAVE.

OM: I WONT BE ANTI-HUMSAFAR OR ANTI-GAY BOMBAY – HUMSAFAR IS DOING GOOD WORK. HUMSAFAR HAS THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT THAT THE COMMUNITY NEEDS RIGHT NOW. GAY BOMBAY IS ALSO DOING GOOD WORK.

RAHIM: HUMSAFAR MAY BE DOING CERTAIN WORK. I AM NOT AT ALL DISCREDITING GAY BOMBAY, THEY ARE ALSO DOING THEIR OWN WORK.... AS LONG AS WE ARE NOT OBSTRUCTING EACH OTHER'S WORK AND ALL CONTRIBUTING....

HARBHAJAN: ALL OF THEM ARE PLAYING A ROLE...IF I LAND UP AT GAY BOMBAY AND NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT, I WILL FEEL ISOLATED. I MAY DISCOVER A BETTER PLACE IN ANOTHER GROUP. SIMILARLY FOR ME, I

WAS DISILLUSIONED AT HUMSAFAR, BUT I FOUND MY PLACE
AT GAY BOMBAY. THESE COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE LARGER
GROUP ALL HELP EACH OTHER. YOU FIND YOUR CLIQUE
SOMEWHERE.

Secondly, I felt that it was too pat to simplify, as many of my interviewees seemed to do, that Humsafar = *kothis*, *hijras*, HIV work and hatred of married gay men, while Gay Bombay = dance parties, upper class people and internet. I observed that Humsafar organized social events regularly, for example, a weekly open-to-all meeting at its premises called 'Sunday High', which took the form of discussions, film screenings and sometimes live performances. They also organized New Year's Eve parties, regular Friday town hall style gatherings and other smaller scale events. Likewise, despite criticisms of sex phobia and drag phobia, I noticed that Gay Bombay did hold community events like workshops on safe sex (including HIV), and had also organized a drag party privately, in one of the core group member's homes. Moreover, its website was a useful provider of HIV related information, including gay-friendly testing centers in and around Bombay. Again, despite the notion that Humsafar was anti-married gay men, I discerned that a lot of their services, including HIV-related and other type of counseling, were directed towards married gay men and their spouses, across all income categories.

As I have mentioned earlier *Bombay Dost* magazine and the Humsafar Trust played and important part in the narratives of my interviewees. For several respondents who had previously only referenced Western material, discovering *Bombay Dost* was their first experience with "narratives in an Indian context" (Karim). In fact a lot of the older respondents and current Gay Bombay regulars like

Pratham, Pulkit or Cholan, used to help publish or promote the magazine, conduct

Humsafar's intervention programs or simply attend the regular Friday meets, and I

also observed several college going students like Om and Senthil who continued to

volunteer at Humsafar while simultaneously attending Gay Bombay events and

parties in the present day. I sensed complex feelings and deep divisions within

them about how they wanted Gay Bombay to be perceived as and the direction in

which it should head. There were heated debates at several of the Gay Bombay

weekend meetings that I attended; I have observed regular flare ups about the six

issues noted above on the Gay Bombay mailing list over the past year and a half

and I am aware that the core group has been meeting regularly to discuss this

topic.

Several of my interviewees reasoned that there were disagreements in every

community (Murgesh: "I don't think there is a united gay identity anywhere else in

the world.") and in fact, in India, the divisions within the queer community were not

as deep as they were in some other countries. While some felt that the differences

could not be resolved and were best left alone, others were of the opinion that a

united front was possible and desirable (Om: "[It] is what any minority does.") and

the need of the hour was for the two organizations to work together.

> GOPAL: DO WE HAVE TO BE LIKE THE REST OF SOCIETY?
> MAYBE NOT UTOPIAN, BUT WE ARE THE ONES WHO ARE
> EXCLUDED ALL THE TIME. MAYBE THE LEAST WE CAN DO IS
> NOT CREATE BARRIERS, NOT BE EXCLUSIVE.

I found some indications of an emerging unity during my time spent in

Bombay when I understood that the Gay Bombay and Humsafar organizers had

mutually decided to hold their events every alternate Sunday, so that the Gay Bombay meets and Sunday Highs wouldn't clash and cross attendance would be possible. I attended one such Sunday High meeting at the Humsafar Trust premises that dealt with the rising problem of male hustlers in Bombay city and noticed the presence of several Gay Bombay regulars there.

I also discerned that Gay Bombay as a group, despite the objection of some of its members, but staying within the ambit of the social space that it was comfortable operating in, had already started to take small steps towards become less insular. "Without feeling that it will threaten its own system," (Murgesh) the group had begun to structure some of its dance parties as fundraisers for projects organized by other LBGT groups such as the Larzish LBGT film festival in 2003, and the Calcutta Pride walk of 2005.

KARIM: THERE ARE PEOPLE WITHIN THE CORE GROUP WHO ARE CLOSE TO OTHER GROUPS. SOME OF US ARE FRIENDLY WITH HUMSAFAR, OTHERS WITH THE *KOTHI* COMMUNITIES OR LESBIAN COMMUNITIES. THROUGH THE DIFFUSE NATURE OF THE GROUP, WE MANAGE TO COMPACT OTHER GROUPS. WE HAVE REALIZED THAT WE DO NEED TO DO THIS IN A FORMAL WAY, WHICH IS WHY WE HAVE THE CONCEPT OF FUNDRAISERS. IF SOMEONE APPROACHES US WITH SPECIFIC PROJECTS THAT WE THINK WORTHWHILE, WE DO ORGANIZE FUNDRAISERS. WE RECOGNIZE THAT THROUGH OUR PARTIES AND FILM FESTIVALS, WE CAN ACCESS THIS LARGER QUEER COMMUNITY – SINCE WE HAVE THIS ABILITY TO REACH OUT, WE SHOULD USE IT. THE ONE THING THAT FRUSTRATES ME PERSONALLY ABOUT THE PARTIES IS THAT WE GET ALL THESE GAY GUYS TOGETHER AND ITS AMAZING BUT MAYBE WE SHOULD DO A LITTLE BIT MORE THAT MAKES THEM THINK OF THEMSELVES AS A COMMUNITY AND ITS ARGUABLE THAT ITS NOT POSSIBLE TO DO THAT IN A PARTY, BUT MAYBE WE SHOULD STILL TRY.

Love, Actually
Happiness is waking up next to J in the morning, the blanket entangled between your four legs. Last night, before going to bed, he serenaded you with Bach fugues on his violin. Now,

you hear his breath rise and fall, and see his face, serene and content, splayed across half of your pillow, and you know that you will do anything (fight battles, climb mountains, sit through an entire episode of Jerry Springer) that needs to be done to protect this angel. You slowly tiptoe out of bed, put the kettle to boil and crawl back in for a cuddle. You smother your sweetheart with kisses, hugs and bites, urging him to get up in time for his early morning lecture. He yawns and stretches out his feline form; his crusty almond eyes open unhurriedly and then the sun comes out as a smile begins to form on his lips. I love you, he whispers and you feel unimaginably invincible, powerful... alive.

You sing together to 106.7 Magic FM (Boston's continuous soft rock) in the shower and subconsciously and silently, a harmonious routine begins to develop – you soap while he shampoos; you shave while he brushes his teeth; you apply lip balm while he smothers on the body lotion. You observe the same synchronization while cooking together, shopping for groceries, or scouting for the good free food at the MIT graduate student Sunday brunches. You begin to recognize his moods and tastes, preempt his needs and give him his space when he needs it.

You come to know well everyone that is a part of his daily existence – the professors he likes, the classmates he doesn't, the homework that he can never seem to finish on time, the financial success of his mother's clinic in Tokyo. You hold hands and walk through the Infinite Corridor and do not flinch when you see your crush from last year pass you by. You invite him to your departmental, community and other social engagements, and go to all of his. You begin to plan a life together, and argue over the holiday destinations you will go to, the color of the house you plan to have, brand of the car that you will buy and the race of the children you will have. You even think of doing a PhD if that can keep you in Boston for the next few years that he will need to complete his. You introduce him to Prada and Hindi songs and Bollywood movies and in turn, learn about Cowboy Bebop, Schubert, and umami. When he goes to visit his family in Japan for a month, you count the days, hours and then minutes until his return. Now, all your previous failures at love seem to have been worth it; you acknowledge that happiness is really all that it's made out to be.

The Imagined Future

How did the inhabitants of Gay Bombay imagine their own personal futures as well as the future of the group? Many respondents were confident that India would become more gay friendly in the future.

NACHIKET: FRAGMENTATION OF THE FAMILY AS A UNIT; ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE WILL INCREASE AND START COMING AT AN EARLIER AGE. THERE IS GOING TO BE A DISTINCTLY GREATER SENSE OF EXPOSURE TO EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN LIFESTYLES. ALL THESE WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Some were apprehensive that the divisions within the gay movement in the country "on the basis of class, gender and politically too," (Vidvan) would hamper the cause. Murgesh and Cholan felt that although there was a lot of progress being made in terms of gay visibility, the real challenges lay ahead, and the path would not be easy.

> MURGESH: IT IS WONDERFUL THAT WE ARE A DEMOCRACY BUT THERE ARE VERY FRIGHTENING FRINGE GROUPS. THERE ARE ALSO A LOT OF VERY INTELLIGENT, INTELLECTUAL PEOPLE WORKING FOR THE COMMUNITY FROM THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY AND LEGAL COMMUNITY. THESE PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT HUMAN, RIGHTS, THE RIGHTS OF MINORITIES...THEY HAVE BEEN HELPING US ON THEIR OWN, WORKING IN OUR FAVOR. HELPING US TO FIGHT AGAINST 377, WILL HELP US FOR GAY MARRIAGES TOO... IT WILL TAKE VERY LONG, ... BUT I AM CONFIDENT THAT [PROGRESS] WILL COME ABOUT.
>
> CHOLAN: WHAT WE HAVEN'T DONE IS TALK TO THE BIGOTS. WE HAVE BEEN CONFIDENCE BUILDING BETWEEN EACH OTHER AND SAYING WE ARE OKAY AND WE HAVE THESE SUPPORT STRUCTURES. BUT LET US TAKE THIS TO THE BIGOTS NOW AND REASON WITH THEM AND SAY STOP ALL THIS BULLSHIT ABOUT GAY MEN IN INDIA SPREADING HIV. I MEAN COME ON – STRAIGHT MEN IN THIS COUNTRY ARE SPREADING HIV. LETS NOT HAVE ALL THIS TALK ABOUT WESTERN CULTURE, BECAUSE WE ARE THERE EVERYWHERE; LET'S BE MORE VISIBLE ABOUT IT. THERE HAVE BEEN FEW SMALL LINKS MADE WITH POLITICAL PARTIES. I THINK NOW WE CAN PROBABLY CALL THE BIGOTS AND SAY LETS HAVE A MATURE DISCUSSION AND A DEBATE, WHICH YOU COULDN'T FEW YEARS AGO. NONE OF THIS COMES WITHOUT A COST, OF COURSE THERE WILL BE UPS AND DOWNS LIKE WITH ANY OTHER MOVEMENT AND THERE WILL BE A COST FOR SOME PEOPLE INVOLVED.

With regard to the future of Gay Bombay, many respondents were comfortable with it exactly as it existed. Some of the core group members wondered if it wasn't getting too "jaded...mechanical and streamlined" (Murgesh). From the others, some pitched for an increased engagement with activism and

inclusiveness of "not only of lower-income groups, but also queer women." (Husain)

Cholan and Asim, suggested steps that Gay Bombay could take, even while staying true to its mandate of not being involved in political activism. Asim was keen that the group promote a vaccination drive for hepatitis B, while Cholan suggested using the group's different channels to route out important information within the community, such as "health information, information about how to deal with hustlers, awareness on how to protect yourself, STIs [Sexually Transmitted Infections] and HIV, coming out..."

> CHOLAN: IT SEEMS THAT THERE IS A YOUNGER GENERATION OF PEOPLE THAT COME INTO GAY BOMBAY AND THEN MOVE OUT AFTER HAVING FOUND THEMSELVES QUICKLY AND THEN JUST ATTENDING THE PARTIES. I THINK IT WOULD BE GOOD TO HAVE A SENSE IN THE YOUNGER COMMUNITY THAT THIS IS NOT JUST ABOUT ME, IT'S ALSO ABOUT A WHOLE LOT OF PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE ALL THE SUPPORT STRUCTURES... I THINK GAY BOMBAY DOES A GREAT SERVICE THROUGH PARENTS' MEETS – BUT IT'S DIFFICULT TO BROAD BASE THAT. I THINK IT WOULD BE NICE IF EVEN THIRTY PERCENT OF THE PARTY CROWD SITS AND THINKS ABOUT THEIR RESPONSIBILITY BEYOND THE PARTY SCENE TOWARDS THE LARGER COMMUNITY.

On a personal level, Mike wanted to become a "role model for the community" and "start scholarships and increase awareness." Rustom, who was located in Ahmedabad, expressed a desire to start a gay support group in the city, on the lines of Gay Bombay. (I was happy to note that he achieved this goal a few months subsequent to our interview.) Several respondents who were single imagined a life with a boyfriend, a life partner or a husband.

> GUL: I THINK THE COOLEST THINGS WOULD BE TO HOLD HANDS AND WALK ON THE ROADS OF BOMBAY WITH MY LOVER. THAT IS MY DREAM. BEING WITH SOMEONE, CANDLE LIGHT DINNERS IF POSSIBLE, STAYING WITH THAT LOVER...

NIHAR: I WANT A LOVER. IF NOT CHILDREN, AT LEAST A DOG OR A CAT. I WANT A HOME. I AM AFRAID OF ENDING UP ALONE. MY FRIENDS TELL ME THAT FOR TWENTY, THAT'S STUPID THINKING, BUT I AM AFRAID.

MOHNISH: MY DREAM LIFE WOULD BE TO LIVE WITH THAT PERSON IN INDIA AS A COUPLE... I WOULD LOVE IF HE STAYS WITH MY FAMILY AND ME, WITH MY MOM AND DAD. BUT THAT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE.

ISAAC: I WILL HAVE A GAY MARRIAGE. MY FAMILY WILL COME AND DANCE. SING WEDDING SONGS. I JUST HAVE TO FIND A GUY. I WANT A *VAISHNAV GUJJU* GUY. I THINK THAT IF MY MOM AND GRANDFATHER ARE OKAY IF I AM MARRYING A GUY, WHY CAN'T I GET A *VAISHNAV* GUY SO THEY CAN BE MORE COMFORTABLE. TODAY... IN 2004, I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE THIS *VAISHNAV* GUY IS – BUT I KNOW I WILL GET MARRIED TO HIM BECAUSE I HAVE VISUALIZED IT.

But Yudhisthir was fearful of the future.

RIGHT NOW IT DOES LOOK A LITTLE DEPRESSING. I AM THIRTY, I HAVEN'T HAD A RELATIONSHIP, AND I DON'T KNOW IF I WILL EVER HAVE ONE. I AM LOOKING AHEAD TO THIRTY YEARS OF LIVING ALONE. IT LOOKS SCARY SO I TRY NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT. PARENTS – WHEN YOU COME OUT TO THEM, AFTER THEY HAVE GOTTEN OVER YOU BEING GAY, AND THEM NOT HAVING GRANDCHILDREN AND STUFF... THE ONE THING THEY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT IS: HOW WILL YOU MANAGE WHEN YOU ARE ALONE? THAT'S A BRIDGE I WILL CROSS WHEN I COME TO IT. THAT IS TOO SCARY FOR ME. WHEN YOU READ ABOUT PEOPLE WHO LIVE ALONE AND ARE KILLED, AND STUFF. I DON'T WANT TO GO THERE NOW.

Chapter 6
Conclusion: Disco *Jalebi*

Observations, concerns, hopes

> *Often truth is neither this nor that. Or rather it is a bit of both – this and that. The truth can rest on the threshold, in the twilight, somewhere in the middle, between contradictions, slipping in as a possibility between two realities...* [1]

This chapter covers my analysis of how Gay Bombay came about, what being gay means to its members and how they negotiate locality and globalization, their sense of identity as well as a feeling of community within its online/offline world. My conclusion aims at a compromise between the need to make a fully knitted closure – weaving all my threads together in a giant sweep – and the realities of ambivalence and the futility of drawing any definite end results from such a polyvocal endeavor. My compromise, just like the rest of the work, is a little bit of this and a little bit of that.

Who am I?

Friend cosmopolitan grandson top shopaholic son boss gay teacher brother bottom male Hindu student advisor fat Indian gossip homo ingénue foodie catalyst Bollyqueen pansy scholar actor... oh, fuck it! How do they expect me to compress my identity into a little Friendster box that says 'About Me'? I write: "I'm fun loving, trusting, sensitive, high-spirited, curious, zany and passionate. I love meeting new people with interests and passions different from mine. I enjoy hugs, languid afternoons in bookstores, picnics by the river, love stories with happy endings, orange sunsets, railway stations, Pringles Sour Cream and Onion, chicken a la Kiev, *the color red,* Acqua Di Parma, *masala tea, oxidized silver, sunshine... I believe in both eternity and transience" and stop. It seems so put on, and incomplete. Is this really the way to meet Mr. Right? (I hit send, just to be safe.)*

I am a time traveler slithering in and out of many skins. crossing timezones into different Bombay worlds every day. Shop, shop shop. This could be New York or Paris. Except that couture doesn't cost you and arm and a leg (Oh dah-ling....I just made a pair of fab-bu-

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lous pink raw silk pants from my tailor.... you'll never believe how good they look!) and you can have Pepsi and lassi next to each other. Broadband and cheap servants. Cable and Shiv Sainiks. Expensive Martinis and 40 different types off coffees. But also fucking outstanding street chaat. Tall buildings right next to slums. Party all night, and while coming out avoid the accusing eyes of beggar children, who're waiting, with grimy hand outstretched, be careful not to stumble over the bodies sleeping on the city's streets. Unlike other cities, Bombay doesn't hide its poverty, its misery in faraway slums, it co-exists right there next to its opulence. Hehehe, it all sounds so fucking clichéd, that it's laughable. (Like one of those desi writers who exoticize India and make fat sums of money writing for the West, and then jealous journalists back home enjoy ripping them apart to shreds while secretly wishing that it would have been them but their manuscript came back, rejected, so sad...what to do we are like this only, par aakhir dil hai Hindustani, baba!) But these are also my clichés and I'm sorry that they're so pathetically lame but really, what to do, man... I turn reflexive whenever I am in India. I mean, how can you not, na – when the entire world and their country cousins come to India for their Karma Cola® spirituality fix and dump their angsty shit on it – why the fuck shouldn't I, you know? To start with, I belong here. Right?

I am Bombay. Pukka, one hundred percent (guaranteed, otherwise free exchange, boss – tension kaikoo leney ka?) I belong to Colaba and Bandra and Lokhandwala and Borivali in a way I have never belonged to Cambridge or Manama or anywhere else I have lived. I am a kitsch Krishna poster on the street outside the Prince of Wales museum. I am the frenzy of Oval maidan cricket. I am the fury of Ganpati at Chowpatty. I am soft Holi gulal smeared on a wet forehead. I am a crunchy papad in a Chinese restaurant. I am pink feather boa draped Hema Malini, slowly descending in a basket, from the sky singing Mere Naseeb Mein. I am a bright orange disco jalebi, hot and soft and syrupy, eaten after dancing for 3 hours non-stop at a Gay Bombay dance party, with random strangers who've suddenly become my new best friends. I climb back into the basket and rise high above the heat and noise in my circular jalebi pattern that makes me dizzy... From far above, this seems to be any group of gay men dancing anywhere in the world. Same dance floor layout. Same crystal ball. Same strobe lights. Same DJ booth, same smoke, same everything, yaar. Except that I can hear the faint strains of 'Hai Re Hai Tera Ghungta' playing, and I have a sweet aftertaste in my mouth. And this feels like home in a way no other place in the world does.

I am gay Bombay. I am straight acting gay Bombay. I am straight acting and hating it gay Bombay. I am straight acting and enjoying my straight acting life gay Bombay. I am I wish I could change but I can't gay Bombay. I am I change a little bit every day gay Bombay. I am a coconut. Brown outside, white inside. (But not white white. Brown white. But brown is the new white, didn't you know? Not the new black? So confusing. Not really. It's simple – repeat after me: same, only different. Same, only different) I am a spice. ("Namaste!" Ka-ching. Same only different.) Exoticize! It's an order. No, subvert, subvert, you're a subaltern who speaks, no? Subsume. Subvert. Subjugate. Subkuch. Follow? Yessir. Sameonlydifferent. I float high above... now everything is a speck.

I am a cloud, evaporating in Bombay's sweltering heat... I can feel the monsoon pouring out from within my skin...I am feeling alive and full and soon, I will burst open... but till then, I am pregnant with infinite possibilities... I want to float, float, float...

How did Gay Bombay Come About?

A simplistic linear explanation would go something like this: Globalization and liberalization happened, Media exposure to gay lifestyles happened, bars and social spaces opened up, gay activism began, and then Gay Bombay came about. While this line of logic is not entirely wrong, it is un-nuanced. There were several forces at work that led to the unique set of circumstances in which gay Bombay was engendered; the post 1991 changes in India were only the last piece within the larger jigsaw.

The first piece would have to be the existence of a significant English speaking population in India, which can be attributed first of all, to the colonial exercise of "creating a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."[2] The British pursued this goal by spreading Missionary style English education throughout the country and following that up by opening up certain jobs in the British Indian administration to Indians that spoke and wrote English. After the British left India in 1947, India's southern states vehemently opposed the imposition of Hindi (the language of central and northern India) as the national language. Prime Minister Nehru's solution was a compromise which stated that "while Hindi would remain the national language, it would not be

imposed on non-Hindi speaking states. Instead English would henceforth enjoy the status of the official language."[3] (Kapur, 2002) This compromise ensured the continuation of English's predominance over the years (in parliament, in the courts, in trade and commerce and especially in higher education) and proved to be beneficial to Gay Bombay in many ways. To list just two:

1. When the Internet emerged, predominantly in English, there was already a ready constituency of English speaking, upper middle class gay men, ready to exploit its opportunities and utilize it for their benefit.

2. The call center boom, when it happened, found a treasure trove of ready and able workers, including Gay Bombay's members, who could leverage their English speaking abilities as their passport to a better life.

Secondly, as Varma points out in his book *Being Indian* (2004), India after independence pursued a lop sided and "socially callous" educational policy – tertiary education received more funds than primary education and basic literacy training; "while the campaign against illiteracy languished... some of the finest technical institutions were set up as part of an enviable infrastructure of higher education,"[4] and thus, today, "a country with the largest number of people in the world who cannot read and write produces a veritable army of technically proficient graduates."[5] Entrance to this army is highly competitive (for example, in 2003, over 200,000 students took the entrance examination for admission into the Indian Institute of Technology, but only 2000 were admitted, a success rate of less than 1%[6]) – but once you're in, the rewards in terms of salaries and the ability to lead a

life of privilege are sumptuous. I don't want to comment on the social inequality of the system here, but for the purpose of this thesis, it is clear to see that the technology and job booms that followed the opening up of the Indian economy in 1991 (and their subsequent ripple effects on Indian gayness, as noted in chapter 2) would not have been possible, had there not been an already existing structure of higher education that shepherded young and ambitious Indian graduates on to the assembly line to a shining techie future.

Thirdly, as we have also seen in chapter 2, there was *already* a thriving social gay community existing in Bombay city during the 70s and 80s. In the 1990s *Bombay Dost* magazine and the Humsafar trust had laid the groundwork for the possibility of Gay Bombay with their constant outreach through the media. One should remember that even in the Western world – sexual politics and social formations only came to the forefront after the 60s and took off in the 1970s and 80s. Jackson has pointed out that there were gay cultures in countries like Philippines, Thailand. Australia and New Zealand even in the 60s, just like in India. Thus, it would be wrong to consider the emergence of gayness in India (and in Bombay, specifically) entirely as an after effect of globalization or an emulation of Western standards, instead, as Jackson suggests, we could consider it as a 'parallel development'.

> The issue is not so much to consider how these cultures appeared after they did in the West, but rather how they emerged at much the same time as they did in many parts of the West. It may be necessary to revise current accounts which imagine the West, in particular the United States is the original site of

contemporary gay and lesbian identities and instead
see these identities emerging by a process of parallel
development in diverse locales. (Jackson, 2000)[7]

Gay Bombay was born in the late 1990s out of the friction, overlaps and

disjunctures of the six scapes recounted in chapter 2.

We saw in chapter 3 that the changed mediascape played a significant

influence in enabling news stories about gay rights and gay cultures and lifestyles

from abroad to circulate freely within the Indian imagination. As my respondents

noted, it was a big thing for them just to be able to see the existence of gay people

in other countries; it validated their own existence and made them feel that they

were not alone. More importantly, the changed mediascape allowed stories about

Indian gay rights and gayness in an *Indian* context to circulate widely, and the

coverage in the English language press at least was by and large positive. The

issues covered were diverse (gay activism and conferences, the pink rupee, lesbian

suicides, corporate HR policy and LBGT issues…); in some cases the media

reflected societal concerns (for example, in framing the emergence of

homosexuality in the popular perception as a debate on globalization), in other

cases, it played advocate (as in the articles advocating for the abolishment of

section 377). Page 3 culture and the press tabloidification of the 1990s contributed

significantly to the discursive idea of gayness as a part and parcel of everyday

urban life. The media also contextualized Indian gayness within the larger scheme

of Indian sexuality as a whole, through its periodic sexual surveys.

Thus the media performed the important role of an ambassador of gayness

in the minds of Indian middle and upper middle classes. It enabled gayness to be brought out of the closet, into the public sphere. It activated the imagination of a larger gay Indian community than what already existed. Every time that there was a story that could be used as a hook (the *Fire* controversy of 1998, the Pushkin Chandra double murders of 2004, etc), the media upped the ante by using the story to debate and discuss Indian homosexuality at large, thus constantly reinforcing the imagination and construction of Indian gayness with every iteration. Indian literature, films and English theatre as performed in the country all added to the news media's steady support and advocacy of the gay cause. All this cemented the simultaneously emerging gay ideoscape.

The financescape of economic liberalization and the subsequent rapid economic growth within the service sector (especially retail, technology and BPO services) resulted in the rapid expansion and transformation of the great Indian middle class into a "pan Indian domestic class of consumers." (Khilnani 2001[8])

> The pressures of the market, both global and local... [are] producing what one might call a commodification of Indianness. The workings of the market are creating a pan-Indian domestic class of consumers who wish to have diversity packaged and served up to them. The new taste for unfamiliar food from other parts of the country (think of the invention of 'regional cuisines'), fashion, domestic ornament, *vaastu*, astrology, and now a search for new travel destinations, all are signs of this new hunger for consuming India. It is a strategy of internal exoticisation and domestication. (Khilnani, 2001)[9]

Side by side to this commodification and consumerization of Indianness was the creation of a 'pan Indian culture.' (Varma, 2004)

The new supranational Indian culture... has given common symbols and icons to Indians even in the remotest parts of the country. Riding on a media and communications revolution, it has spread faster than any cultural development before. It permeates every aspect of everyday life: dress, food, art, language, employment and entertainment. It has the arrogance of the upstart, and the self-absorption of the new. Irreverent in expression, it is dismissive of critics, and has no time for apologists. What it lacks in pedigree, it makes up for in confidence, for it can count on the support of the people. It's greatest strength is that – excluding perhaps the absolutely marginalized, it includes more people across India in a common language of communication in more areas of everyday life than ever before. The new culture is still evolving. It is difficult to define exactly, but impossible to ignore in the nationwide appeal of masala *dosa* and *tandoori* chicken, the rhythms of Daler Mehendi and AR Rahman, the evolution of 'Hinglish', the ubiquity of *salwar-kameez*, the popularity of Hindi films, the audience for cable TV, the mania for cricket, and the competition for IIT-JEE, to name just a few. What has facilitated the growth of this pan-Indian culture? Certain answers are obvious, such as the reach of Indian films and the exponential growth in the popularity of television. The revolution in communication has helped, as has the huge increase in mobility. Common aspirations and the solidarity imparted by similar constraints...the gradual but definite democratization of the social order.... countrywide opportunities, standard institutions and curricula... the presence of the Indian state.... the consequence is a far more homogenized India than Indians are aware of or willing to accept." (Varma, 2004)[10]

For many years, the semi socialist state had been thrusting its definition of what was modern and national down the throats of the citizens... But..."micro narratives of film, television, music and other expressive forms... allowed modernity to be rewritten... as a vernacular globalization.... (Appadurai, 1996)[11]

Because this globalization was vernacular, it was accepted as something very Indian. To inelegantly adapt some Appadurian terminology, there was a case of cultural homo-Indianization and cultural hetero-Indianization occurring simultaneously with vernacular globalization. It is important to remember (and this is a salient feature of cultural heterogenization, as we have encountered in chapter 1) that various Indian historical traditions continued to flourish along with the reformulated modernity. For example, the popularity of Indian pop music was accompanied by a revival of interest in Indian classical music. (Varma, 2004)[12]

For our purpose, we see that this timely emergence of pop cultural homogeneity, pan-Indianness and vernacular globalization enabled gay identified Indian individuals to 'imagine' a distinctly *Indian* gay identity, in opposition to a Western gay identity. As we read in chapter 5, my respondents were adamant that they were both *Indian* and *gay*; they had created this composite identity by drawing on and appropriating Western cultural elements in combination with the aforementioned homogenous Indian elements that were being articulated at the same time. Appadurai points out that the work of imagination "is neither purely emancipatory, nor entirely disciplined, but is a space of contestation...."[13] I was witness to this contestation taking place as my respondents answered me about how they negotiated this imagined hybrid gayness, individually and collectively. (It is this combination of radically diverse elements that is perhaps, the defining factor perhaps of Indianness – never a case of eitherness, but always of bothness; both this *and* that. This can be frustrating, but also liberating, as we shall see later.)

Anyway, in a scenario like the above, the advent of the Internet proved to be the tipping point, which served as a catalyst for the expansion of the gay community. It was the right technology that emerged at the right time and soon enough, Gay Bombay was born. Its anonymity and asynchronous nature (both the site and mailing list did not need to be accessed in real time; thus people did not need to have their own computers – they could go to cybercafés whenever convenient, or access the service from their offices) made it an instant hit among the educated, English speaking men that it targeted.

In chapter 2, I commented that all the recent changes in the Indian gay landscape occurred within the *Hindutva* ('Hinduness') charged, schizophrenic political environment of the mid 1990s and wondered why the establishment did not jump upon these as yet another Western influence to be fought tooth and nail and squashed. My explanation for this official tolerance of gayness through the 1990s is as follows.

Firstly, it must be understood that the changes we are talking about were really very tiny and only affected a small section of urban India. Homosexuality is in any case pretty much a non-issue for any Indian political party – national or regional; it is not even a blip on their political agenda radars, and I certainly don't see that changing in the immediate future. This does not mean that the fundamentalist governments in power at both the state and central level were not aware of the existence and spread of Gay Bombay; they certainly were, but it is my

contention that gayness in general was tolerated by subsuming it into the 'imagination' of the ideal nation state.

The mid-1990s were a period of increased political chauvinism; the cultural 'threats' supposedly posed by globalization and the opening up of the economy had resulted in a hybrid outward looking / inward looking behavior amongst the mainstream middle classes. Being Indian took on a shrill jingoistic fervor after the nuclear bomb explosions of 1998 and the Kargil battle with Pakistan in 1999. The BJP led government tried to forge an identity for India that stood for belligerence and nationalistic assertion. India was no longer to be imagined as an idealistic Gandhian state, a poor country cousin of the world's superpowers, but a proud international nuclear world power, that would deal with the world on its own terms.

It should be made clear that both the BJP government at the centre and the BJP/Shiv Sena government in power in Bombay from the mid 1990 onward were extremely homophobic; both explicitly and implicitly and practiced what Bachetta (1999) has called "the dual operations of xenophobic queerphobia and queerphobic xenophobia." Within xenophobic queerphobia, being gay or queer is positioned as being non-Indian – it is a marked as a Western import and something against Indian culture. Within queerphobic xenophona – "queerdom is assigned (often metaphorically) to all designated others of the nation, regardless of their sexual identity."[14] Within their kind of nationalistic imagination, there was, of course, no place for homosexuality or difference of any kind, but if by chance, any difference

did manage to raise its head, it was not cut off, but immediately marked and made powerless, and thus non-threatening.

We can see this subsumption of difference in operation within the Hindutva inspired Bollywood films churned out during that period.

> [They] created the apparently contradictory images of a marginalized, stereotyped, and yet benign religious minority and of overwhelmingly harmonious relations between members of the dominant Hindu culture and the Muslim minority, a set of circumstances not unlike those found in the American cinema with regard to that culture's African-American minority. Hindus and Muslims do not normally contest for superiority, women, or other prizes in the Hindi cinema. (Booth, 2005)[15]

I want to specifically point to *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* ('Who am I of Yours?' 1994), the extended marriage video of a film, released in the aftermath of the terrible riots and bomb blasts of 1993, as an excellent example of this display of hegemony. In this film, the Muslim 'threat' is addressed not by exclusion, but by othering, inclusion and taming. As Kazmi (1999) notes, the only Muslim presence in the film is the jovial doctor couple, who are 'othered' by religion, speech (*adaabs* galore, lots of *shaayiri*) and dress (*achkans* and *ghararas*).[16] They function as support staff, offering sage words of advice only when asked, completely marginal to the main plot. Even the lower castes, typified by the servants, get a bigger role, and Laloo, the main servant, is quite an important character. Of course, his servant stature is constantly emphasized throughout, whether through his own expressions of gratitude at the benevolence of his masters, or their continuous insistence that he is 'like a' son or a brother to them. The loyalty of both – the servants and the

Muslim friends – is made explicit; they exist within the periphery of the main Hindu family – that is their place, and that is how they must live, and as long as they understand that, its good. I am reminded of Hardt and Negri's contention that "Empire does not fortify its boundaries to push others away, but rather pulls them within its pacific order, like a powerful vortex."[17] (2000)

One can read the entire slew of Bollywood films that emerged in the 1990s with gay sidekicks keeping this operation in mind. The markedly effeminate, comic gay characters (almost always men) were ridiculed but also indulgently patronized by the protagonists, and effectively neutralized. Thus a Bobby Darling is teased and mocked in whatever film he is a part of, but his place in the youth gang is never in doubt. It is of course understood that he will never behave transgressively with the hero, coo over him or insinuate desire for him. He is accepted, despite being different, because his loyalty as a friend and overall integration into the master narrative overrule his effeminate behavior and implied homosexuality. In *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* itself, there is a song and dance sequence where the lead heroine performs a raunchy sex simulation act with another cross dressing woman, at the end of which, they are both joined by the film's hero, in full drag, but the transgressive element of all this is neutralized due to the comical presentation. Similarly, in the public eye, Ashok Row Kavi is 'othered', and then indulged as a firebrand activist, because ultimately, he is 'one of us' – with his impeccable Hindu credentials, et al.

But let us not forget, whenever the situation gets non-comical, like with the *Fire* controversy, this indulgence stops and the response is vicious and often violent. *Fire* was deemed as an attack by "ultra westernized elite" on "the traditional set up" through "explicit lesbianism and other perversities." [18] (Bhatia in *Organizer*, 1998)

> It proves that modern India wants to become as modern as ancient Greece. And for those who think that this is going backward, the answer is simple – West is best, and nothing coming from the West, ancient or modern, can ever go out of fashion for us. (*Organizer*, 1999)[19]

> That way, one day all the pornographic flings of Mona (sic) Lewinsky-Clinton duo may become the role model, if the aim is to disintegrate the family a la western society. (Bhatia, 1998)[20]

We see countless other instances of clamping down on gayness whenever the discourse around it becomes too public, or too threatening. For example, Naz Foundation workers are arrested in 2001 for running a 'gay sex club' when they are in fact simply doing HIV prevention outreach (see chapter 4), the government and the courts constantly decry homosexuality (see chapter 2), and the current Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh, clearly flustered by a question about same sex marriages by a Canadian journalist, emphasizes that "these kinds of marriage are not appreciated here [in India]."[21]

To summarize, Gay Bombay was formed as a result of the intersection of certain historical conjectures (including an already existing gay history) with the disjunctures caused via the flows of the radically shifting ethnoscape, financescape,

politiscape, mediascape, technoscape and ideoscape of urban India the 1990s. It was allowed space to exist due to its upper class orientation and the relative insignificance of gayness in the larger socio-political scheme of things. Of course, my explanation for the above is "radically context dependent"[22] (Appadurai himself has emphasized that his theories – my reference grid – are insufficiently developed to be even parsimonious models at this point, much less to be predictive theories."[23]); however I find it to be extremely relevant in dispelling the simplistic one sided linear theory (as evinced within the global queering debate, discussed in chapter 1) that gayness is a Western thing, and that its history and circulation in other countries will follow the same path that it has done in the West.

What Does Being Gay Mean in Gay Bombay?

> Large numbers of Asian men and women continue to live within the 'traditional' spaces for gender/sex difference and to understand themselves and their lives in 'pre-gay' terms that often relate more to the pre-industrial rural pasts of their societies than to the post modernizing urban present. However there are also large numbers of men and women who are reacting against what they see as the historic constraint on homoeroticism in their respective societies and who are actively engaging in relocating homoeroticism from the shadows and the periphery to the centre stage of their lives. (Jackson, 2000)[24]

My respondents were polarized between two opposing conceptions of homosexuality. One camp (the majority, let us call them the *BOMgAY* Brigade) equated homosexuality with being gay and wished to assimilate and appropriate the term within the Indian context, recognizing fully well the unique set of

circumstances within which this would take place. For them, social interaction was the key to building a sense of gay community in Bombay, but they recognized that cutting across class and gender norms may be a problem within these kinds of interactions. The other camp (or shall we say, the *Gulabi Aaina* Gang) was vehemently against terms like 'gay' and deemed them Western imports and negative influences and preferred to use indigenous terminology such as '*kothi*' or functional terms like 'MSM'. They were interested in social interaction across class norms, an assimilation of the various LBGT identities that exist in India, and were also concerned with issues such as HIV/AIDS. Both camps used the gay Bombay newsgroup as well as real world events like parties and meetings as a battleground for their respective ideologies. The archive facility of the Gay Bombay newsgroup provides a fascinating and rich look at their debates as they have played out through the volatile posts over the years.

However this is not to suggest that these were the only two positions that my respondents adopted – as we have seen in chapter 5, there existed a variety of other stances that were sandwiched between and around these two prominent takes on the nature of Indian homosexuality. These included reconciliatory stances advocating a middle ground, which echoed Shivananda Khan's (2000) line of reasoning that "to say gay is appropriate and right. But at the same time to denigrate or deny other frameworks of identities and choices is not...."

> Let us stop seeing a debate that pits those who work for gay rights and those who work in preventing HIV/AIDS among men who have sex with men against each other. Let us work together whatever our own

frameworks and priorities, and recognize that in a region of over one billion people there is space for everyone to work out their destinies. (Khan, 2000)[25]

For the gay identified respondents, being gay signified different things to each of them. For some 'gay' just represented their sexual desires, for others it was a political statement or a social identity. Many respondents felt that it was a state of being or a way of life, while some spoke of it as an emotional commitment to other men. For all of them, the common element about being gay was the imagination of themselves as gay, in whatever way they wished to articulate this imagination. (It was fascinating to meet someone like Nachiket, for example. He was married with kids, had never had sex with another man, but still described himself as gay, because he *imagined* himself so.)

Many respondents felt that they were bound by the 'contract of silence' and that being discreet about their sexuality was the pragmatic thing to do. Within this silent space, they found society to be pretty flexible and accommodating with regard to their sexuality. Some, citing responsibilities towards their parents, families and society, had either chosen to get married, or were contemplating doing so in the near future. As Vanita (2001) writes, in India…

> The parental family remains a major locus of social and emotional interaction for adults. There are few public places where people can comfortably interact, so friends are entertained at home and absorbed into the family or turned into fictive kin. The family is also the only form of social security and old age insurance available to most people. This means that heterosexual marriage and parenthood hold many attractions even for homosexually inclined people. Many deal with the dilemma by marrying and then leading a double life.[26]

For these married men, or soon to be married men, marriage did not indicate a change in their sexual identity. They were clear that their marriage was an obligation, but that their sexual gratification would continue to rest with men, even after marriage. There was very little sensitivity expressed towards the feelings or desires of women in these worldviews.

Other respondents were avoiding marriage and devising means to negotiate what was best for them. For some of these individuals, this meant coming out, for others it meant fighting for what they felt was important and making creative compromises to attain their goals. For all respondents, there was a constant reflexivity – an acute consciousness of their thoughts and actions vis a vis their sexuality.

Overall, I conclude that to be gay in Gay Bombay signifies being 'glocal'; gayness here stands for *Indianized* gayness. So, one might dance in a Western style disco anywhere else in the world, but one can only munch on a post-dance *jalebi*[27] in India. My respondents wanted to selectively draw on a buffet of Indian and western influences in conjuring their own *thali*[28] of gayness. Several of them, even though they had access to the El Dorado of 'abroad', still wanted to configure their gay experiences within an Indian matrix. As Cholan said, hanging out in the Castro was not important, but coming back home and being with his father was. Even for the younger Gul, traveling to America opened his eyes to *Queer as Folk* and gay strip bars, but he used the experience to be more confident *in* India.

Gay Bombay is certainly inspired by Western notions of what it means to be gay – its dance parties, PFLAG[29] style meets, website, etc, have all drawn from Western experiences; but they have been customized, glocalized, and made uniquely Indian, uniquely Gay Bombay. Thus as I noted in chapter 1, even though I talk about flows throughout this thesis, I do not want to diminish the agency of my respondents or their locatedness in Bombay itself. For Gay Bombay, as I realized, place did matter, and this was true both offline and online, where even though it was a 'virtual' world, it was still a manifestation of Bombay; a conception of Bombay firmly rooted in the glocal.

How is Identity Negotiated in Gay Bombay?

> The politics of identity generally is driven by the paradox that no identity, no sense of community, and no imputed property of a place ever can be self evident or stable. There are always multiple meanings, many narratives, and inherent instabilities within such entries. (Hansen, 2001)[30]

As we saw in chapter 5, for most of my respondents, being gay was just one aspect of their identity and not the dominating aspect. Family and related obligations and duties were a much more important aspect. This is similar to Seabrook's (1999) analysis that the "English speaking and educated to university level" men that he interviewed did not see "being gay as the main constituent of their identity." "They did however express relief at being able to name this aspect of themselves."[31]

For my respondents, their gay identity was something that was both fixed and negotiated. Being gay was something that was often considered intrinsic – "I always knew that I was this way ever since I can remember" was a popular refrain – but alongside, it was also something that was constructed and played with performatively, in an acutely reflexive manner.

Online, my respondents used the Gay Bombay newsgroup as a "tool, a place and as a way of being,"[32] in order to better understand and makes sense of their sexual and other identities. For them, the Gay Bombay newsgroup (and this was similar to what Berry and Martin concluded from their 2000 study of queer people and the net in East Asia) was "neither a substitute for nor an escape from real life. Nor [was] it simply an extension of existing offline communities and identities. Instead, it [was] a part of lived culture, informed and informing other parts of [their] lives,"[33] and often functioned as a "testing ground for possible selves that can then inform offline identity."[34] Like Campbell (2004), I too saw my respondents "integrating their online and offline experiences into a broader understanding of the reality of everyday life."[35]

In any case, for most of my interviewees, online versus offline distinctions were not as significant as the distinctions between their 'gay' and 'straight' identities. Several of them reported purposefully constructing a straight-acting offline identity that they performed for the outside world and in their day to day lives, while they gay side was only be revealed in safe spaces like Gay Bombay and among close friends.

It was clear that the habitus of my respondents fixed their notion of social identity a great deal. As I have already iterated, being 'Indian', however the respondents chose to define it, was a common thread running through the responses. My interviewees were in a constant state of internal negotiation between their Indianness (and its related social and family expectations and obligations), and what were to them considered to be more Western ideals, such as the quest for personal space and self-centered happiness. Thus though cultural globalization as defined by Apppadurai (flows, etc) did take place in Gay Bombay, factors like nationality and cultural origins mattered, perhaps more to my respondents, as did their educational and social background. I saw this happening again and again in my interviews. I perceived each individual's identity as the product of his own personal interaction between his habitus and the extent to which that he was able to stretch that habitus to allow him to tap into the rapid changes occurring all around him. It would be pointless to generalize. I was under the mistaken assumption when I started my research that the more access that one had to gay themed materials, like books and films, and the more traveled one was internationally, the more out one would be, and the more one would value one's personal space and gay identity, however that might be constructed. But this was far from the case in Gay Bombay.

At the same time, as Bourdieu himself noted, habitus is not something that is constant. It also involves choice and reasoning and while it continues to be affected by geography, family background, gender, etc., it can definitely change based on

one's life experiences. According to Appadurai (1996), the *improvisational* quality of habitus is now being stressed.[36] Certainly, I witnessed a tremendous amount of creativity and improvisation being carried out by my respondents with regards to their habitus, and the various Gay Bombay spaces served as both – the facilitator and the locus – of these changes.

Is Gay Bombay a Community?

Yes, I think so. It is a "community of sentiment"[37] (Appadurai, 1996); of "affirmation and solidarity…[and] self-discovery" (Campbell, 2004)[38]; a gay 'third space', borne out of the collective imagination of its constituents, representing a variety of meanings for them. It is a fluid community – its name fixes its location geographically – but its membership is global. It is an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) and also a divided one (Woolvine, 2000). Its inhabitants, English speaking upper middle class urban gay men, connect to this 'imagined world' via a tangle of wires, satellite signals and fragile human networks. Unlike other gay communities in the West, Gay Bombay serves as a secondary community for its members rather than their primary community. (Insofar as one's primary community is concerned, the blood family still rules the roost here.)

I rather like Phelan's notion of community as a process (1994), "which… is always in a state of becoming, and thus is open to, and requires negotiation."[39] This resonates with Ahmed and Fortier's suggestion of thinking about communities as "never fully achieved, never fully arrived at, even when 'we' already inhabit them,"[40] sites of possibilities as well as reality. Drawing on these accounts, I view Gay

Bombay as a site that is "lived through the desire for community, rather than a site that fulfils and 'resolves' that desire."[41] It is more a common ground rather than a site for commonality – both a space and a place – where community is created as an effect of how the members of gay Bombay "meet on this ground... a ground that is material, but also virtual, real and imaginary."[42]

Modus Vivendi

And so we arrive... back to the future. Gay Bombay turns seven this year and (in the spirit of the proverbial itch), I'd like to offer some thoughts, ideas and suggestions that might be considered by the group as it plans its future. Perhaps these words might be able to generate a discussion that might then be extended beyond the scope of this thesis, into the online/offline spaces of Gay Bombay that I continue to inhabit.

For the Indian LBGT movement, it is clear that the battles need to be fought on multiple fronts, and this is something we already see happening. Legally there are excellent groups like the Lawyer's Collective fighting against article 377. Health wise, there is a lot is being done already (and the Humsafar Trust is doing stellar work in this regard), but a lot more needs to be done, with regard to HIV especially. On the social front, identity based groups like Gay Bombay are provides spaces and opportunities for interaction in a manner that was unimaginable even five years ago.

I am in complete agreement with Gay Bombay's managing committee that their programs constitute activism too, only of a different kind. But I also think that it

is inevitable that the group takes the next step and joins the political struggle purposefully. It must not sit out, indeed it cannot sit out, as the stakes are simply getting too large now; I sincerely feel that their active involvement would be a big boost to the movement.

As Cholan mentioned, the activist movement is entering its crucial phase. The past few years have been spent in having discussions and debates among each other, and in infrastructure building, but this has already been done and now it is time to speak to the bigots, and take the case outside the ghetto. Time for lobbying – smartly and sensibly. Of course, this means that there will be repercussions. It would be foolish to think that increased visibility will not create the necessity for increased surveillance and increased disciplining action by the state. Conflict will arise, and I agree, as Appadurai writes, that this conflict will be resolved, "not by academic fiat, but by negotiations.... both civil and violent."[43] How can the movement prepare for these negotiations? The remainder of this chapter aims at providing an answer to this question.

We have seen throughout this thesis that the conflict between Gay Bombay and Humsafar has been contentious. But these are not the only two groups within the larger movement that are jostling with each other – the movement is full of infighting and bitter rivalries. As my respondent Vidwan observed:

> VIDVAN: RIGHT NOW, THE QUEER WORLD IS BEING INCREASINGLY SPLIT IN INDIA ON GENDER LINES AS WELL AS ON ECONOMIC LINES. THERE SEEM TO BE DIFFERENT SPACES OPERATING FOR GAYS, LESBIANS, *HIJRAS* AND *KOTHIS* INSTEAD OF A SINGLE SPACE FOR ALL QUEER PEOPLES. NOT THAT I DO NOT CONCEDE THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ALL-LESBIAN SPACE OR AN ALL-*KOTHI* SPACE, BUT, IT

DOES SEEM, THAT THESE VARIED SPACES ARE INTERACTING VERY LITTLE AMONG EACH OTHER, AND THIS INCREASES WITH THE ECONOMIC BARRIER BETWEEN MANY GAY AND *KOTHI* SPACES, AS WELL AS THE DIVIDE BETWEEN GAY SPACES ON AN ECONOMIC BASIS AS WELL. INSTEAD OF BRIDGING THE GAP AND UNITING THE STRUGGLES, THE MOVEMENT SEEMS TO BE PROMOTING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THESE VARIOUS GROUPS.

One way of reconciling these differences, as Bhudev told me, was to practice a "politics of exclusion," and by that, he implied that the different sub groups all do their own little numbers, excluding each other from their plans, and not really work towards a unified or common larger agenda. However we both agreed that this could not really be a long-term solution. What might the alternatives be?

It is my belief (and we have seen it play out in this thesis – for example, in the similarities between *Gulabi Aaina* and *BOMgAY* or in the common ground between Humsafar and Gay Bombay) that the divisions within the larger movement are not so insurmountable, nor are the issues so different that a common ground cannot be reached. Perhaps we might be able to construct (to borrow a phrase from India's coalition politics of the past decade) a 'common minimum program' that could be agreed upon by all parties concerned? I am aware that coalitions like INFOSEM and Voices Against 377 exist as an umbrella organization for all the activist groups – but their membership excludes unregistered amorphous entities like Gay Bombay. Perhaps, this common minimum program might provide an opportunity for these entities to be actively involved in the political movement – given the constraints that

they operate under, and recognizing that they fulfill vital needs in the community at large, and their activities are complementary to those of other activist organizations.

What might such a program include? Here are some suggestions that I'd like to put forward as considerations for its manifesto, should such a program ever materialize; I offer these with humility and with the sincere hope of making a constructive contribution towards the movement as it enters a crucial and exciting phase. I have gathered my thoughts under the rubric of *modus vivendi*, which stands for both a way of life, and a negotiated settlement. I borrow the phrase and the spirit in which it is being used from an interview conducted with John Gray in the *New Perspectives Quarterly* Spring 2001 issue, whereby Gray advocates a *modus vivendi* approach to globalization that signifies a desire for 'commodious living'.[44] This approach incorporates the realization that neither extremism nor confrontation will work, accommodation is imperative, and the key at every stage should be "to openly work out conflicts"[45] and move ahead. Thus – *modus vivendi* – or "a negotiation between conflicting interests instead of an insistence on absolute rights."[46]

Collaboration is the key of my *modus vivendi* approach and coalition is its defining organizational mechanism. Coalition politics doesn't mean that the member parties will agree on everything. It just means that there is consensus required to pursue a broad common minimum agenda.

1. *'Strategic Essentialism' + 'Tactical Pragmatism' = Unity within Disparate LBGT Activist Groups*

I am drawn to Gayatri Spivak's (1987) notion of "strategic essentialism" – "a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest."[47] Spivak feels that essentialism (that is a certain essential meaning or property or quality that can be ascribed to something, say a word or a person or a race) is a trap, at the same time conceding that is impossible to be completely non-essential. She resolves the dilemma by pursuing 'strategic essentialism' – or self consciously essentializing in order to accomplish one's goals. Strategic essentialism advocates solidarity in the interest of action, to bring about real change.

Within the queer movement, it is easy to get caught up in infighting and identity politics and lose sight of the larger common objective that all sexual minorities are fighting against – for example, the repeal of section 377. A strategic interventionist approach would recognizes that gay, *kothi, hijra* and other identities are important on the ground, and in people's lives, however reductionist they may appear to be theoretically. It would also recognize these identities as constructs – ways of seeing and being. It would further self-consciously define certain essential qualities of these identities if needed, and reshape others, to achieve larger goals. Adopting strategic essentialism within my *modus vivendi* framework would mean maintaining separate LBGT sub-identities, but tweaking them when needed, and compromising on them, if the situation demands so.

The focus within the different groups should be on maintaining unity through what David Woolvine (2000) has called 'tactical pragmatism' – or the "ability to distance [oneself] from [certain] organizations and from some of the goals or tactics

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of the organizations while at the same time supporting the organizations."[48] We

have seen in the previous chapter how Humsafar and Gay Bombay have worked

together to schedule non-conflicting meetings on every alternative Sunday – so as

to allow cross attendance. This model could be replicated by other LBGT

organizations across the board, that are in similarly strained relationships with each

other.

2. Equitable change needs to be pursued

In order to be sustainable, change has to be equitable. Right now, the

situation is far from so, but then, the LBGT community is only a reflection of the

society and world in which it exists. In her essay 'Power Politics' Arundhati Roy

writes of how the vast majority of poor Indians, whose lives have been devastated

by India's government led attempts at modernity, like damns and nuclear bombs,

don't really count in the national imagination. There is a tiny convoy of people, she

writes, moving towards a "glittering destination somewhere near the top of the

world," while a much larger one just melts away, "into darkness."[49] Amartya Sen is

equally anguished at pointing out: "India has the dubious distinction of having both

the largest number of poor in the world, and also the largest middle class on

earth... can we really live at peace with such massive contrasts?"[50] For Sen, the

challenges of globalization and internal disparity in India are closely linked. He writes

that unless the problems of poverty, inequality and social and economic exclusion

are not addressed, the country will lose out of several benefits of participation in the

process of globalization. Addressing his argument to the queer scenario, it is

imperative that members of social groups like Gay Bombay realize that upper

middle class gay men in Bombay are not the only sexual minorities in the country,

and their needs are not the only needs around. Unless there is a genuine attempt

being made at the pursuit of equitable change for all queer minorities, the problems

of inequality and social exclusion within the queer movement will still remain at

large. Seriously, what kind of a hollow empty victory will it be – if a few 'gay' men

are able to do their own thing – while their disenfranchised queer brothers and

sisters languish, unheard and uncared for?

3. *Small changes should be striven for, along with the big ones*

The larger political and health agendas should be pursued in tandem with

smaller, ordinary day-to-day ones. So of course, article 377 needs to go, but until

then, it is equally valuable if say, an ad agency that has put up queer-insensitive

billboard hoardings all over the city is sensitized enough to remove them and

apologize for their insensitivity.[51] All these small changes add up to a larger social

transformation in mindsets and attitudes, without which any major legal or political

victories will seem shallow.

4. *The Media should be co-opted and used when needed*

We have seen in this thesis how the English media has served Gay Bombay so well,

as an ambassador for gayness at large. As Cholan commented, judges and

politicians are also part of the world. They read the newspapers and watch

television and can be as influenced from these as the general public. Thus the

media should be consciously co-opted and made a part of the larger queer

struggle. Moral panic must not be allowed to be created at all cost, and if so, it must be countered immediately and forcefully. The success enjoyed with the English media needs to be broad based further so as to include the vernacular media.

5. *Indian queer histories and tradition should be emphasized*

I agree with Nihar's hypothesis that once a certain visibility threshold is crossed and the battle for recognition and acceptance really enters the mainstream, it might lead to "more pronounced homophobia." We have seen through different incidents recounted in this thesis (like the debates over *Fire* and *Girlfriend*) that the attack may well be framed as an overall attack on Westernization: being gay will be added into the "well defined yet adaptable arsenal of 'Western Evils' – divorce, drinking alcohol, eating meat, or drug abuse." (Shah, 1993)[52] – as something that needs to be prevented from happening to the impressionable young men and women of the country. It is imperative therefore, to emphasize the localness and situatedness of India's queer sexual identities as a part of our *modus vivendi*. I think that this might be done in three ways.

First it should be emphasized that gayness has a history in India, and its own historical Indian traditions. Secondly, contemporary traditions should be created for the community to increase and foster a community spirit. Gay Bombay's creative appropriations of *Bhishma Ashtami*[53] and pan Indian festivals like *Raksha Bandhan* or *Eid* are excellent examples of this ideal in practice. As Giddens writes, "traditions are invented and reinvented"[54] constantly, according to the need of the hour. And

finally, it should constantly be emphasized that queerness is not a threat to the strength of the family system in India. We have seen in this thesis what an important status my respondents assigned to family in their lives. Thus every outreach effort should emphasize this inherent *Indianness* of queer individuals, and their deep commitment to the institution of family and to *Indian* traditions. I contend that among the several reasons why *My Brother Nikhil* came and went along without much of a hullabaloo, as opposed to *Fire*, is that *Fire* threatened the family, while *My Brother Nikhil* was all about gaining acceptance by one's family. Like the mainstream blockbuster *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*[55] and all its clones of the 1990s, *My Brother Nikhil* implied that the child's happiness is not complete, unless his or her parents accept him completely. In this world, rebellion is futile - how can you rebel against tradition and your family? The right path lies in living your life the way you want to (so Nikhil did not give up being gay, or dump his boyfriend) but within the ambit of parental approval (or of constantly seeking it). I am certain that this suggestion will be attacked with accusations of pandering to ideals of hetero-normativity and assimilation tendencies – and I happily plead guilty to these charges. Within this *modus vivendi* orbit, I feel that this is a small price to pay and the issues at stake are much larger.

6. *The West should not be vilified*

I am in agreement with Jackson that queer resistance "must always be locally modulated. In one place the dominant form of resistance may be street marches and agitation for law reform, in another place, the most important form of

resistance may be avoiding arranged marriage." (Jackson, 2000)[56] Clearly, a Western style agenda is unsuitable for India, but at the same time, one should realize that 'the West' is not the enemy of the Indian LBGT movement.

Vanita critically notes that "it is usually those who have already obtained most of their basic civil rights and liberties in first world environments who object to the use of these terms in third world contexts.[57] (These are, of course, the same people who have no qualms in accepting Western grant money!) The West has been a very good source of information for the gay community in India. Lots of queer health and political programs operational in India are funded by Western agencies – for example Lawyers Collective and the Humsafar Trust.

Thus, I feel that traveling to and fro, and appreciating the positive aspects of Western style activism need not necessitate replicating its institutions or practices. We should learn from these, of course, but freely adapt them to our needs. For instance, copying Gay Pride might not be such a good idea at this point, but having Fenway Boston help out with HIV counseling and related services might be significant and relevant.

7. *There should a realization that change is not just coming in from the West but also from other parts of the world*

One can, and indeed, must find inspiration from non-western societies. For example, South Africa's new constitution, adopted on 10 December 1996, had an express non-discrimination clause against homosexuals, making it the first country in the world to do so. (Narrain, 2004)[58]

8. The diaspora and closeted men should be co-opted in the struggle

The queer and non-queer diaspora should be co-opted and strategically used, and this is already happening to some extent. Remember that Trikone began in 1986, before *Bombay Dost*; the Khush List was started before Gay Bombay; Indians marched in New York pride for many years before Calcutta pride.... A lot of the success of the activist work in India has been due to the beneficial interaction of the movement with the Indian queer diaspora.

This Indian diaspora at large are now imagined as part of *Pravasya Bharat* – non-resident Indians, or NRIs, that the central and state governments are so eager to pursue.[59] While a chunk of these NRIs might be considered Hindutva-oriented (and perhaps homophobic), there are also others who are not, and they have begun to flex their muscles of late. For example: the successful campaign to prevent Narendra Modi (the chief minister of Gujarat and the man held widely responsible for the communal rioting in the state in 2002) from being granted a US visa in 2005. A strategy of outing Indian politicians and business leaders with regressive views will certainly need the co-operation of the Indian diaspora. India's unequal constitution that permits the victimization of its sexual minorities is definitely shameful, and the progressive world that India is so desperate to be a part of given its recent economic success, often mandates human right compliance as a prerequisite of membership. I believe that sustained lobbying by the diaspora will surely contribute to the progress being made on the ground in the home country.

I also feel that closeted gay men should not be shunned. I disagree with my respondent Bhudev's contention that real activism is only on the ground and not in cyberspace; I think that real activism happens everywhere – offline as well as online, including social spaces like Gay Bombay. I find Nachiket's comments in this context to be crucial: activism is not just about awareness, but also about change, and while activists on the ground bring about awareness, change can be brought about by everyone, including closeted queer people in positions of power. So it is important to co-opt the closeted and make them feel they are part of the community. Here I emphasize – that there is a different between co-opting someone and endorsing someone – in coalition politics, you often work together with those whose policies or ideologies you disagree with, in the interest of the larger common minimum program agreed upon by everyone. What is important is doing whatever is necessary so as to keep the *modus vivendi* going.

I disagree with my respondent Rahim (in the context of passport princesses who remain closeted at home but go abroad to live their gay lives) that a gay man from Bombay dancing on the streets of Boston won't make a difference to the movement in India. Images circulate globally today and what is happing on the streets of Boston is shown on television screens in Bombay. Thus, when NDTV covers Boston pride (as it did in 2004), and interviews the queer Indian men and women dancing on the streets, it *does* have an impact on opinions in India.

9. *Indian democracy and Dalit politics might provide some food for thought*

Perhaps, the leaders of the Indian gay movement might wish to study the rise of Dalit politics within the Indian democratic system, especially the rise of the politician Mayawati and her Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh. By establishing themselves as stakeholders in the political process, the party has been able to effect social changes that would not have been possible otherwise.[60]

10. HIV needs to be battled much more strongly

The threat of HIV cannot be emphasized enough. The potential catastrophe is far too large and the efforts being done to combat it are far too little. Fear and loathing within the queer sub groups, including Gay Bombay, must give way to a pragmatic approach of developing HIV education, prevention and management programs. Gay people need to take up arms for themselves, as Bhudev rightly said. Nobody else is going to do so for us.

Parting Thoughts

Throughout this thesis I have harped on the glocal, or the integration of globalization and its effects within a context that is peculiarly Indian. As I conclude, I find that it is two of these 'peculiarly Indian' traits that provide me with inspiration as I dream of the future of Gay Bombay and the larger Indian queer community. The first of these traits is fortitude: "the intrinsic Indian propensity for not losing hope" and "the resilience that comes from being continuously exposed to adversity." (Varma, 2004)[61]

> For the vast majority of Indians life is a daily challenge. Even for a middle class family, very little can be taken for granted: schooling, water, electricity,

medical care, higher education, housing – everything is a struggle. And yet, the miracle is that everyone seems to be getting by and in fact, planning for more... The deprivations in India and the social callousness which ignores them is condemnable. But the Indian is the ultimate stoic. Indeed the real Indian rope trick is the persistence of hope in the most hopeless of circumstances. (Varma, 2004)[62]

The second of these traits is adaptability. As Khilnani (2001) writes: What is "distinctively Indian" is "a capacity... an ability to improvise, a kind of cunningness at historical survival, a knack for being able to respond to any question that may be asked. In the musical forms of India, as in its literary traditions, it isn't fixity—the dogma of the singular text—that is valued, but rather the skill of improvisation and variation."[63]

I witnessed the existence of these two traits in abundance among my respondents during my two years in the field. In physical Bombay, just to provide one instance, because I conducted some of my interviews in the participants homes located all over the city, I commuted extensively by train or bus to reach them through the torrential monsoon rains, and realized, probably for the first time in my life, just how difficult it was to just *physically* be gay in a place like Bombay. For someone coming for a party from faraway Thane, the bone crushing train ride, the sweat bath and the time it took to reach the party venue were all issues to be factored in – plus of course, an alibi for one's absence to the family waiting at home. Participants at Gay Bombay events overcame these physical encumbrances with a ferocious vivacity that I found energizing.

I am excited and scared as I look towards the future. The fears are not unfounded; however, neither is the excitement. If Indianness is something that grows out of imagination, then this imagination can also be *reimagined* to include gayness – and I see daily instances of this reminagination occurring all around me.

I feel inspired by the small acts of institutional change that are taking place with regularity. For example, applicants for a new passport can now chose between three categories on their application form – 'M', 'F' and 'E' (for eunuch). (In an attempt to recognize the *hijras* as a separate category, the government seems to have erroneously followed the popular convention of categorizing *hijras* as eunuchs in this regard.) Likewise, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs has made it possible to change one's sex in one's passports on the production of a sworn affidavit and a medical certificate from the hospital where the person has undergone treatment – implying that gender reconstructive surgery is not illegal in India. It is also possible to change one's sex on the electoral roll, and on one's PAN card (Permanent Account Number card, used as an identification card and for taxation purposes). [64] NACO or the National Aids Control Organization[65] - a division of the Government of India's Health and Family Welfare ministry works with the Humsafar Trust and other organizations working with MSM regularly on intervention projects; NACO's officials continuously show their support to the organization – for example, Dr. Prasada Rao, the head of NACO inaugurated Humsafar's Voluntary testing center in June 1999. Similarly, the city's hospitals like Sion, Cooper and Jaslok all co-operate with Humsafar with regard to HIV counseling and referral.

On a personal level too, as we have seen at so many points in this thesis, things are changing rapidly. In my own life, just to recount another instance, my ex-boyfriend V did not have to come out to his parents – they brought up the issue with him sensitively, and then followed it up with a reassuring dinner with me, where they comforted the two of us that they were supportive of our relationship, and just wanted us to be happy.

I am inspired by the market led forces of globalization, even as I recognize their inherent flaws and weaknesses. As Khilnani writes, "if choice is an axiom of the market, it's hard to see how it can be excluded from the realm of culture and identity."[66] The changing demographics of India will play a key role in how these choices will be exercised; soon, power will shift from the 'pre-independence' and 'Midnight's Children' age cohorts, to the emergent cohorts of 'liberalization's children' and the 'millennium children' who, "God willing, could be a generation... markedly different because they are shaped by an India of plenty, well integrated with and respected by the world."[67] (Bijapurkar, 2005) I am hopeful that their sense of integration and adroitness at managing plurality will translate into a respect for sexual minorities as well.

Indeed, I truly believe that society can and *does* change. As Giddens writes, "Society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do."[68] Thus individual acts of resistance all add up to influence changes to the larger social structure. I like Bollywood style happy endings... endings that fill one with hope and the possibility

of something magical… And so, if there is one feeling I want to conclude this thesis with, it is with a belief that yes, tomorrow, we – Gay Bombay and the Indian queer movement at large – *will* be able to create a better society; a world where, even though it sounds terribly mushy, "the only important thing is love, and where everyone is welcome and included within that love." (Wilhelm, 2004)[69]

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Appendices

(A) Interviewee Demographics

Summary

The individuals interviewed for this thesis comprised professionals and students from different fields (law, academia, medicine, media, stock trading, engineering). The age groupings were as follows: thirteen were between 20-29 years of age, eleven were between 30-39, six were between 40-49 and one was in his fifties. Half of those interviewed had graduate degrees (either Masters, post-graduate diplomas or PhDs), 25% held undergraduate Bachelor degrees and the others were continuing college students at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Five of the respondents were located out of India (In the US, Canada and UK). The others were from within India. Of these, most (80%) were located in Bombay and the others across other metropolitan cities like New Delhi, Bangalore and Ahmedabad. Six respondents were members of Gay Bombay's managing committee – the 'core group', that I write about below, while seven respondents were actively involved in activism/gay organizations other than Gay Bombay, which included the Humsafar Trust and *Bombay Dost* Magazine, protest rallies, workshops, legal activism and documentation. The remaining respondents were not directly involved in organizing Gay Bombay community events or activism at large.

Two thirds of the respondents declared that they were single. Of the others, seven were in same-sex relationship while three were in heterosexual marriage

relationships. Half of the respondents were "selectively out" (mostly to close friends, but not family and/or at the workplace). Of the remaining, three were "closeted"; the others were completely "out" to their families as well as at their work places. Over half of the respondents classified themselves as Hindu. Among other religions represented were Islam (three respondents), Christianity (three respondents), Zoroastrianism (two respondents), Jainism (two respondents) and Buddhism (one respondent). Three respondents declared that they had no religious affiliation whatsoever, three considered themselves to be atheist and one person declared himself agnostic. I think that my ethnoscape is reasonably diverse on most counts; however, it may seem weak in terms of the number of married gay men interviewed (only three) and those who consider themselves completely closeted (three). I found it very hard to find willing interviewees in both these categories, either online or offline. This is a deficiency that I hope to rectify in future iterations of this study.

Interviewee Profiles

No.	Alias	Age	Location	Sex	Gender	Sexuality
1	Husain	40	Toronto, Canada	Male	Masculine	Gay
2	Mike	22	Rhode Island, USA	Male	Masculine	Gay
3	Pratham	45	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
4	Karim	36	Bombay, India	Male	Masculine	Gay
5	Ormus	23	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
6	Randhir	32	New Delhi, India	Male	Man	Same-sex attracted person
7	Queen Rekha	31	Bangalore, India	Male	Inter-gendered	*Zenana kothi,* inter-gendered drag queen, questioning
8	Divakar	25	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
9	Jasjit	34	Oxford, England	Male	Male	Gay
10	Taksa	26	USA	Male	Male	Gay

11	Gopal	33	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
12	Vidvan	22	Bombay/ Delhi, India	Male	Male	Gay/Queer
13	Rustom	23	Pune/ Ahmedabad, India	Male	Masculine	Gay
14	Mohnish	26	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
15	Nachiket	40	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Bisexual
16	Bhuvan	24	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
17	Om	22	Bombay, India	Male	Masculine	Gay
18	Iravan	22	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Bisexual
19	Murgesh	47	Bombay, India	Male	Masculine	Gay
20	Senthil	23	Bombay, India	Male	Masculine	Gay
21	Kabir	35	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
22	Pulkit	33	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
23	Nihar	20	Bombay, India	Male	Androgynous	Gay
24	Isaac	31	Bombay, India	Male	Masculine	Gay
25	Harbhajan	33	Bombay, India	Male	Masculine	Gay
26	Cholan	34	Bombay, India	Male	Masculine	Queer
27	Gul	23	Bombay, India	Male	Masculine	Gay
28	Rahim	42	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
29	Savitri	-	Bombay, India	Hijra	Hijra	Hijra
30	Bhudev	58	Bombay, India	Male	-	-
31	Yudhisthir	30	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay
32	Asim	45	Bombay, India	Male	Male	Gay

Interviewee Profiles (Cont'd)

No.	Alias	Education	Profession	Relationship Status	Out/ closeted
1	Husain	University Graduate	Sales and Marketing	Same-sex relationship	Selectively out
2	Mike	Bachelor of Pharmacy	Graduate Student	Single	Selectively out
3	Pratham	Post graduate	Filmmaker	Same-sex relationship	Selectively out
4	Karim	MBA	Journalist	Long term Same-sex relationship	Quite out
5	Ormus	MBBS. (Doctor)	Graduate Student	Single	Selectively out
6	Randhir	LLB (Bachelor of Law)	Lawyer and Sexuality Rights Consultant	Long term Same-sex relationship	Out
7	Queen Rekha	University Graduate	Salesperson	Single	Out
8	Divakar	University Graduate	Insurance Advisor	Single	Closeted
9	Jasjit	Ph.D.	Professor	Single	Selectively Out
10	Taksa	University Graduate	Graduate Student	Single	Selectively Out
11	Gopal	University Graduate	Journalist	Single	Out
12	Vidvan	BA in History	Graduate Student	Single	Selectively out
13	Rustom	Bachelor of	Student	Single	Selectively Out

		Architecture candidate			
14	Mohnish	LLB.	Human Resource Officer	Single	Selectively Out
15	Nachiket	Post-graduate in Business Administration	Human Resource Management	In a heterosexual marriage	Closeted
16	Bhuvan	Post-Graduate – Event Mgmt.	P.R. Consultant	Same-sex relationship	Selectively out
17	Om	Graduate	Unemployed	Single	Selectively out
18	Iravan	Bachelor of Architecture candidate	Student	Single	Selectively Out
19	Murgesh	Post-Graduate in psychology	Self-employed	Single	Selectively out
20	Senthil	LLB.	Student	Same-sex relationship	Selectively out
21	Kabir	BA in Film and Theatre Studies	Filmmaker	Single	Out
22	Pulkit	Post-graduate in Industrial Mgmt.	Self-employed	Single	Selectively Out
23	Nihar	BA Student in Literature	Student	Single	Selectively Out
24	Isaac	Post-Grad	Chemical Engineer	Single	Selectively Out
25	Harbhajan	Bachelors in Hotel Management	Food and Beverage Manager	In a heterosexual marriage	Selectively Out
26	Cholan	Post-graduate degree in law	Lawyer	Single	Out
27	Gul	Graduate. Part-time student in fashion design	Family Business	Single	Closeted
28	Rahim	MBA	CEO of a gay-health related NGO	Single	Out
29	Savitri	Graduate	Dance Teacher, Head of *Hijra* Organization	Single	Out
30	Bhudev	Graduate	Activist, Head of Gay Organization	Single	Out
31	Yudhisthir	Post-graduate in Marketing and Advertising	E-learning Content Writer	Single	Out
32	Asim	Bachelor of Technology	Stock Trader	Single	Selectively Out

(B) Background of India's Economic Reforms of 1991

The liberal-minded Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress Party government in the mid-80s had attempted some reforms of India's severely protected socialist-leaning

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economy – but these faltered due to the controversies that the government got mired into and Gandhi was booted out of power at the 1989 polls. After two shaky hotch-potch coalition governments collapsed, another election was called in 1991. Tragically, Gandhi was assassinated by a suicide bomber during a campaign rally and in the sympathy wave that swept the nation, the Congress was voted back into power. The new government, headed by the demure intellectually-bent septuagenarian PV Narasimha Rao, took charge of a country in dire fiscal straits.[1]

The situation was so bad that there were only two week's of foreign reserves in the government kitty to pay for imports – a bill that had risen dramatically due to the rise of oil prices during the Gulf War. The country was forced to ask the International Monetary fund (IMF) for a US$ 2.2 billion bailout package, which necessitated the dispatch of a part of the country's gold reserves to London to serve as collateral. Rao's Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Oxbridge-educated former Reserve Bank of India governor, who is currently India's Prime Minister, was the chief architect of the IMF mandated reforms implemented subsequently, which changed the structure of the Indian economy significantly. These included the devaluation of the Indian rupee by 20 percent, the liberalization of the national trade policy, the abolishment of the license-permit regime for industry, a severe cut in various subsidies and sops, tax reforms and a reign-in of governmental expenditure.

(C) The Great Indian Middle Class

In a book by the same name, Pawan Varma (1998) provides a riveting account of the genealogy and unique nature of this behemoth from the 1940s onward. To track its more recent growth, we might refer to some figures from the Market Information Survey of Households (MISH), an annual exercise carried out by India's National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER).

MISH asks the head of the household surveyed to estimate the household income over the previous fiscal year. According to the 1994 report, India's Very Rich comprised a million households or six million people. Below this lay the middle class, split up into three segments: the Consuming Class with 30 million households and 150 million people (a ready market for all types of consumer durables), the Climbers with 50 million households and 275 million people and the Aspirants, again numbering 275 million people.[2] (Both these are segments with consumption potential.) By 2001-2001, the number of people in the Very Rich and Consuming Classes had risen to 281 million, while the number of Climbers totaled 429 million and by 2006-2007, it is projected that India will have 462 million in the Very Rich and Consuming Classes and a further 472 million as climbers – making over 70% of India's population 'middle income' by that year.[3]

This is truly a revolution when one considers that as recently as 1984-85, NCAER data put the Indian middle class at less than 10% of the total population.[4] Thus within a short span of 20 years, the shape of India's income distribution has transformed from an inverted pyramid (very large number of poor at the top, a small

middle class in the middle and negligible rich at the bottom) to a diamond (fewer poor at the top, larger middle-class in the middle, and a small number of rich at the bottom).[5] In the succinct words of India's current Finance Minister P. Chidambaram: "The Indian middle class has arrived and it is a reality."[6]

This is the middle class of the world's youngest nation – over 54% of Indians today are below 25 years of age.[7] It is buzzing with energy and creating a "revolution in ideas."[8] Members of the Great Indian Middle Class worship monetary success – their heroes are not just sporting icons like Sachin Tendulkar (a cricketer, restaurateur and businessman, guaranteed a minimum of Rupees 20 crore per year in endorsements, who zips around Bombay city in his Ferrari) or film stars like Shah Rukh Khan (a self made entertainment mogul comfortable flaunting his hard earned palatial mansion and successful film producing company) but also businessmen like Anil Ambani (scion of the Rs. 100,000 crore Reliance group – the country's largest corporation, voted MTV youth icon for 2003) and Azim Premji (the richest person living in India with a net worth of US$ 10 billion[9]), savvy entrepreneurs like (Hotmail founder) Sabeer Bhatia and cyber-smart politicians like Chandrababu Naidu (The former 'CEO' of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh). They are obsessed with glamour and fashion and a symbol of its aspirations is the impressive list of beauty queens that it churned out during the 1990s (Sushmita Sen, Miss Universe 1994; Aishwarya Rai, Miss World 1994; Diana Hayden, Miss World 1997; Yukta Mookhey, Miss World 1999; Priyanka Chopra, Miss World 2000 and Lara Dutta, Miss Universe 2000). They are also slowly changing mindsets about the role of women at

work and in society – thus the urban working women population was 25% in 2001 as compared to 13% in 1987. (Of course, there is still a lot of change needed in this direction, especially when one considers that only 8% of Parliamentary seats and 4% of seats in High Courts and the Supreme Court are occupied by women and the percentage of women in Indian corporate senior management is only 3%. But, we digress....)[10]

Today's Indian middle class does not save its money like its earlier more frugal counterparts. What it earns, it likes to spend, spend, spend...Fuelled by rising incomes, falling taxes (the maximum income tax rates came down from 56% in 1991 to 40% in 1993 and 30% in 1997[11]) and an obsession with upward social mobility, its members are in the throes of one giant consumerist orgy that shows no sign of stopping[12]. Consider some figures. Credit cards were only introduced in India in 1990. Today there are 9 million credit card holders and according to a McKinsey prediction, this number will rise to 35 million by 2010.[13] The number of cars produced in India in 1993-94 was 207,658 units. This has quadrupled to 842,437 units in 2003-2004. Similarly, the number of motorcycles has risen from 461,955 in 1993-94 to 4,355,137 in 2003-2004.[14] The country is in the midst of a shopping mall spree – the number has risen from 3 in 2000[15] to 245 in 2004[16] and is expected to touch 600 in 2009[17]. Organized retailing has grown from Rs 50 billion in 1999 to Rs 300 billion in 2004 and is one of the fastest growing industries in the country[18]. (With an overall retail market pegged at Rs 9000 billion – there is still a lot of ground for organized retailing to cover.)[19] Most recently, in 2003, spending by

urban middle class India (valued at Rs. 22,000 crores, up from Rs. 12,000 crores in 1999) increased by 96% on mobile phones, 53% on consumer durables, 38% on books and music, 32% on vacations and 10% on computers and peripherals.[20]

The language of this class is Hinglish – a hybrid of Hindi and English. (For example: Pepsi's catchy 1999 advertisement slogan – *Yeh Dil Maange More* or 'The Heart Wants More'.) Among its myriad wants are entertainment – lots of it – including gossip-laden newspapers and hundreds of TV channels at the flick of a remote control, new nightclubs and pubs, Indipop (Indian pop) albums by performers like Daler Mehendi and AR Rehman, and Bollywood and Hollywood films screened in posh, air-conditioned multiplexes. (There are 500 cinema multiplexes expected to come up within the next four years – companies like PVR, Fame Adlabs, IMAX, Inox, E-Square and Fun Republic – already big national players – are rushing ahead with construction and growth plans.)

The restaurant business is booming – with over 22,000 registered restaurants and the number growing rapidly almost daily, eating out is "urban India's overpowering collective passion"[21] These include the global fast food chains McDonalds, Domino's Pizza, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut and Subway, all rapidly opening up new outlets. Other global food and beverage trends are being quickly replicated in India – for example, coffee, which was largely confined to the south of India as a daily staple beverage, has been upscaled to a lifestyle beverage and is now retailed across the country in Starbucks-type chains like Barista (100 'Espresso Bars' in 2004[22]) and Café Coffee Day (136 cafés, 59 mini-cafés and

6,600 vending machines in 2004[23]); wine is being manufactured and consumed with great gusto;[24] and world cuisines like Italian, Mexican, Balinese, Mediterranean, Spanish, French and Korean all being inquisitively devoured.[25]

Travel is another big draw – both within the country (by the well networked railway system or on the new efficient private airlines like Jet, Sahara, Kingfisher and Air Deccan) and abroad. Foreign travel has been greatly facilitated by the gradual increase in the Reserve Bank of India-sanctioned travel allowance for outbound Indians from a measly US $ 500 pre-liberalization to the current US $ 10,000. Thus in 2003-2004, approximately 10 million well-heeled Indians traveled to foreign countries where they splurged around Rs. 192 billion. Popular destinations include old favorites like the USA, UK and Switzerland and new ones like Greece, Seychelles, Egypt, New Zealand, Scandinavia and Morocco.[26]

The consumption frenzy is not just restricted to India's metros – or well known smaller cities like Pune and Hyderabad. *Outlook* magazine reports that small cities like Indore (Eight lane bowling alleys), Ludhiana (Hawaiian beach parties by private poolsides, nightclubs, ice cream parlors), Guwahati (all night discos) and Kottayam (jewelry malls and car showrooms) – are all "markets on amphetamine" caught "in a tidal wave of desire".[27] The objects of this ardor are the seemingly unending stream of brands flowing into India – Mercedes, Honda, Mont Blanc, Cartier, Lacoste, Levi's, Ray Ban, Foster's, Nike, Coke, Sony, Compaq, Samsung, Whirlpool, Victoria's Secret, Kellogg's....

(D) Press Coverage of Gay Related Issues Prior to 1991

There was a huge media hullabaloo around the 1927 release of Ugra's *Chocolate* – a compilation of eight short stories in Hindi dealing with homosexuality. Vanita (2000) writes that this was probably the first public debate in the local Indian press on the topic[28]. Then in 1944, the famous Urdu writer Ismat Chugtai was accused of obscenity (and subsequently acquitted in court) for her short story *Lihaaf* (The Quilt). Published in the journal *Adab-I-Latif* in 1942, the tale "depicts sex between a neglected wife and her maidservant, witnessed by a horrified girl child. The married woman's husband is only interested in boys."[29]

Besides the odd scandal here and there, media coverage of gay-related issues in general was extremely rare in India prior to 1991 and limited to the occasional letter to the editor of newspapers like *Times of India* by Ashok Row Kavi in 1981 (about the country's first conference of homosexuals held in the city of Hyderabad that year).[30] An interview with 'SK', described as the president of the now-defunct organization, the *Lavndebaaz-i-Hind* ('Homosexuals of India') in the August 15-31, 1977 issue of the now-defunct *Onlooker* magazine[31] is significant because, as student-activist Mario D'Penha writes in his blog *Historiqueer*:

> ...It was perhaps the first time in post-colonial India that an open articulation for a more positive recognition of homosexuals by the law was being made. Although, 'SK' was asking for legalization and not decriminalization, which seems to be the more legally sound term, (and since the original interview was translated by the magazine from Hindustani to English, there is a chance that this may have been lost in translation) I believe it is very significant that the linkage between harassment, the law and law-enforcement

was being made and was being publicly articulated in 1977.[32]

The interview makes for extremely entertaining reading. SK freewheels his opinions on anal sex (*Arrey, gaand marvate hai, to yeh Sarkar ki jaaidaad thodi hai? Yeh bhi kya insaaf hai, bhai?* or 'If we choose to get ass-fucked, is it the property of the government? What kind of justice is this?'), Hinduism ('I am attracted to the *Gita* [Religious Hindu text] because it is basically homosexual...') and masculinity ('The only genuine love is between two men'). D'Penha writes that SK seems to completely stump the interviewer "because he breaks every stereotype of what one assumes homosexuals to be...Here is someone who is 'very masculine' and has a 'deep bass voice' and 'looks anything but a homosexual', but is so articulately flamboyant anyway, that he leaves you in complete and utter awe."[33]

Towards the end of the 1980s, special features on homosexuality began to start appearing in weekly and monthly magazines, like the *Sunday* magazine cover story on Indian homosexuals dated August 6, 1988. This sensitive eight page article is a comprehensive account of the gay environment prevalent in the country then – it comprises interviews with gay men, their families and psychiatrists, lists of gay hangouts in major Indian cities, problems encountered by gay men at home and the workplace, the intense pressure to marry, the AIDS crisis, homosexuality in Indian prisons, class differences, extortion, police harassment, gay prostitution and the lack of a social network for Indian gay men.[34] Earlier that year, *Debonair* (India's *Playboy* equivalent) ran another sensitively-worded special feature on two officers of the women's company of the 23rd Battalion of the police (India's first women's

police company) who had created a scandal with their "marriage" to each other (interestingly, by a Hindu priest who on conferring the scriptures maintained that marriage existed between two souls, not two sexes) and their subsequent discharge from the police force.[35] Articles like these played an important role in preparing both readers and journalists for the media deluge that was to follow in the 1990s.

(E) Gay Indian Literature pre-1991

I wish to briefly reflect on two major gay 'Indian' texts written before 1991: 1932's *Hindoo Holiday* and 1977's *The World of Homosexuals*. *Hindoo Holiday* was written by J R Ackerley, a twenty-something homosexual, Cambridge-educated, war-returned dilettante who spent five months in India in 1923 as the secretary to the (also homosexual) *Maharaja* of Chhatarpur. On his return to England, Ackerley fashioned his Indian diaries into a pacy travelogue and the book – published first in 1932 (when it was considered too sexy to be read aloud on BBC radio!), and then republished subsequently in more explicit editions in 1952 and 1979 – became an instant classic. I am considering this as an 'Indian' book because of its widespread availability in Indian libraries – for Indian homosexuals rummaging through library bookshelves and looking for characters closer to home in the decades prior to liberalization, this was often a refreshing find.

Hindoo Holiday weaves desire, palace intrigue and Indian customs adroitly together – laced with the wry humor that Ackerley would later become famous for as the literary editor of *The Listener* magazine between 1935-1959. By renaming

Chattarpur as Chokrapur (City of Boys), Ackerley is upfront about his intentions. Yes, this is a book about boys – their beauty, their elusiveness, the pleasures they offer and the pain they might cause. He vividly describes the physical attractiveness of the various young men he encounters during his travels and comically recounts the *Maharajah*'s pining for the performing boy actors of his kingdom. We learn, among several other juicy tidbits, that one of the king's peccadilloes includes forcing his young queen to make love with one of his regular bisexual playmates in his presence!

Ackerley's prose, as Eliot Weinberger writes in the 2000 introduction of the book's reprint edition, is "entirely without the psychodrama or the Hellenistic pretensions that were common among gay writers at the time"[36] – it is natural, guilt-free, evocative, and makes for extremely pleasurable reading. Although it appears light on the surface, the book is extremely sensitive to the myriad complexities surrounding issues of power, race, caste, sexuality and gender inequality observed by Ackerley during his sojourn. Consider this description of a kiss between the author and the 20-year-old Narayan, who he has been lusting after ever since his arrival in Chokrapur.

> ...Narayan came down the path to meet me. I thought how graceful he looked in his white muslin clothes, the sleeves of his loose vest widening out at the wrist, the long streamers of his turban floating behind him. The breeze puffed at his *dhoti* as he approached, moulding the soft stuff to the shape of his thigh; then as he turned a bend in the path, another gentle gust took the garment from behind and blew it aside, momentarily baring a slim brown leg. I took his hand and led him into my tent...

"I want to love you very much," he said.

"You mean you do love me very much."

"I want to."

"Then why not?"

"You will go away to England and I shall be sorry. But you will not be sorry. I am only a boy and I shall be sorry."

...He suddenly laughed softly and drew me after him. And in the dark roadway, overshadowed by trees, he put up his face and kissed me on the cheek. I returned his kiss, but he at once drew back, crying out:

"Not the mouth. You eat meat! You eat meat!"

"Yes, and I will eat you in a minute," I said and kissed him on the lips again, and this time, he did not draw away.[37]

The World of Homosexuals is a concise, detailed and enlightened examination of a wide range of issues surrounding homosexuality in the Indian context. It's unlikely author – the celebrated mathematics genius Shakuntala Devi – beat the then world's fastest computer (the Univac 1108) at a competition to find the 23rd root of a 201-digit number in the same year of the book's publication (1977). She subsequently entered the Guinness Book of World Records three years later for mentally multiplying two randomly chosen 13-digit numbers and correctly giving the 26-digit answer in 28 seconds! In *The World of Homosexuals*, she declares at the outset that she is "neither a homosexual nor a social scientist, psychologist or a psychiatrist" and that her only qualification for writing the book is

that she is "a human being" and wishes to shed light on a section of her "fellow human beings who have been little understood and forced to live in 'half-hiding' throughout their lives by a society that is merciless towards everything that differs from the statistical norm"[38].

Devi's research is meticulous; her sources include "books, pamphlets, departmental reports, parliamentary debates and even blue books [porn]" and interviews with "psychologists, social scientists, social workers, politicians, priests, doctors, lawyers, professors and many homosexuals in India as well as in Canada, West Germany, the UK and many other countries."[39] The book comprises 16 chapters. There are three extended interviews with Indian and Canadian homosexuals and chapters dealing with historical, legal, religious and psychiatric perspectives on homosexuality, commercialized homosexuality, homosexuality in prisons, homosexuality in literature and films and 'gay lib'. Devi's tone is compassionate and sanctifying: throughout the book, she attempts to clarify misconceptions about homosexuals, ("The most common myth propagated about the homosexual is that he is effeminate. This is far from the truth."[40]) present sexual information matter-of-factly, ("Sometimes men may indulge in what is popularly known as '69' where they lie in such a way that they can simultaneously engage in oral-genital contact."[41]) and advocate for the complete normalcy of homosexuality. ("What people do not realize is the ordinariness and commonplaceness of homosexuality. Every time we walk down the street, travel in a bus or train, we shall

probably pass homosexuals without knowing it.... Most people will have at least

one relative who is a homosexual."[42])

It is remarkable to observe just how much of the book rings true even today,

whether it is in the predicament of Indian gay men who have to marry to conform to

social norms[43], or Western gay men that have to constantly struggle to preserve

their hard-fought rights[44]. In the chapter on homosexuals and community, I find a

historical background to some of the issues surrounding kinship that I am exploring

in this thesis:

> In India, where such [open] advertisements, bars, clubs or social groups are unheard of, homosexuals, men and women, join small cliques of friends of long standing, who visit one another's homes, patronize the same cafés and meet at one another's parties.
>
> In ordinary company, many homosexuals who succeed in putting up a front of normality feel themselves outsiders merely pretending to share the lives and interests of the majority. Among their own kind, they can drop the mask; enclosed by their own tight little circle, insulated from the outside world, they can be completely at ease and they can enjoy the morale boosting effect of being accepted for what they are.[45]

Notes

§ *Kabhi Kabhie* ('Sometimes'); words by Sahir Ludhianvi, music by Khayyam. (Bombay, India: Yash Raj Films/HMV Music, 1976). Hindi to English lyrics translation courtesy *Bollywhat.com.* Gender modified from original.

Chapter 1: The Heart Has It's Reasons

[1] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora Identity', in Identity: *Community, Culture, Difference* (Ed. Jonathan Rutherford) (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990) p.223; excerpted in Kathryn Woodward (Ed.) *Identity and Difference,* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p.51

[2] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Eds.) *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) p.11

[3] John Edward Campbell, *Getting It on Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality, and Embodied Identity* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004) p.83

[4] Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson and Jane Shattuc, 'The Culture That Sticks to the Skin: A Manifesto for a New Cultural Studies, in *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 3

[5] See:
   — Between the Lines – festival website: http://mit.edu/cms/betweenthelines/

   — Chavi Dublish, 'South Asian Gays Find US Voice' *BBC News* April 13, 2004 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3620417.stm

   — Susannah Mandel, 'Between the Lines' explores South Asian LGBT identity' *Tech Talk* March 31, 2004
   — http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2004/arts-lines-0331.html

[6] Kath Weston, 'The Virtual Anthropologist' in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit. p.167

[7] David Silver 'Communication, Community, Consumption: An Ethnographic Exploration of an Online City' in Beth Kolko (Ed.) *Virtual Publics: Policy and Community in an Electronic Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) p. 347

[8] For reportage about *Freshlimesoda* and its online/offline activities, see:
   — Lindsay Perreira 'Lime Lagao' *Rediff.com* September 22, 2001
   http://www.rediff.com/search/2001/sep/22fresh.htm

   — Georgina Maddox, 'Fresh and Tangy' *Indian Express* August 26, 2001.

   Varsha Shenoy, 'Budding Poets Squeeze Life Between the Lines' *Express Newsline: Indian Express* August 4, 2000.

— Tara Patel, 'At Chauraha, They Have a Good thing Going' *The Afternoon Despatch and Courier* August 7, 2000.

[9] Thomas Blom Hansen (*Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*, [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001, p.235; footnote 3 to 'Introduction: The Proper Name']) notes that while there have been some recent studied of urban India (Kumar, 1992; Breckenridge, 1996), the study of contemporary urban life in India "is nowhere near the sophistication one finds in the study or urban practices in Latin America, for example, nor does it compare to the density of studies on rural India."

[10] *Time* magazine reported in March 2001 that in just five years, the internet had done to Asia's gay and lesbian communities what Stonewall had enabled in the West over the past twenty-five years. See 'Boy's Night Out: We're Here. We're Queer. Get Used to It. Can Singapore Accept its Gay Community?' in *Time International* (Asia) 19 March 2001, as referred to in Chris Berry, Fran Martin and Audrey Yue, (Eds.) *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p.2

[11] Foe example:
— Jose Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latin America* (New York: NYU Press, 2000)
— Neil Miller, *Out in the World: Gay and Lesbian Life from Buenos Aires to Bangkok* (New York: Random House, 1992)
— Cindy Patton and Benigno Sanchez-Eppler, (Eds.) *Queer Diasporas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000)
— Martin Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003)
— Ruth Vanita (Ed.), *Queering India: Same-sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2002)
— Wah-Shan Chou, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (New York: Haworth Press, 2000)
— Mark McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities* (Richmond; Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 2000)
— Jeremy Seabrook *Love in a different climate: Men Who Have Sex With Men in India* (New York/London: Verso, 1999)
— Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan (Eds.), *Gay and Lesbian Asia: Culture, Identity, Community* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2000)

[12] Peter Jackson 'Pre-Gay, Post-queer: Thai Perspectives on Proliferating Gender/Sex Diversity in Asia, in Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan (Eds.), *Gay and Lesbian Asia: Culture, Identity, Community* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2000), pp. 1-2

[13] In articles like 'Under the Rainbow Flag: Webbing Global Gay Identities' (from the *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* July 2002 issue; Vol. 7 (2-3), pp. 107-124), the authors compare and contrast the analyses of heavily trafficked US gay websites with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender sites originating in Mainland China, Japan, and Germany. John Campbell's *Getting It On Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality, and*

Embodied Identity (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004*)* is a timely book that deals with the construction of the gay male body in cyberspace. David Shaw has a chapter in the Steve Jones edited *Virtual Culture* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997) titled 'Gay men and computer communication: A discourse of sex and identity in cyberspace' and Randal Woodland examines gay/lesbian identity and the construction of cyberspace in *The Cybercultures Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000). From an Asian perspective, *Mobile Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) provides relevant and empirically grounded studies of the connections between new media technologies, globalization and the rise of queer Asia. There are also a few essays available describing the Indian gay online experience, such as:

— Chandra S. Balachandran, 'Desi Pride on the Internet - South Asian Queers in Cyberspace' *Trikone* (January 1996) pp. 18-19
— Vikram 'Cybergay' *Bombay Dost*, Vol. 7 (1), 1999, pp. 8-13
— Shrinand Deshpande, 'Point and Click Communities? South Asian Queers out on the Internet' *Trikone* (October 2000) pp. 6-7
— Scott Kugle, 'Internet Activism, Internet Passivism' *Trikone* (October 2000) pp. 10-11
— Sandip Roy, 'GayBombay' *Salon.com* December 2, 2002 http://archive.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/12/02/gay_india

[14] Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2000) p. 5, as cited in Samuel Wilson and Leighton Peterson 'The Anthropology of Online Communities' *Annual Review of Anthropology* (Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, 2002) Vol. 31, p. 453

[15] Dennis Altman, 'Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities' *Social Text* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) No. 48, p. 91

[16] Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994) pp. 1-2

[17] "*Kothi* is a feminized male identity which is adopted by some people in the Indian sub-continent and is marked by gender non conformity. A *kothi* though biologically male, adopts feminine modes of dressing, speech and behavior and would look for a male partner who has masculine modes of behavior." (Arvind Narrain, *Queer: Despised Sexuality, Law and Legal Change* (Bangalore: Books For Change, 2004, pp. 2-3)

[18] The term *hijra* refers to "a socially constructed role for a group of men with religious and cultural significance, whose primary belief is around the religious sacrifice of their genitalia and who act as women in exaggerated styles." (Shivananda Khan, 'Cultural constructions of male sexualities in India', *Naz Foundation International*, June 1995) It includes "men who go in for hormonal treatment, those who undergo sex change operations and those who are born hermaphrodite." (Arvind Narrain, '*Queer: Despised Sexuality, Law and Legal Change* Bangalore: Books For Change, 2004, p.2) *Hijra* is "not just a third gender" but "also a third sex," with a "well defined social identity...To be *hijra* the crucial step is to take the vow of *Hijra*hood and became part of the *Hijra* clan, which functions almost as a caste, with its own specific inner workings, rules, rituals, and hierarchy.... In the past kings and

noblemen were their patrons...today... as they beg, sing, dance, bless and curse for a living, the public treats them with a mixture of awe, dread and disdain." (Devdutt Pattanaik, *The Man Who Was a Woman and Other Queer Tales from Hindu Lore* New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002, pp. 11-12). For more about the *hijra* world, read Serena Nanda's *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990) and Zia Jaffrey's *The Invisibles: A Tale of the Eunuchs of India* (New York: Pantheon, 1996).

[19] Outlined in Arjun Appadurai *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) pp. 27-47

[20] Ibid, pp. 32-33

[21] Ibid, p.33

[22] Ibid, p.37

[23] Arjun Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination' in *Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), Vol. 12(1), p.6

[24] Ibid.

[25] Arjun Appadurai (1996) op. cit., p.3

[26] Nancy Fraser introduces the notion of 'counter-publics' (or sub-groups within the mainstream that are critical of mainstream ideologies and practices) in her essay 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy'. From *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Ed. Craig Calhoun) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991) pp. 109-142

[27] David Silver, 'Internet/Cyberculture/Digital Culture/New Media/Fill-in-the-Blank Studies' *New Media and Society* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA; New Delhi, India: Sage Publications, 2004) Vol. 6 (1) p. 55

[28] See David Silver, 'Looking Backwards, Looking Forward, Cyberculture Studies 1990-2000' in David Gauntlett, *Web.Studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age* London: Arnold, 2000), pp.19-30

[29] William Gibson, *Neuromacer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984), p.51, cited in David Silver (2000) op. cit., p.21

[30] In this context, Allucquere Rosanne Stone's definition of cyberspace (from 'Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary Stories About Virtual Cultures' in Michael Benedikt, [Ed.] *Cyberspace: First Steps* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991] p.85) would be more apt: "...incontrovertibly social spaces in which people still meet face to face, but under new definitions of both 'meet' and 'face'." Reproduced in David Silver, (2000) op. cit., p.21

[31] See Barry Wellman 'The Three Ages of Internet Studies: Ten, Five and Zero Years Ago' *New Media and Society* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA; New Delhi, India: Sage Publications, 2004) Vol. 6 (1) pp. 123-129

[32] See David Silver (2000) op. cit., pp. 18-30

[33] These utopian/dystopian visions are not unique to the internet, but have accompanied every major new communication invention. See, for example:
— Daniel R. Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)
— Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers* (New York: Berkley Books, 1998)
— David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992)
— Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

[34] John Perry Barlow, 'Is there a There in Cyberspace' *Utne* Reader 68 (Minneapolis, 1995) cited in Barry Wellman (2004) op. cit. p. 124

[35] Texas broadcaster Jim Hightower, quoted in Fox R, 'Newstrack' Communications of the ACM 38(8), 1995, pp. 11-12, cited in cited in Barry Wellman (2004) op. cit., p.124

[36] David Trend (Ed.) *Reading Digital Culture* (Malden, MA/Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001) p.2

[37] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), cited in Nina Wakeford, 'Pushing the Boundary of New Media Studies' *New Media and Society* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA; New Delhi, India: Sage Publications, 2004) Vol. 6 (1) p.132

[38] 'A Rape in Cyberspace; Or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society', *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World* (New York: Owl Books, 1999). This article first appeared in the New York based newspaper *Village Voice* in 1993 and has since been included in several cyberspace anthologies.

[39] A MUD (multi-user dungeon/domain) is a multi-player internet based computer role-playing game, where players adopt avatars or roles of certain characters, see textual descriptions of rooms, objects, and other avatars within the game and interact with other players by using text commands. MOO stands for *MUD* object oriented and is a kind of MUD text-based virtual reality system that is programmable by utilizing the MOO programming language.

[40] Frank Schaap, *The Words That Took Us There: Ethnography in a Virtual Reality* (Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2002) p.15

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[41] Stone's oft quoted book is *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996)

[42] See Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002) for an understanding of her key arguments.

[43] See http://www.pewinternet.org/index.asp

[44] See http://www.worldinternetproject.net/

[45] Barry Wellman (2004) op. cit. p. 126

[46] David Silver (2000) op. cit., p.30

[47] James Katz and Philip Aspden, 'Motivations for and Barriers to Internet Usage: Results of a National Public Opinion Survey' in *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy*, (Bradford, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 1997) Vol. 7 (3), pp. 170-188, as cited in Robert Burnett and P. David Marshall, *Web Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Routletdge, 2002) p.65

[48] R. Kraut, V. Lundmark, M. Patterson, S. Kiesler, T. Mukopadhyay, and W. Scherlis, ' A Social Technology That Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-Being?' in *American Psychologist*, (Washington, DC: The American Psychologist Association, 1998) Vol. 53 (9), pp. 1017-1031, as cited in Burnett and Marshall, op. cit., p.65

[49] David Silver (2004, op. cit., p. 57) makes this observation in his review of the Steve Jones edited *Virtual Culture* (op. cit.).

[50] Barry Wellman and M. Gulia, 'Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities', in Barry Wellman (Ed.) *Networks in the Global Village* (Boulder CO: Westview, 1999) pp. 331-366; cited in Barry Wellman (2004) op. cit., p. 125

[51] John Edward Campbell, op. cit. p.52

[52] Wilson and Peterson, op. cit., pp. 456-457

[53] Ibid.

[54] Mary Des Chene, 'Locating the Past' in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., p.78

[55] James Clifford, 'Spatial Practices: Fieldwork, Travel, and the Disciplining of Anthropology' in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., p.218

[56] Most notably by John Boswell, who did not agree that homosexuality was a recent Western development. In his first book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) he argued that Christianity only became intolerant to homosexuals after the 13th century. In *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern*

Europe, (New York: Villard, 1994), he posited that the Christian church accommodated same sex unions and had rituals for the same.

[57] Ruth Vanita, (Ed.) *Queering India: Same-sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002) p.1; as cited in Douglas Sanders, 'Flying the Rainbow Flag in Asia' Conference Paper – Second International Conference on Sexualities, Masculinities and Cultures in South Asia Bangalore, India, June 9-12 (2004), footnote 13, pp. 4-5. Though, as Sanders notes, "some writings now suggest much more self conscious homosexual groupings in the West in earlier periods" – like "Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the 19th Century* (New York: WV Norton, 2003) Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2003)."

[58] Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003) p.3

[59] Michel Foucault, (Trans. Robert Hurley) *A History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981 [1976]) p.43. Though I disagree with him on this point, I acknowledge that Foucault is seminal reading for anyone interested in sexuality studies, and his decision in *A History of Sexuality* to treat sexuality not as a biological or psychological drive but as an effect of discourse, as the product of modern systems of knowledge and power, represented a crucial political breakthrough for lesbians and gay men in the West.

[60] Douglas Sanders, op. cit., p.6

[61] Peter Drucker, *Different Rainbows* (London: Gay Men's Press 2000), p.9 as quoted in Douglas Sanders, op. cit., p.10

[62] Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p.179

[63] Douglas Sanders, op. cit., p.10

[64] Jeffrey Weeks *Sexuality* (2nd Edition) (London/New York: Routledge, 2003 [Ellis Horwood and Tavistock Publications, 1986]), p.80

[65] New York Public Library Gay and Lesbian Studies Research Guide. Accessible on the world wide web at:
http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/grd/resguides/gay/index.html.

[66] The now classic paper, Mary McIntosh's 'The Homosexual Role' (*Social Problems* Vol. 16 (2), 1968 pp. 182-92) kick started the field, as well as the 'essentialist-constructionist' debate over homosexuality (that Foucault continued a few years later), which is still very much alive and kicking today.

[67] Robert J Corber and Stephen Valocchi, *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003) p.2

[68] Ibid.

[69] Douglas Sanders, op. cit., p.13

[70] Sanders (op. cit., p.11) finds a parallel between the gay rights movement and the women's movement: "Just as gay men, striving for acceptance, disavowed drag queens and effeminate men for a period, the women's movement rejected lesbians. Feminism made striking gains, changing dramatically the expectations of young women about how they could live their lives. Western feminist organizations began to openly support lesbian rights."

[71] Corber and Valocchi, op. cit., p.3

[72] John Hawley (Ed.) *Post-colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) p.3

[73] Mary McIntosh, 'Foreword' in Theo Sandfort, Judith Schuyf, Jan Whem Duyvendak and Jeffery Weeks, (Eds.) *Lesbian and Gay Studies: An Introductory, Interdisciplinary Approach* (London; Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications, 2000) p. xi

[74] Barry Adam ' Love and Sex in Constructing Identity Among Men Who Have Sex with Men' *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000) Vol. 5 (4), p.326

[75] Ibid.

[76] Dennis Altman, 'On Global Queering' *Australian Humanities Review*, July 1996 http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-July-1996/altman.html

[77] Over two thirds of my respondents self-identified as 'gay'; of the remaining, two called themselves 'bisexual', one preferred 'same sex attracted person' one chose '*kothi*' one chose '*hijra*' and only two chose the sobriquet 'queer'. In terms of gender, all except two respondents chose to categorize themselves as masculine. Nihar classified himself as 'androgynous' ("I am he, I am she, I am a wo/man") the *kothi*-identified Queen Rekha preferred the term 'intergendered' and Savitri reiterated that she was '*hijra*'.

[78] The 2nd International Conference on Sexualities, Masculinities, and Cultures in South Asia, 9-12 June 2004, Bangalore. Conference website: http://www.dharanitrust.org/conf2004/index.html

[79] Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap (Eds.) *Out in Theory: The Emergence of Lesbian And Gay Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p.8

[80] This includes people like Anajali Gopalan and Shivananda Khan of the London based Naz Foundation (a HIV/AIDS and sexual health technical support agency working in South Asia), British author Jeremy Seabrook, and others like Indian activist Ashok Row Kavi (to some extent)

[81] Shivananda Khan, 'Kothis, Gays and (other) MSM' (Naz Foundation International, October 2000)

[82] Ruth Vanita (2002), op. cit., p. 7

[83] Ibid, p.5

[84] Dennis 'Altman (1996), op. cit.

[85] Peter Jackson op. cit., pp. 21-22

[86] Suniti Namjoshi *Conversations of Cow* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), as discussed in Ruth Vanita, 'Introduction', *Queering India* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 6

[87] Lesbian + Bisexual + Gay + Transgender + Kothi + Hijra + Queer.

[88] Arvind Narrain, op. cit. p.11 (Endnote 1)

[89] Ibid, p.1

[90] Anthony Giddens, (revised edition) *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2002 [2000]), p.7

[91] John Beynon, and David Dunkerley, *Globalization: The Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.3

[92] Manfred Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p.7

[93] Ibid, p.13

[94] Ibid, pp. 17-36

[95] Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, (London: Sage Publications, 1992), as referenced in Beynon and Dunkerley op. cit., p.9

[96] Ibid, p.10

[97] Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (Revised Ed.) (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux 2000 [1999]), pp. xvi-xvii

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[98] IMF stands for the International Monetary Fund, established in 1947 to oversee the global financial system after the end of World War II. GATT stands for the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the international global trade accord, that was in place between 1948-1994, when the WTO or the World Trade Organization replaced it.

[99] See:
— *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (New York: Picador, 2000)
— *Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate* (New York: Picador, 2002)

[100] See *The Cost of Living* (New York: Modern Library, 1999)

[101] Thomas Friedman op.cit., pp. xx-xxi

[102] Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.3

[103] Beynon and Dunkerley op. cit., p.27

[104] Jagdish Bhagwati *In Defense of Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.110

[105] Renato Rosaldo and Jonathan Xavier Inda (Eds.) *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002) p. 30

[106] Roland Robertson 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity', from Roland Robetson, M Featherstone and S. Lash *Global Modernities* (London: Sage Publishing, 1995), p.40, as cited in Beynon and Dunkerley op. cit., pp. 20-21

[107] Shirley Leung 'Armchairs, TV and Espressos – Is it McDonalds?' *Wall Street Journal* August 13, 2002, cited in Jagdish Bhagwati op. cit., (2004) pp. 110-111

[108] See the issue titled 'The Rising Soft Power of China and India' *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003) Vol. 20 (1).

[109] Scott Baldauf 'A Hindi-English Jumble Spoken by 350 Million' *Christian Science Monitor Online* November 23, 2004
http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1123/p01s03-wosc.html

[110] See Anushka Asthana 'Kiss My Chuddies (Welcome to the Queen's Hinglish)' *Observer* April 25, 2005
http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,6903,1202721,00.html

[111] See Sampa Chakrabarty Lahiri 'A Peek Into the Rural Market' *ET Strategic Marketing* June-July 2002, for more examples of creative appropriations of consumer products by rural India.
http://www.etstrategicmarketing.com/smJune-July2/art6_1.htm

[112] See Brian Larkin, 'Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities' in Inda and Rosaldo op. cit. pp. 350-378

[113] See Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of 'Dallas'*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990)

[114] S. Lash and J. Urry *Economies of Sign and Space* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), paraphrased in Zsuzsa Gille and Sean O Riain, 'Global Ethnography' *Annual Review of Sociology* (Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, 2002), no. 28, p.274

[115] Manuel Castells, *The Information Age* (3 volumes) (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996-1998), paraphrased in Gille and O Riain, op. cit., p.274

[116] Gille and O Riain, op. cit., p.275

[117] Saskia Sassen 'Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global: Elements for a Theorization' *Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) Vol. 12 (1), pp. 215-232 paraphrased in Gille and O Riain, op.cit. p.275

[118] Arjun Appadurai, (1996) op. cit., p. 18

[119] Berry, Martin, and Yue op. cit., pp. 5-6

[120] Dennis Altman (1996) op. cit.

[121] 'Fran Martin responds to Dennis Altman', *Australian Humanities Review* (1996) http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/emuse/Globalqueering/martin.html#2

[122] Dennis Altman (1996) op. cit.

[123] The Humsafar Trust is an NGO formed in Bombay in 1991 by the famous LBGT rights activist Ashok Row Kavi with the mandate of working in the field of HIV/AIDS awareness/prevention in Bombay.

[124] Chris Berry and Fran Martin, 'Syncretism and Synchrony: Queer 'n' Asian Cyberspace in 1990s - Taiwan and Korea' in Berry, Martin, and Yue op. cit., p.89

[125] In Peter Jackson (op. cit, pp. 8-9) he alerts us to the need to avoid "over hasty generalizations in specifying what unites and what distinguishes different national or regional forms of g/l/t identity and culture" The "globally uniform view of gay identity" can also be negative – countries can use this to victimize their own people... The political complexities of taking either a 'global'/western influences' or local history explanatory line should be thought out.

[126] Manfred Steger, op. cit., 'Preface'.

[127] The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000). Accessible on the world wide web through Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/

[128] Jostein Gripsrud, *Understanding Media Culture* (London: Arnold Publishers, 2002), p.7

[129] Eric Eisenberg, 'Building a Mystery: Toward a New Theory of Communication and Identity' *Journal of Communication* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), No. 51, p. 537

[130] Kathryn Woodward, op. cit., pp. 1-2

[131] Stuart Hall (1990), op.cit., p.225, as cited in Nayan Shah, 'Sexuality, Identity and the Uses of History', *A Lotus of Another Color* (Ed. Rakesh Ratti) (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1993), p. 121

[132] Jeffrey Weeks *Invented Moralities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) p. 98

[133] Eric Eisenberg, op. cit., p. 537

[134] Jeffrey Weeks (1995) op.cit., pp. 98-99

[135] Jeffery Weeks (1990) op.cit., p. 115

[136] Eric Eisenberg, op.cit., p. 535

[137] Jostein Gripsrud, op. cit., p.6

[138] Ibid, p.6

[139] Mihaela Kelemen and Warren Smith 'Community and its Virtual Promises: A critique of Cyberlibertarian Rhetoric' *Information, Community and Society* (Taylor and Francis [Routledge], 2001) Vol. 4(3), p.373

[140]Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) p.76, as cited in Maria Bakardjieva 'Virtual Togetherness: An Everyday-life Perspective' from *Media, Culture & Society* (Sage Publications, 2003) Volume: 25 (3), p.292

[141]Kelemen and Smith, op. cit., p.373

[142] Sara Ahmed and Anne-Marie Fortier, 'Re-imagining Communities' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (Sage Publications, 2003) Vol. 6 (3) pp. 251-252

[143] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) p.18

[144] Neo-tribes are transient communities that we choose to become members of, just because we feel like it. Michel Maffesoli (*The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Societies,* [London: Sage Publications, 1996] p.6) calls them 'microgroups' which are inherently "unstable, since the persons of which these tribes are constituted are free to move from one to another".

[145] Kelemen and Smith, op. cit., p.374

[146] Ray Oldernburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get You Through the Day* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), paraphrased in Kelemen and Smith, op. cit., p.376

[147] Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson and Jane Shattuc, "The Culture That Sticks to the Skin: A Manifesto for a New Cultural Studies", *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 16

[148] David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction* (London: Sage Publications, 1993), p.156; cited in Kim Christian Schroder 'The Best of Both Worlds: Media Audience Research Between Rival Paradigms', from Pertti Alasuutari (Ed.) *Rethinking the Media Audience* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999), p.50

[149] Kim Christian Schroder 'The Best of Both Worlds: Media Audience Research Between Rival Paradigms' in Pertti Alasuutari (Ed.) *Rethinking the Media Audience* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999), p.51

[150] Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., p.34

[151] Joanne Passaro, 'You Can't Take the Subway to the Field' in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., p. 156

[152] Stephen Tyler *The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 199-200, cited in Frank Schaap op. cit., p.131

[153] Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis, 'Series Editors' Introduction', Annette Markham, *Life Online: Researching Real Experience in Virtual Space* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998), p.8

[154] Ibid, p.213

[155] John Edward Campbell op. cit., p.25

[156] Kath Weston, *Families We Choose* (Revised Edition), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997 [1991]), p.14

[157] John Edward Campbell op. cit., p.39

[158] See Donna Haraway 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' *Feminist Studies* (College Park, MD: Feminist Studies Inc., 1988) No. 14 pp. 575-599

[159] See Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit,. p.32

[160] Kirin Narayan, 'How Native is a "Native" Anthropologist?' *American Anthropologist* (Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, 1993), Vol. 95 (3), pp. 672, 682

[161] Suad Joseph, 'Feminization, Familism, Self and Politics: Research as a Mughtaribi' in Soraya Altorki and Camilla Fawzia El-Solh (Eds.) *Arab Women in the Field: Studying Your Own Society* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998) p.47

[162] Kirin Narayan, op.cit., pp. 681-682

[163] Lewin and Leap, op. cit., p.12

[164] Frank Schaap, op. cit., p.1

[165] John Edward Campbell, op. cit., p.185

[166] Jenkins, McPherson and Shattuc, op. cit., p. 3

[167] John Edward Campbell, op. cit. p.185

[168] Kath Weston, 'The Virtual Anthropologist', in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 171-172

[169] Slavo Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) p.95, as quoted in Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) p.2

[170] Thomas Blom Hansen, op. cit., p4

[171] David Trend, op. cit., p.54

Chapter 2: From This Perspective...

[1] "Information arbitrage is the synthesis of information from disparate perspectives, woven together to produce a picture of the world that you would never had if you had looked at it from only one perspective." Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (Revised Ed.) (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux 2000 [1999]), pp. 19-20

[2] Arjun Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination' in *Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), Vol. 12(1), pp. 5-6

[3] Ibid.

[4] Arjun Appadurai *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p.5

[5] Ibid, p.7

[6] Ibid, p.8

[7] Peter Jackson 'Pre-Gay, Post-queer: Thai Perspectives on Proliferating Gender/Sex Diversity in Asia, in Gerard Sullivan and Peter A. Jackson (Eds.), *Gay and Lesbian Asia: Culture, Identity, Community* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2000), p.9

[8] Ashok Row Kavi, 'Contract of Silence' in Hoshang Merchant, *Yaarana: Gay Writing from India* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1999) p.18

[9] This was billed as the biggest gay party ever to be organized in Bombay. The organizer (an heir to one of the country's large business empires) had cut no corners to ensure that his outdoor event was ultra luxurious, with firework displays, exotic flower arrangements, ice sculptures, floating water bodies, hundreds of scented candles and a male strip tease performance as the grand finale. Unfortunately, the police raided the party in large numbers just as the strip tease was in full swing. The organizer was arrested and while his family pulled enough strings to ensure that the media reportage of the police raid made no mention of the fact that it was a gay party, the fear and humiliation experienced by all those present at the venue ensured that nothing on that scale was ever organized again in the city.

[10] This was the country's first gay magazine. It continues to be published very sporadically now; after the emergence of the internet, its periodicity and circulation have dwindled. But for a few years in the early 1990s, it was the only source of gay information, narratives and networking, available to gay men in India.

[11] The Humsafar Trust began its operations in 1991, with the mandate of working in the field of HIV/AIDS awareness/prevention. Today it has grown into a large multifaceted organization with a drop in center, a sexually transmitted diseases clinic and counseling, advocacy and outreach services.

[12] Initially a suburban McDonalds; the current regular venue is a more spacious suburban coffee shop.

[13] Approximately US $ 23, at mid-2005 rates.

[14] The parties are of two types. 'Bar Nights' are usually held at smaller bars and clubs like Zouk and Copa Cabana. The entrance fee is less (approximately Rs. 250 or US $ 6 at mid-2005 exchange rates) and this usually includes coupons for drinks or snacks, but no dinner. 'GB Parties' are held at large nightclubs like Rhinoceros, Mikanos, Velocity, Zinc or

Karma – they usually cost between Rs. 350-450 (or US $ 8-10), which include a buffet dinner besides coupons for drinks and snacks. In May 2005, the group also decided to expand into hosting occasional Sunday brunches, with food and games, including speed dating.

[15] The group website (created in 1999) states, "There is nothing 'official' about the group. There never was, and there still isn't a membership form, registration fee, annual general meetings, minutes of meetings and voting or veto. Everyone is free to participate." http://gaybombay.org/misc/aboutGay_Bombay.html

[16] Rajiv Desai, *Indian Business Culture* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 1999) p.85

[17] Government of India, *Ministry of Finance Economic Survey 2003-2004* p.2. Accessible on the Ministry of Finance website: http://finmin.nic.in/the_ministry/dept_eco_affairs/economic_div/eco_survey/index.htm

[18] Warrick Smith et al, *A Better Investment Climate for Everyone: World Development Report 2005* (World Bank) p. 260. Accesible on the World Bank website: http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/EXTW DR2005/0,,menuPK:477681~pagePK:64167702~piPK:64167676~theSitePK:477665,00.h tml

[19] Sources: *Ministry of Finance Economic Survey* op. cit., p.2; *Ministry of Finance Monthly Economic Report* (Government of India, April 2005) p.1 Accessible on the Ministry of Finance website: http://finmin.nic.in/stats_data/monthly_economic_report/index.html

[20] AT Kearney, *FDI Confidence Index 2004* (Global Business Policy Council, October 2004), Volume 7. p.5. Accessible on the world wide web: http://www.atkearney.com/main.taf?p=5,3,1,89

[21] Arun Shourie, 'Before the whining drowns it out, listen to the new India' *Indian Express Online* August 15, 2003 http://www.indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=29666

[22] See Dani Rodrik and Arvind Subramanian, 'From 'Hindu Growth' to Productivity Surge: The Mystery of the Indian Growth Transition' (*CEPR Discussion Papers* 4371, 2004) Downloadable: http://www.nber.org/papers/w10376.pdf

[23] Sunil Khilnani, 'Many Wrinkles in History' *Outlook* 20 August 2001, as quoted in Pawan Varma, *Being Indian* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2004) p.160. Accessible online: http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20010820&fname=Sunil+Kilnani+%28F%2 9&sid=1

[24] Pawan Varma, op.cit., (2004) pp. 88-89

[25] Anonymous magazine editor, interviewed by Leela Fernandes on September 17, 1998, for Leela Fernandes, 'Nationalizing "the Global": Media Images, Cultural Politics and the Middle Class in India' *Media, Culture & Society* (Sage Publications, 2000) Vol. 22, p.614

[26] See Rama Bijapurkar, Virginia Valentine and Monty Alexander, 'Charting the Cultural Future of Markets,' paper delivered at the European Society for Market Research Annual Congress at Davos (September), in ESOMAR 47th Congress Handbook (Amsterdam, 1995), pp. 143-161; cited in David Page and William Crawley *Satellites Over South Asia* (London: Sage Publications, 2000) p.141

[27] Leela Fernandes op. cit., p.615

[28] Indian Census 2000 data, cited in Gurcharan Das, *The Elephant Paradigm: India Wrestles with Change* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2002) p. 171

[29] Jagdish Bhagwati and Arvind Panagariya 'Great Expectations' *The Wall Street Journal* May 24, 2004

[30] Gurcharan Das (2002) op. cit. p. 253

[31] Paola Bacchetta ('When the [Hindu] Nation Exiles its Queers', *Social Text* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1999] No. 61 p. 141) describes Hindu nationalism as a "extremist religious micronationalism of elites, in which elites make strategic political uses of elements drawn from one religion to construct a exclusive, homogenized, Other-repressive, 'cultural' nationalist ideology and practice to retain and increase elite power... Hindu nationalists ultimately propose to eliminate all non-Hindus from the citizen-body..."

[32] Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.3

[33] See Farhad Wadia, 'Don't Rock Our boat, Navalkarji' *Indian Express* April 11, 1998 http://www.expressindia.com/ie/daily/19980411/10150944.html

[34] Smita Thackerey, Bal Thackerey's daughter in law, is a Bollywood film producer, with films like *Haseena Maan Jaayegi* ['The Beautiful Girl Will Comply, 1999] and *Hum Do Humaara Ek* [We Are Two, We Have One, Unreleased]

— See Arjuna Ranawana 'Bombay's Cultural Wars' *Asia Week* August 7, 1998, for an overview of the Shiv Sena culture policing of the mid-1990s. http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/98/0807/feat1.html

[35] In a speech addressed to Indian American and American business leaders in New York, then Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha said: "Swadeshi is pro global but it is pro-Indian without being anti-foreign. And that's the important message from India... If every country were to follow this policy and most countries are following it, we can have a better world... " Speech quoted in Narayan Keshavan, 'Swadeshi goes Global' *Outlook*, April 27, 1998,

cited in William Mazzarella, *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) p.11

[36] See:
— 'BJP Admits India Shining Error' *BBC Online* May 28, 2004
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3756387.stm

— M.G. Devasahayam 'On Whom Does India Shine' *Hindu Online* March 23, 2004
http://www.hindu.com/op/2004/03/23/stories/2004032300110200.htm

[37] Jeremy Seabrook, *Love in a different climate: Men Who Have Sex With Men in India* (New York/London: Verso, 1999) p.140

[38] See:
— P. Sainath's series on rising farmer suicides in India on *Indiatogether.org*
http://www.indiatogether.org/opinions/psainath/suiseries.htm

— Arundhati Roy's critique of big dams and nuclear bombs 'The Greater Common Good', available online on *Narmada.org* http://www.narmada.org/gcg/gcg.html

— Jean Dreze's overview of some successful pro-poor policies in different Indian states
'Don't Forget India's Poor' *Time Asia* December 6, 2004
http://www.time.com/time/asia/covers/501041206/two_indias_vpt_dreze.html

[39] Table source: Lodestar Media, in Vanita Kohli, *The Indian Media Business* (New Delhi: Response Books, 2003) p.2

[40] These include AOL Time Warner (CNN, HBO, Cartoon Network, Warner Bros. India, Warner Music, Turner Distribution, Warner Home Video), Walt Disney (Buena Vista), Sony (Sony Entertainment Television, Sony Music, Columbia Tristar Pictures), Vivendi Universal (Universal Music), Viacom (MTV, Nickelodeon) and News Corporation (Star India, Radio City) Reference: Vanita Kohli, op. cit., p. 211

[41] Douglas Sanders, 'Flying the Rainbow Flag in Asia' Conference Paper – Second International Conference on Sexualities, Masculinities and Cultures in South Asia Bangalore, India, June 9-12 (2004) p.2

[42] I am focusing on the English language press because it is what is predominantly read by the middle-class, both the subject and the context of this thesis.

[43] Due to an astute strategy of price cutting, price differentiation and product diversification carried out by a team of marketing whizkids under the guidance of owner Sameer Jain, the *Times* group's revenues rose from Rs. 4.79 billion in the year ended July 1994 to Rs. 15 billion in July 2003, making it India's largest media company. Source: Vanita Kohli op. cit., p.26

[44] For a closer look at page 3 culture and the 2005 Bollywood film made on the subject, see:

— Zubair Ahmed, Bollywood Director Eyes 'Tabloid Culture' *BBC Online* July 30, 2004 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3929687.stm

— Sukanya Varma, 'Madhur Bhandarkar Proves Himself Yet Again' *Rediff.com* January 21, 2005 http://www.rediff.com/movies/2005/jan/21page.htm

— Namrata Joshi and Lata Khubchandani, 'Page One and a Half' *Outlook India* February 7, 2005 http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fname=Film%20(F)&fodname=20050207&sid =1

[45] 'NRS 2003: Bhaskar is Unbeatable at No. 1; Times Overtakes HT in Delhi' *AgencyFAQS.com*: http://www.agencyfaqs.com/news/stories/2003/12/22/7950.html

[46] Rajiv Desai, op. cit. p.66

[47] Television officially began in India in 1959, but it was not until the beginning of color transmission for the 1982 Asian Games (hosted by New Delhi) that the medium really took off. India's former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was deputed in charge of the event by his mother, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Rajiv oversaw the smooth functioning of the games, including their national colour transmission, a first in the country's history. Prior to the games, the government had encouraged Indian industry to manufacture colour TV's and their import into the country was permitted at a lower rate of duty than that for other electronic items. Both these factors led to a spurt in colour TV ownership. Soaps like *Hum Log* and *Buniyaad*, mythologicals like *Ramayan* and *Mahabharata* and Hindi song compilation shows like *Chhayageet* and *Chitrahaar* were the hallmark of the 1980s along with the sycophantic evening news bulletins and the staple Sunday evening Bollywood film – all screened on Doordaarshan.

[48] This began in the late 70s with the boom in the VCR market.

[49] See Kinjal Shah and Seema Raisinghani, 'India – Cable TV Special Report' *Fitch Ratings* June 2003 p.2

[50] The channel was initially launched on the new Asiasat-1 satellite by Hong Kong based billionaire Li Ka Shing, who sold his stake to Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in 1993.

[51] These were Star Plus (with never seen before programs like *The Bold and the Beautiful, Santa Barbara, Baywatch, Oprah* and *Donahue*), BBC News World Service (an international alternative to DD), MTV (sexy videos, trendy Video Jockeys) and Prime Sports (with games like basketball and entertainment like WWF Wrestling).

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[52] MTV and BBC left the Star bouquet to go solo in 1993. Prime Sports in its newer avatar Star Sports entered into a 50:50 Joint venture with ESPN in 1996 and Zee's promoters bought out Star's stake in 1999 to form their own formidable network.

[53] Zee's initial programming mix included the daily soap *Tara*, with its scandalous smoking, drinking, swearing and adulterous single women, and weekly game shows like *Tol Mol Ke Bol* (the Indian avatar of *The Price is Right), Antakshri* (the popular Indian song game, now televised for large studio audiences), and *Saanp Seedi* (Snakes and Ladders, played in a studio with the slimy host Mohan Kapur).

[54] Dr. Chandraprakash Dwivedi, Former Head of Programming Zee TV, Bombay, May 1998, as quoted in Vanita Kohli op. cit., p.141

[55] For example, the Bollywood song countdown show – *Philips Top Ten*.

[56] For a list of the top 100 programmes in India as measured by AC NIELSEN'S Tam peoplemeter – India's sole TV rating agency, visit http://indiantelevision.com/tvr/indextam.php4 The site maintains separate rankings for Cable and Satellite Programmes and Terrestrial programmes, as provided by AC Nielsen.

[57] Waseem Mahmood, 'Policy Analysis of Electronic Media Practices in South Asia' – a report prepared by the Baltic Media Centre for UNDP's PARAGON regional governance program, August 30, 2001 p. 7

[58] Ronnie Ganguly, 'Indian Media Industry' (Bombay: JP Morgan Asia Pacific Research May 12, 2005) p.6

[59] Source: Various industry estimates in Vanita Kohli op. cit., p.60

[60] National radio had begun in India in 1921 and though the state controlled All India Radio (AIR) that began in 1932 greatly increased its reach during the post-independence years, it was slow to respond to public tastes – preferring instead to adopt a paternalistic 'we know what's best for you approach' towards its listeners. For example, it took several years and severe competition from the Sri Lanka based Radio Ceylon before AIR launched *Vividh Bharti* (its 'light' service airing film based songs) in 1957.

[61] The government suddenly disallowed private FM in 1998 – however intense lobbying by the public and media companies ensured that the space was once again opened up in 2000.

[62] The internet was present in India from the early 1990s in the form of ERNet (Educational and Research Network – a division of the government's Department of Electronics or DoE) and NICNet (the government's National Informatics Centre Network). While ERNet aimed at providing internet connectivity to the country's leading educational and research institutions, NICNet served government departments and organizations. There was also the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) internet service for the software exporters falling under the STP scheme of the DoE. On August 15, 1995, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited

(VSNL) – the government owned company that held the telecommunications monopoly in the country, launched the Gateway Internet Access Service for providing public Internet access. For three years, the company continued to operate as India's only Internet Service Provider (ISP), using the Telegraph Act of 1885, a pre-independence British law, to give itself extended powers while blocking the entry of private ISPs. Information source: Anindo Ghosh, 'Outlook White Paper: Private Internet Service Providers in India' October 15, 1997. Published on the world wide web: http://www.india50.com/isp.html#6

[63] Source: NASSCOM (National Association of Software Companies) Internet Survey 2000, as cited in Puneet Gupta, 'India's Internet: Ready for Explosive Growth' *ISP Planet Market Research*. Available on the World Wide Web:http://isp-planet.com/research/india_stats.html

[64] Ibid.

[65] Source 'Internet Indicators: Hosts, Users and Number of PCs by Country' *ITU (International Telecommunication Union)*, September 16, 2004. Available on the World Wide Web: http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/

[66] Source: NASSCOM Media Update April 2004. Available on the World Wide Web: http://www.nasscom.org/artdisplay.asp?cat_id=447

[67] AP, 'Gartner Report Finds India's Computer Market Robust' *Yahoo Asia News,* November 16, 2004
http://asia.news.yahoo.com/041116/ap/d86d17602.html

[68] Ibid.

[69] '80 Million More PCs in India by 2010' *Rediff.com* December 15, 2004
http://in.rediff.com/money/2004/dec/15pc.htm

[70] Shrikanth RP, 'Sify on iWay to Success' *Express Computer* January 12, 2004
http://www.expresscomputeronline.com/20040112/coverstory01.shtml

[71] Gurcharan Das (2000), op. cit., p.9

[72] The country was divided into sectors comprising the 4 metropolitan cities (Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras) and 19 other telecom circles and services in each sector were structured as a duopoly (only two cellular mobile operators per telecom circle). However by 1997-98, despite the attractiveness of the Indian market, there were only about 800,000 cellular subscribers in the country. The operators had paid huge license fees, which had resulted in a high cost structure, un-affordable tariffs for their services and thus, a low growth of the market. The government took the first of its two prudent decisions in 1999, which helped rejuvenate the industry. It announced a completely revamped National Telecom Policy (NTP), much more beneficial to the operators than its previous regulations. This almost immediately translated into lower tariffs for consumers, greater subscriber uptake for operators and increased cellular coverage in the country.

Cellular tariffs dropped by over 90% between 199 and 2001 and there was a parallel drop in the cost of mobile handsets. Cellular operators began to venture into more and more cities and towns of the country. The year 2001 also saw the entry of the state owned BSNL and MTNL as the third cellular operators in each circle, using WLL (Wireless in Local Loop) technology, as had been mandated by the NTP 1999. Further, in July 2001, cellular licenses were awarded to the 4th cellular operators in different telecom circles. All these moves saw the cellular subscriber base increase to approximately 5.5 million users by the end of 2001. Information and Statistics sourced from the official website of the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), an industry association comprising all the cellular phone companies operation in India. See: http://coai.com/

The government took a second prudent decision by allowing the use of CDMA (Code Division Multiple Access) technology-based operators to enter the market and compete on par with the hitherto GSM (Global Services Mobile) technology-based players in 2002. This enabled the entry of companies like Reliance India Mobile and Tata Indicom into the fray and it was then that the cellular market in the country really began to sizzle. It began to add a million new customers every month at first and this has risen to an astonishing 1.8 million customers per month Source: AFP, 'Mobile Phones the Talk of India as Landlines Lose Out' *Sify News* October 25, 2004

[73]In October 2004, the number of mobile phones in the country surpassed the number of landline users (44 million) for the first time. See:

— Arindam Mukherjee, '98 Tra La La 1000' *Outlook* April 4, 2005
http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20050404&fname=VTelecom+%28F%29&sid=1

— Official Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) statistics. See http://coai.com/

— Anand Parthasarthy, 'Mobile Phone Growth Signals India's Telecom Maturity' *The Hindu* Saturday 16, 2004
http://www.hindu.com/2004/10/16/stories/2004101603401300.htm

[74] Indrajit Basu (UPI), 'India's New Telecom Callers' *The Washington Times* June 25, 2004
http://washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20040624-010347-8465r.htm

[75] India's NASSCOM (National Association of Software Services and Companies) – the has co-opted IT Enabled Services within its ambit and includes ITES figures in its reporting. Source: Carol Upadhyay 'A New Transnational Class' *Economic and Political Weekly* November 27, 2004 footnote 2. Article archived on http://www.epw.org.in (Membership required)

[76] 'IT Sector Employee Base Tops 1 Million' *Rediff.com* June 2, 2005
http://in.rediff.com/money/2005/jun/02it.htm

[77] 'IT Exports to Account for 30% Forex Inflows by 08: Maran' *Economic Times* October 20, 2004

[78] For an excellent overview of India's emergence as an IT superpower, read *The Horse that Flew: How India's Silicon Gurus Spread their Wings* by Chidanand Rajghatta (New Delhi: Harper Collins India, 2001). Also read Devesh Kapur's excellent essay 'The Causes and Consequences of India's IT Boom' in *India Review* 1(2), April 2002, 91-110.

[79] Douglas Sanders op. cit., pp. 8-9

[80] Ruth Vanita, (Ed.) *Queering India: Same-sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), p.1

[81] Amara Das Wilhelm *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex* (Xlibris Corporation, 2004) p.32

[82] Brett Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p.2; quoted in Douglas Sanders op. cit. pp. 19-20

[83] Amara Das Wilhelm op. cit., p.32

[84] Ruth Vanita, and Saleem Kidwai (Eds.) *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) pp. 220-221

[85] "Vedic refers to ancient Hindusim, or the indigeneous religion and culture of India prior to any foreign inflience, based on traditional 'veda' or 'knowledge'...According to the scriptures... the Vedic age ended just over five thousand years ago or about 3,150 BC, with the dawn of the Kali Yug era. Most modern historians place this date much later, at about 1,500 BC." Amara Das Wilhelm op. cit., pp. xix-xx

[86] Kama Shashtra: "Vedic scriptures concerned with sense, pleasure and sexuality, set aside by Nandi at the beginning of creation." Amara Das Wilhelm, op. cit., p.192

[87] Ibid, pp. xvii

[88] Artha Shastra: "Vedic scriptures concerned with politics, economy and prosperity, sset aside byBrhaspati at the beginning of creation. Amara Das Wilhelm, op. cit. p.184

[89] Vanita and Kidwai (2001), op. cit., p.25.

[90] Their excellent book *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* is divided into three parts. 'Ancient Indian Materials' covers the epics like the Sanskrit Ramayana and M*ahabharata*, the *Vedas* and *Puranas*, as well as early Budhist and Tamil texts between the period 1500 BC – 8th century AD. 'Medieval Materials' mainly deals with Persian and Urdu literary texts, poetry, Sufi writings and *ghazals* from the Muslim Mughal kingdoms from the 8th century AD to the late 18th century. 'Modern Indian Materials' covers

19th and 20th century India, discussing material as diverse as *Rekhti* poetry, travelogues, homophobic fiction, and positive and the negative media coverage of homosexuality.

[91] Vanita and Kidwai (2001), op. cit., p xviii

[92] Ibid. pp. 194-195

[93] Ruth Vanita (2002), op. cit. p.3

[94] A *ghazal* is a "Persian/Urdu love poem." Vanita and Kidwai (2001), op. cit., p.358

[95] *Rekhti* stands for "poetry written by male poets in the female voice and using female idiom in Lucknow in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." Vanita and Kidwai (2001), op. cit., p.220

[96] Ruth Vanita (2002), op. cit., p.4

[97] Vanita and Kidwai (2001), op. cit., p 196

[98] Paola Bacchetta (1999), op. cit., pp. 146-147

[99] See Arvind Narrain, *Queer: Despised Sexuality, Law and Legal Change* (Bangalore: Books For Change, 2004), pp. 44-45

[100] Douglas Sanders, op. cit., p.21

[101] Vanita and Kidwai (2001), op. cit., p xxiii

[102] Douglas Sanders, op. cit., p.21

[103] Arvind Narrain, op. cit., pp. 33-34

[104] Aditya Bondyopadhyay, 'MSM and the law in India', Position Paper (Naz Foundation International, undated) Received via email, on request from NFI London office, on November 14, 2003.

[105] Paola Bacchetta (1999), op. cit. p.159

[106] See for example:
— Anju Singh, 'An Unnatural Opposition to Section 377' *Indian Express* (Bombay) October 1, 2002

— Anubha Sawhney, 'A Flaw in the Law? Officially' *Times of India* (Bombay) August 23, 2004

— Saleem Kidwai ' 'Time To Break Shackles: Let Antiquated Laws Go and Same-Sex Lovers Be Allowed to Live in Dignity' *Outlook* April 25, 2005

http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20050425&fname=Column+Salim+Kidwai+%28F%29&sid=1

[107] See *Combat Law: The Human Rights Magazine* Volume 2, Issue 4, October-November 2003. The entire issue is dedicated to different aspects of LBGT activism in India, mostly relating to Section 377.

[108] See 'HC Asks Center to Clarify Stand on Homosexuals' *Telegraph* (Calcutta) January 16, 2003
http://www.telegraphindia.com/1030116/asp/nation/story_1578382.asp

[109] See:
— PTI, 'Allowing Homosexuality Will Lead to Delinquent Behavior: Indian Govt.' *Rediff.com* September 8, 2003
http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/sep/08sex.htm

— Kavita Chowdhary, 'Center Says Being Gay Will Remain a Crime, It's Reason: Our Society Doesn't Tolerate It' *Indian Express* September 9, 2003
http://www.indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=31224

— Siddharth Narrain, 'Sexuality and the Law' *Frontline* Volume 20 Issue 26 December 20, 2003 – January 2, 2004
http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2026/stories/20040102002209500.htm

— Shibu Thomas, 'Mumbai Gays Against Center's Stance' *Mid-day* September 15, 2003
http://web.mid-day.com/news/city/2003/september/63897.htm

[110] 'SC Notice to Government on Homosexuality' *Times of India* April 1, 2005
http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1067013.cms

[111] INFOSEM's initial agenda is outlined as follows: (Source: personal email exchange with Ashok Row Kavi, dated November 6, 2003)
— "Work to abolish parts of Section 377 of the IPC that deal with consensual sex between adults, independent of their sexual orientation
— Work on very clear formulations of all forms of sexual assault and child sex abuse to be addressed by the law
— Make representations to the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) seeking inclusion of sexual orientation as a group for non-discrimination in Part III of the Constitution of India.
— Work for the recognition of the transgendered as a third sex in the Constitution of India.
— Advocate for health awareness and care on a priority basis to fight HIV/AIDS and other STIs among LGBT people.
— Help grassroots and emerging groups by providing input and training in conducting research and health, social, and legal needs assessment; help in building their skills

and resources; provide access to funding for their respective health and associated programmes; and share research and baseline data.
— Set up consultations for lesbian sexual health and recognize their sexual health needs.
— To encourage, advocate and work for capacity building of sexual minorities in India."

[112] Arvind Narrain op. cit., p.66

[113] Douglas Sanders, op. cit., pp. 38-39

[114] Ibid, p.37

[115] See Arvind Narrain, op. cit., p.67. Also Peter Jackson, op. cit., p.1

Chapter 3: Up Close and Personal

[1] U2 'Walk On' *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (Santa Monica, USA: Interscope Records, 2000)

[2] Throughout, when I use the term 'anthropology', I refer to social/cultural anthropology and not the other anthropology subfields like medical anthropology, etc.

[3] Delmos Jones, 'Towards a Native Anthropology' *Human Organization* (Winter 1970) vol. 29 (4), p.256

[4] John Van Maanen *Tales of The Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) p.16

[5] James Clifford, 'Spatial Practices' in Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Eds.) *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) p.195

[6] Joan Vincent. 'Engaging Historicism', in Richard Fox (Ed.) Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present, (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), p.55, as cited in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit. p.7

[7] Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p.1

[8] Tim Plowman, 'Ethnography and Critical Practice' in Brenda Laurel, *Design Research: Methods and Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p.32

[9] Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture' in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 10

[10] Andreas Witel, 'Ethnography on the Move: From Field to Net to Internet' in *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research.* (January, 2000) Available on the World Wide Web at: http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-00/1-00wittel-e.htm

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Arjun Appadurai 'Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries For a Transnational Anthropology' in R. G. Fox (Ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991) pp. 191-200; cited in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit. p.3

[14] John Van Maanen, op. cit., pp. 17-18

[15] Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap (Eds.), *Out in Theory: The Emergence of Lesbian And Gay Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 2-4

[16] John Edward Campbell, *Getting It on Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality, and Embodied Identity* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004), p.7

[17] See http://www.cheskin.com/

[18] See http://www.look-look.com/

[19] John Van Maanen ,op. cit., p.24

[20] Tim Plowman, op. cit., p.32

[21] Delmos Jones (op. cit., pp. 251-252) defines fieldwork as "a process off finding answers to certain questions, or solutions to certain theoretical or practical problems. As such it involves a series of steps, from the definition of the problem to be studied through the collection of data to the analysis of data and the writing up of the results."

[22] Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit. p.12

[23] George Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Think* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) p.79; cited in Andreas Witel, op. cit.

[24] Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 35-37

[25] Mary Des Chene, 'Locating the Past', in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit. p.71

[26] Ibid, p.78

[27] James Clifford 'Spatial Practices' in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit. p.218

[28] Pierre Bourdieu, Richard Nice (Translator) *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press,1990 [1980]), p. 25

[29] Renato Rosaldo *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) p.168

[30] Soheir Morsy, 'Fieldwork in my Egyptian Homeland: Towards the Demise of Anthropology's Distinctive-Other Hegemonic Tradition' in Soraya Altorki and Camilla Fawzia El-Solh (Eds.) *Arab Women in the Field: Studying Your Own Society* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998) p.72

[31] Ibid, p.69

[32] James Clifford (1997), op. cit., p.215

[33] Kirin Narayan, 'How Native is a "Native" Anthropologist?' *American Anthropologist* (Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, 1993), Vol. 95 (3), p.679

[34] Ibid, p.682

[35] Joanne Passaro, 'You Can't Take the Subway to the Field' in Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 152-153

[36] Kirin Narayan, op. cit., p.680

[37] Ibid.

[38] James Clifford, op. cit., p.215

[39] Joanne Passaro, op. cit., p.161

[40] Stuart Hall 'New Cultures for Old' in Doreen Massey and Pat Jess (Eds.), *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures, and Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 206

[41] Kirin Narayan, op. cit., p.672

[42] Kath Weston, in Gupta and Ferguson (1997), op. cit. p.167

[43] Altorki and El-Solh, op. cit., p.7

[44] James Clifford, op. cit., p.208

[45] See Altorki and El-Solh, op. cit., p.7

[46] Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 31-32

[47] Delmos Jones, op. cit., p.252

[48] Altorki and El-Solh, op. cit. p.8

[49] Soraya Altorki, 'At Home in the Field' in Altorki and El-Solh, op. cit., p.57

[50] Delmos Jones, op. cit., pp. 252-256

[51] Kath Weston, in Gupta and Ferguson (1997), op. cit. p.167

[52] Soheir Morsy, op. cit., p.73

[53] Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., p.17

[54] Kath Weston, in Gupta and Ferguson (1997), op. cit. p.168

[55] Ibid, pp. 176-177

[56] Seteney Shami, 'Studying Your Own: The Complexities of a Shared Culture' in Altorki and El-Solh, op. cit., p.115

[57] Gupta and Ferguson, op. cit., p.18

[58] Renato Rosaldo, (1989) *op. cit.* p.168-195; cited in Kirin Narayan, op. cit. p.676

[59] Kirin Narayan, op. cit. p.676

[60] Renato Rosaldo (1989) *op. cit.* p.181

[61] Thomas Blom Hansen *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) p.17

[62] See Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994

[63] James Clifford, op. cit. p.213

[64] Ibid, pp. 215-216

[65] Kirin Narayan, op. cit. p.678

[66] Ibid, pp. 671-672

[67] Salman Rushdie *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999) p.7

[68] Gay Bombay Website: 'About Us'

http://www.gaybombay.org/misc/aboutgb.html

[69] A newsgroup (like its earlier avatar, the mailing list) is an asynchronous one-to-many online communication device – as opposed to asynchronous one-to-one online communication devices like email, or synchronous communication devices like chat and instant messenger.

[70] As the first online navigational guide to the Web, Yahoo! is the leading internet guide in terms of traffic, advertising, household and business user reach; today the company's global Web network includes 25 World properties and it has offices in Europe, Asia, Latin America, Australia, Canada and the United States. Source: Yahoo! Media Relations:http://docs.Yahoo.com/info/pr/index.html

[71] These are: (Source: Yahoo! Groups Guidelines: http://groups.Yahoo.com/local/guidelines.html)
— "You may not harass, abuse, threaten, or advocate violence against other members or individuals or groups.
— You may not post content that is harmful to minors.
— You may not post content that is obscene, otherwise objectionable, or in violation of federal or state law.
— Stay on topic. Although all groups are different, most groups appreciate it when you stay on topic. If you constantly stray from the topic you may be moderated or removed from a group altogether by its owner.
— You may not add members to a group without their permission.
— You may not use Yahoo! Groups for commercial or advertising purposes.
— You may not post content which infringes the intellectual property, privacy or other rights of third parties.
— You may only post adult-oriented content in age-restricted areas. You must be 18 years old or over to access these areas.
— Some content may be more appropriate in some contexts than others. Yahoo! reserves the right to remove content that it determines, in its sole discretion, to be inappropriate and in violation of our rules. For example, discussions or depictions of bestiality, incest, excretory acts, or child pornography may be inappropriate if placed in a sexual or otherwise exploitative context.
— You may not use Groups solely for the purpose of storing and archiving files."

[72] Within this group, there is a provision to post messages to the entire group at large, or to individuals who have already posted on the list – by clicking on the (partially disguised) email link that appears besides their nickname, accompanying their posting.

[73] See *Between the Lines: Negotiating South Asian LBGT Identity* Official Festival Website: http://mit.edu/cms/betweenthelines/

[74] In *Life Online: Researching Real Experience in Virtual Space* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998, pp. 62-67), Annette Markham conducts her research by carrying out what she calls "User on the Net" interviews using various "real time talk" software packages.

[75] Suketu Mehta *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004) p.14

[76] Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport Undertaking or BEST is the public undertaking that operates Bombay's citywide bus services. Bus number 123 operates on a short route from RC Church in South Bombay to V. Naik Chowk in Tardeo. See official BEST website: http://www.bestundertaking.com/

[77] Andrew Strickler, 'Officials in India strive to improve rail safety for millions of riders' *San Francisco Chronicle* November 12, 2004
http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-
bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/11/12/MNG2P9PCR11.DTL

[78] R Raj Rao, *The Boyfriend* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003) p.1

[79] Suketu Mehta, op. cit., p.14

[80] US $ 8 at mid-2005 rates

[81] Georgina Maddox, 'A Gay Summer' *Indian Express* 18 July, 2004
http://www.indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=51228

[82] Renato Rosaldo (1989) op. cit., p.168-195; cited in Kirin Narayan, op. cit., p.676

[83] Suad Joseph, 'Feminization, Familism, Self and Politics: Research as a Mughtaribi' in Altorki and El-Solh, op. cit. p.35

[84] Lynn Cherny, *Conversation and Community: Discourse in a Social MUD* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p.311

[85] Amy Bruckman, 'Studying the Amateur Artist: A Perspective on Disguising Data Collected in Human Subjects Research on the Internet'. Paper presented at the Computer Ethics: Philosophical Enquiries (CEPE) conference, held at Lancaster University, UK, December 14-16, 2001. Accessible on the World Wide Web: http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_bru_full.html

[86] Lynn Cherny (op. cit., p.312) writes that "research rigor usually demands that the researcher provide a trail of supporting evidence for another researcher to duplicate her efforts and reach similar conclusions from the data.... privacy protection, on the other hand means thwarting just such a research duplication. However the ethnographer must be pragmatic about how much effort anyone is likely to take to uncover identities and locations."

[87] Altorki and El-Solh, op. cit., p.20

[88] Soraya Altorki, op. cit., p.62

[89] Delmos Jones, op. cit., p.255

[90] James Clifford op. cit., p.202

[91] See Mark J. McLelland 'Virtual 'Ethnography: Using the Internet to Study Gay Culture in Japan' in *Sexualities* (Sage Publications: 2002) Vol. 5(4) pp. 387-406

[92] David Bell and Gill Valentine (Eds.) *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1995) p. 26; cited in John Edward Campbell op. cit., p.41

[93] John Edward Campbell op. cit., p.41

[94] Ibid, p.42

[95] Ibid.

[96] Salman Rushdie, op. cit., pp. 248-249

[97] AR Rehman 'Swades' *Swades* (Bombay, India: Ashutosh Gowarikar Productions/T Series Music, 2004)

[98] The protagonist *in Swades* has to chose between returning to India to work on basic issues like electricity in his village, or remain at NASA in the US.

Chapter 4: Media Matters

[1] For an overview of press coverage of gay related issues and Indian gay writing prior to 1991, see appendix D and appendix E respectively. For an examination of 'queered' Indian advertising, I recommend Ruth Vanita's excellent essay 'Homophobic Fiction/Homoerotic Advertising: The Pleasures and Perils of Twentieth Century Indianness' in *Queering India: Same-sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002) pp. 127-148

[2] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996) pp. 63-64

[3] Shridhar Raghavan, 'Gay: Everything You Wanted to Know About Homosexuality but Were Afraid to Find Out' *Gentleman* August 1991

[4] Anusha Srinivasan 'I Want My Sex' *Mid-day* (Bombay) June 30, 1993

[5] Madhumita Ghosh, 'Homosexuality: A Thorny Issue' *Sunday Mail Magazine* September 1, 1991

[6] For e.g.:

— Soraya Khan, 'Homosexuals – Should They Be Damned?' *Deccan Chronicle* (Hyderabad) August 14, 1993

— R Raj Rao, 'Where Are the Homosexuals? You Don't Have to Look Too Far' *Indian Express* (Bombay) September 2, 2002

[7] Vijay Jung Thapa and Sheela Raval, 'Sex, Lies, Agony, Matrimony' *India Today* May 11, 1998

[8] Kiran Manral, 'Bi Bi Love' *Saturday Times* (Bombay) March 6, 1999

[9] Sheela Raval, 'Men on Call' *India Today* January 27, 2001

[10] Piyush Roy and Mamta Sen, 'I Want To Break Free' *Society* October 2002

[11] Georgina Maddox 'Gay and Gloomy' *Indian Express: Mumbai Newsline* June 24, 2003
http://cities.expressindia.com/fullstory.php?newsid=55715

[12] Neil Pate, 'Blackmailers Give Gays, Lesbians a Hard Time', *Times of India* (Bombay) July 16, 2004

[13] Neil Pate, 'Police Target Gays to Extort Money', *Times of India* (Bombay) August 24, 2004

[14] Sweta Ramanujan, 'Love in the Time of Cynicism' *Indian Express: Mumbai Newsline* February 14, 2003

[15] 'No Gay Priests, We're Indians' *Mid-day* August 6, 2003
http://web.mid-day.com/news/city/2003/august/60407.htm

[16] See Georgina Maddox, 'Coming Out' *Sunday Express* July 27, 2003
http://www.indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=28237

Shalini Nair, 'Coming Out' *Indian Express: Mumbai Newsline* July 13, 2004
http://cities.expressindia.com/fullstory.php?newsid=91232

[17] Shefalee Vasudev, 'The Gay Spirit' *India Today* August 2, 2004

[18] 'Gay Couple Stabs Each Other' *News Today* May 27, 1992

[19] Ramesh Babu, 'Lesbians' Death Wish' *Sunday Hindustan Times* June 27, 2004

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[118] Personal conversation with Ashok Row Kavi, Bombay, India, August 24, 2004

[119] 'Star-TV Suspends TV Show After Row' *TeleSatellite Magazine*, May 14, 1995
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[120] Cadre members of the right wing political party, the Shiv Sena.

[121] 'Sena Men, Gay Activists Spar on Live TV' *Times of India* (Bombay) June 26, 2004

[122] 'Jassi forges ahead with a bold step' *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi) December 4, 2003

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[124] Arvind Kala, Invisible *Minority: The Unknown World of the Indian Homosexual* (New Delhi: Dynamic Books, 1991)

[125] Pedro Menezes 'On Gay Street' *The Daily* July 5, 1992

[126] Kajal Basu, 'A Closet View' *India Today* June 15, 1992

[127] The author prefers to use this expression as he feels that in India, like with several other non-Western countries, concepts of 'gay' or 'bisexual' may not be applicable to men that indulge in homosexual intercourse.

[128] Ruth Vanita, 'Introduction: Modern Indian Materials' in Vanita and Kidwai (2001), op. cit., p.212

[129] Ratti, Rakesh, (Ed.) *A Lotus of Another Color: An Unfolding of the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Experience* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1993) p.15

[130] See:
— *The Golden Gate* (New York: Random House 1986)
— *A Suitable Boy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993)

[131] See the short story 'Artha' in *Love and Longing in Bombay* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1997)

[132] See Firdaus Kanga *Trying to Grow* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990)

[133] Consider, for example, this delightful passage (pp. 30-31)
> *"Are you a dhakka start?" the man said to Yudi, who had fallen for the thick veins on his erect penis. Yudi had set eyes on the man in the Nalla Sopara loo as soon as he got off his train. He noticed the veins even in the dull light of a zero-watt bulb. After that, he couldn't take his eyes off. They stood in their respective stalls and talked.*
> *"What's your choice?" the man asked him.*
> *"Everything. How about you?"*
> *"Biryani khaayega?" [Will you eat biryani?]*
> *Yudi knew all the slang of working class homos. "Dhakka start" was gay. "Biryani khaayega" was rimming...*
> *Back at the flat, they did everything. Yudi ate and relished his biryani as Asha Bhosle provided the background score. The man's name was Dyaneshwar. His parents had named him after the revered Marathi saint, Maharashtra's answer to Lord Krishna, in the hope that he would grow up and show people the Way. Did they know that he would become a dhakka start who would treat the famished to biryani?*

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[134] Vanita and Kidwai (2001), op. cit., pp. xxiv

[135] Bina Fernandez (Ed.) *Humjinsi: A Resource Book on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights in India* (Bombay: India Center for Human Rights and Law, 2002)

[136] *Human Rights Violations Against Sexual Minorities in India* (Bangalore, India: PUCl-K, 2001)
Accessible on the World Wide Web: http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Gender/2003/sexual-minorities.htm

[137] *Human Rights Violations Against the Transgender Community* (Bangalore, India: PUCl-K, 2003)
Report summary accessible on the World Wide Web:
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[138] See Jerry Pinto, 'Cinema Comes Out of the Closet' *Sunday Review* January 26, 1997

[139] See Shibu Thomas, 'India Finally Enters Gay World' *Asian Age* (Bombay) January 31, 2003

[140] The term Bollywood is believed to have first been used by a journalist from the Indian film magazine *Cine Blitz* in the 1980s. (Nasreen Munni Kabir, *Bollywood: The Indian Cinema Story* London: Channel 4 Books, 2001, p 21) It refers to the cinema of the Bombay-centric Hindi film industry.

[141] Hoshang Merchant (Ed.) *Yaarana: Gay Writing from India* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1999) p. xxiii

[142] Shohini Ghosh 'The Closet is Ajar' *Outlook* May 30, 2005
http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20050530&fname=GShohini+Ghosh+%28
F%29&sid=1&pn=1

[143] See:
— Gayathri Gopinath, 'Queering Bollywood: Alternative Sexualities in Popular Indian Cinema' Journal of Homosexuality (New York: Haworth Press, 2000) Vol. 39 (3/4) pp. 283-97

— R Raj Rao 'Memories Pierce the Heart: Homoeroticism, Bollywood-Style' Journal of Homosexuality (New York: Haworth Press, 2000) Vol. 39 (3/4), pp. 299-306

— Ashok Row Kavi 'The Changing Image of the Hero in Hindi Films' Journal of Homosexuality (New York: Haworth Press, 2000) Vol. 39 (3/4) pp. 307-12

[144] Categories like 'first' are often contested and ambiguous. I note that the 1983 Hindi film *Holi* touches upon the subject of homophobia in a boys college, where an effeminate boy is driven to suicide by the violent harassment by his dorm-mates. However, the Indian media

widely heralded *Mast Kalander* as the first film with a gay character and it is this premise that I have followed here.

[145] Gayatri Sinha, 'Bollywood Goes Gay With Abandon' *Indian Express Magazine* (Bombay) April 21, 1991

[146] See Rashid Kidwai, 'Real Cheer Dims MLA Jeers' *The Telegraph* May 18, 2005
http://www.telegraphindia.com/1050519/asp/nation/story_4758092.asp

See 'Eunuch MP Takes Seat' *BBC News, March 6, 2000*
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/668042.stm

[147] The characters in the film are not really gay, but only pretend to be so, much to the disapproval of Kantaben, the housekeeper. The actors playing these two characters camped it up as emcees of the annual Filmfare Awards in 2004 – a show that was broadcast to millions of viewers over television. My respondents were polarized about the film and their performance at the awards – some saw it as stereotypical, others felt it was liberating.

[148] See Ziya Us Salam, 'Bold But Clichéd' *Hindu* June 18, 2004
http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/fr/2004/06/18/stories/2004061801190100.htm

Parul Gupta, 'Bollywood Rocks, Both Ways' *Times of India*, September 15, 2003
http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/cms.dll/articleshow?msid=183143

[149] 'Gay Lord' *Asian Age* (Bombay) January 10, 2004

[150] See Praveen Swami 'Furore Over a Film' *Frontline* December 19, 1998 – January 1, 1999
http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1526/15260430.htm

[151] 'Sainiks Spew Venom Against Dilip Kumar for Backing Fire' *Indian Express* December 13, 1998
http://www.indianexpress.com/ie/daily/19981213/34750024.html

[152] 'Firepariksha – Replace Radha with Shabana' *Indian Express* December 14, 1998
http://www.indianexpress.com/ie/daily/19981214/34850474.html

[153] See Suhasini Haider 'What's Wrong With My Film? Why are People Making Such a Fuss?' *Rediff.com*
http://www.rediff.com/entertai/1998/dec/10fire.htm

Sonia Trikha, 'Since Cricket Issues Didn't Work, People Picked on Fire, says Deepa' *Indian Express* December 6, 1998
http://www.expressindia.com/ie/daily/19981206/34050764.html

[154] For various academic debates about *Fire* and its reception, see:

— Geeta Patel 'On Fire: Sexuality and its Incitements' in Ruth Vanita (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 222-233

— Monica Bachmann 'After the Fire' in Ruth Vanita (2002) *op. cit.* pp. 235-243

— Shohini Ghosh, 'From the Frying Pan into the Fire', in *Communalism Combat* (Bombay, India: Sabrang Communications) January 1999, p.19

— Ratna Kapur, 'Cultural Politics of Fire' in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay, India) May 22, 1999, p. 1297

— Jigna Desai 'Homo on The Range: Mobile and Global Sexualities' in *Social Text* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) Vol. 20 (4), pp. 65-89

[155] 'Sena Turns the Heat on Girlfriend' *Times of India* (Bombay) June 15, 2004

[156] Srinivas Prasad and Sujata Anandan 'Gay Groups Join Chorus Against Girlfriend' *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi) June 16, 2004

[157] '*My Brother Nikhil*' *Outlook* April 11, 2005
http://outlookindia.com/showtime.asp?fodname=20050411

[158] For example: Priyanka Haldipur '*My Brother Nikhil*' *Deccan Herald* March 27, 2005
http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/mar272005/mr1.asp

Mayank Shekhar 'Film Review – *My Brother Nikhil*' *Mid-day* March 25, 2005
http://ww1.mid-day.com/hitlist/2005/march/106267.htm

[159] There could be several reasons for this lack of moral panic this time around. The fact that this was a 'multiplex' film (released to a select urban audience), the fact that the gay relationship was completely avoided in the promos enabling it to slip under the cultural police radar, the conjecture that because the film was about the men and not women, it was less threatening to the morality brigade and finally it's promotion by a phalanx of celebrity cricketers and film personalities, as an AIDS sensitive goody-goody type of film.

[160] Riyad Wadia, 'Long Life of a Short Film', *Queer Asian Cinema: Shadows in the Shade* (Ed. Andrew Grossman) (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2000), p. 320

[161] Ibid. p. 322

[162] *BOMgAY*'s end credits included the statement: "This film is dedicated to all those who agree to disagree and in doing so espouse biological and cultural diversity".

[163] Jaspreet Pandohar, 'Loud and Proud: India's Hidden Gay Community Comes Out of The Closet', *Desi Magazine* (London: December/January 2004); referred to from the official Gulabi Aaina website http://www.solarispictures.com/reviews7.htm

[164] Ibid.

[165] The report 'Male to Male Sexual Behaviors in South Asia: Challenges and Assumptions' (Naz Foundation International October 2001) by Shivananda Khan states that there is

evidence pointing to *kothi*-identified males having more multiple partners than gay identified males. Other characteristics of *kothi* identified males, who belong primarily to the lower classes, as described in the report, include higher levels of anal sex, less condom use, vulnerability due to poverty and unemployment, less access to STI services, lower levels of education and little access to the English language.

[166] Jaspreet Pandohar, op. cit.

[167] Riyad Wadia, op. cit., p. 317

[168] A chawl is "a set of small multi-storied residential units, constructed mostly in the nineteenth century, to accommodate industrial workers particularly in Bombay. These are sometimes described as 'inner city, run-down, walk ups'." Source: 'Words and Concepts in Urban Development and Planning in India: An Analysis in the Context of Regional Variation and Changing Policy Perspectives' by Amitabh Kundu and Somnath Basu, *Inde du Nord / Northern India*, Working Paper No. 4 (UNESCO: 1999)
http://www.unesco.org/most/p2basu.htm

[169] Consider this dialogue exchange from *Gulabi Aaina*:
> *Bibbo: There were so many after us [at the party]*
> *Shabbo: Because we were in drag – they were all straight otherwise.*
> *Bibbo: Straight my foot. Pussy or bum, no one leaves a bubble gum!*

[170] 'The Pink Mirror', *B. News* 85, 11 March 2004, p. 17. Referenced from the Solaris Pictures Website http://www.solarispictures.com/reviews9.htm

[171] Nayan Shah, 'Sexuality, Identity, and the Uses of History', *A Lotus of Another Color* (Ed. Rakesh Ratti) (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1993) p. 127

Chapter 5: Straight Expectations

[1] Jeremy Seabrook *Love in a different climate: Men Who Have Sex With Men in India* (New York/London: Verso, 1999) p.50

[2] Barry Adam ' Love and Sex in Constructing Identity Among Men Who Have Sex with Men' *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000) Vol. 5 (4), p.322

[3] Douglas Sanders, 'Flying the Rainbow Flag in Asia' Conference Paper – Second International Conference on Sexualities, Masculinities and Cultures in South Asia Bangalore, India, June 9-12 (2004), p.7

[4] Hinduism is the predominant religion in India. According to the 2001 census about 83% of the population identified as 'Hindu'. The latest Indian census facts and figures may be viewed on the world wide web: http://www.censusindia.net/

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[5] Devdutt Pattanaik, *The Man Who Was a Woman and Other Queer Tales from Hindu Lore* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002) pp. 5-8

[6] Maria Bakardjieva 'Virtual Togetherness: An Everyday-life Perspective' from *Media, Culture & Society* (Sage Publications, 2003) Volume: 25 (3), pp 291. Bakardjieva reverses Raymond Williams' 1974 concept of 'mobile privatization'; her term 'immobile socialization' denotes the "socialization of private experience through the invention of new forms of intersubjectivity and social organization online."

[7] David Woolwine, 'Community in Gay Male Experience and Discourse' *Journal of Homosexuality* (New York: Haworth Press, 2000) Vol. 38 (4) p.21

[8] Peggy Wireman, *Urban Neighborhoods, Networks, and Families: New Forms for Old Values* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1984); cited in Barry Wellman and M. Gulia 'Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities', in Mark Smith and Peter Kollock (Eds.) *Communities in Cyberspace* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998) p.176

[9] Barry Wellman and M. Gulia 'Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities', in Smith and Kollock, op. cit., p.181

[10] N Charles and A Davies 'Contested Communities: The Refuge Movement and Cultural Identities in Wales' *Sociological Review* (Blackwell Publishing, 1997) No. 45, pp. 416-436; as cited in Mihaela Kelemen and Warren Smith 'Community and its Virtual Promises: A critique of Cyberlibertarian Rhetoric' *Information, Community and Society* (Taylor and Francis [Routledge], 2001) Vol. 4(3), p.374

[11] David Woolwine, op. cit., p.21

[12] "Weak ties are more apt than strong ties to link people with different social characteristics. Such weak ties are also a better means than strong ties of maintaining contact with other social circles." M. Granovetter 'The Strength of Weak Ties' *American Journal of Sociology* (University of Chicago, 1973) 78(6), pp. 1360–1380; referred to in Wellman and Gulia, op. cit., p.176

[13] David Woolwine, op. cit., p.30

[14] See Roland Robertson 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,' in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities* (London: Sage Publishing, 1995) pp. 25-44

[15] Wellman and Gulia, in Smith and Kollock, op. cit., p.187

[16] *Holi* and *Raksha Bandhan* are Hindu festivals and national holidays in India. *Iftaar* is the daily fast breaking meal performed during the holy month of Ramadan in the Islamic calendar.

[17] See Sally Munt, Elizabeth H Bassett, and Kate O'Riordan, 'Virtually Belonging: Risk, Connectivity, and Coming Out On-Line' *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), Vol. 7 (2,3), p.127, for an overview.

[18] Anthony Giddens, (1991), *Modernity and Self- Identity, Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* Cambridge (Polity Press), p.54 quoted in David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction* (London / New York: Routledge, 2002), p.99

[19] See Munt, Bassett, and O'Riordan, op. cit., p.128, for an overview.

[20] Judith Donath 'Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community' in Smith and Kollock, op. cit., p.53

[21] Ibid, pp. 30-31

[22] Ibid, p.44

[23] See Ketan Tanna, 'Bombay Gays' Night Out - New Year's Eve Parties', *The Hindustan Times*, December 31, 2003 http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/919_514378,001800010001.htm

[24] Jeremy Seabrook, *Love in a different climate: Men Who Have Sex With Men in India* (New York/London: Verso, 1999) p.75

[25] Read 'GayBombay', *Salon.com* (December 2, 2002), where the writer Sandip Roy speculates whether the internet keeps "gay men from really coming out" and instead, puts them "in a giant virtual closet". http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/12/02/gay_india/print.html

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Chapter 6: *Modus Vivendi*

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[2] Thomas Babington Macaulay's 'Minute of 2 February 1835 on Indian Education' as cited in Pawan Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 1998), p.2. The entire text of the minute and other writings of Macaulay may be found in *Macaulay, Prose and Poetry*, selected by G. M. Young (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1957)

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[4] Pawan Varma, (1998) op. cit., p. 115

5 Ibid, p. 116

6 Ibid, p. 117

7 Peter Jackson 'Pre-Gay, Post-queer: Thai Perspectives on Proliferating Gender/Sex Diversity in Asia, in Gerard Sullivan and Peter A. Jackson (Eds.), *Gay and Lesbian Asia: Culture, Identity, Community* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2000), p.4

8 Sunil Khilnani 'Many Wrinkles in History *Outlook Magazine* 20 August 2001, as quoted in Pawan Varma *Being Indian* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2004) p.160. Article accessible online:
http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20010820&fname=Sunil+Kilnani+%28F%29&sid=1

9 Ibid.

10 Pawan Varma (2004) op. cit., pp. 149-150

11 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p.10

12 Pawan Varma (2004) op. cit., p.158

13 Arjun Appadurai (1996) op. cit., p.4

14 Paola Bacchetta 'When the [Hindu] Nation Exiles its Queers', *Social Text* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) No. 61 p., p.144

15 Greg Booth, 'Pandits in the Movies: 'Contesting the Identity of Hindustani Classical Music and Musicians in the Hindi Popular Cinema' *Asian Music* (University of Texas Press, Winter/Spring 2005) Volume 36 (1), pp. 72-73

16 *Adaab* is an Urdu greeting. Shaayiri is a form of Urdu poetry. *Achkan* and *Gharara* are traditional Muslim male and female costumes respectively. See Fareed Kazmi *The Politics of India's Conventional Cinema: Imaging a Universe, Subverting a Multiverse (*Sage Publications: New Delhi 1999) p.155, for an incisive reading of *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* as a medium of Hindutva propaganda.

17 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 198

18 From an article published in the *Organizer* – the mouthpiece of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Brotherhood of volunteers) – the mammoth right wing organization that the BJP is the political wing of. The article, by VP Bhatia is titled 'Raise Tempers, Lacerate and Raise the Whirlwind: The Philosophy Behind Deepa Mehta's Kinky

Film *Fire*' and appears in the *Organizer* issue dated 27 December 1998. Cited in Paola Bacchetta, op. cit. p.153

[19] Unsigned, 'Shabana's Swear, Rabri's Roar, Teresa's Terror: The Three Which Sustain Secularism', from *Organizer* January 10, 1999. Cited in Paola Bacchetta, op. cit. p.157

[20] VP Bhatia, op. cit., p.153

[21] 'Same Sex Marriage Stumps PM' *Indiatimes.com*
http://people.indiatimes.com/articleshow/996155.cms

[22] Arjun Appadurai, (1996) op. cit., p.47

[23] Ibid.

[24] Peter Jackson, op. cit., p.5

[25] Shivanada Khan, '*Kothis*, gays and (other) MSM' *October 2000* Naz Foundation International

[26] Ruth Vanita, and Saleem Kidwai (Eds.) *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p.199

[27] A popular pretzel-shaped gooey syrupy Indian sweet.

[28] Meaning a platter of assorted items (usually food).

[29] Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays, or PFLAG, is an American support group with more than 200,000 members. See their website: http://www.pflag.org

[30] Thomas Blom Hansen, op. cit., p.2

[31] Jeremy Seabrook, *Love in a different climate: Men Who Have Sex With Men in India* (New York/London: Verso, 1999) p.47

[32] In *Life Online: Researching Real Experience in Virtual Space* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998, p.85), Annette Markham puts forth these three terms as frameworks for how users of computer mediated communication frame their experiences online. For Markham, these "definitions fall along a continuum, from tool, to place, to way of being."

[33] Chris Berry and Fran Martin, 'Queer 'n' Asian on – and off – the Net: the Role of Cyberspace in Queer Taiwan and Korea', in (Ed. David Gauntlett) *Web.Studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age* (London: Arnold Publishers, 2000), p.80

[34] Giuseppe Mantovani, *New Communication Environments From Everyday to Virtual* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), pp. 123-127; as cited in Berry and Martin op. cit., p.78

[35] John Edward Campbell, *Getting It on Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality, and Embodied Identity* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004) p.12

[36] Arjun Appadurai, (1996) op. cit., pp. 55-56

[37] A "community of sentiment" is 'a group that "begins to imagine and feel things together". Arjun Appadurai, (1996) op. cit., p.8. Appadurai first used the term in his essay 'Topographies of the Self: Praise and Emotion in Hindu India', in CA Lutz and L Abu-Lughod (Eds.) Language and the Politics of Emotion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

[38] John Edward Campbell (2004) op. cit., p.109

[39] Shane Phelan (1994) Getting Specific: *Postmodern Lesbian Politics Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p87* paraphrased in Nikki Sullivan, (2003) *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* New York: New York University Press, p.146

[40] Sara Ahmed, and Anne-Marie Fortier, (2003) 'Re-imagining Communities' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol. 6 (3) p.257

[41] Ahmed and Fortier op. cit., p.257

[42] Ibid.

[43] Arjun Appadurai, (1996) op. cit., p.23

[44] John Gray 'Modus Vivendi: Liberalism for the Coming Middle Ages' in *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) Vol. 18 (2) http://www.digitalnpq.org/archive/2001_spring/modus.html

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politic* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 205

[48] David Woolwine, 'Community in Gay Male Experience and Discourse' *Journal of Homosexuality* (New York: Haworth Press, 2000) Vol. 38 (4), p.16

[49] Fred Dallmayr 'But on a Quiet Day... A Tribute to Arundhati Roy' *Logos 3.3* Summer 2004 http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_3.3/dallmayr.htm

[50] Amartya Sen 'India: What Prospects?' *Indian Horizons* (New Delhi: Indian council for Cultural Research, 1998) Volume 45 (3/4), p.21

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[51] This incident occurred in the first fortnight of June 2005. Rediffussion, an ad agency working for the client *DNA* (a new city newspaper) had put up billboards all over the city with the text 'Same sex' and 'Safe sex' written below each other, and a checking box right next to each option. As Alok wrote on the Gay Bombay mailing list, this was offensive because "a.) people [might] believe that Same Sex and Safe Sex are two mutually exclusive activities. Therefore, same sex can never be safe. So apart from being "Bad" same sex is a death wish. b.) It takes us back to old 80s western rhetoric that all Gay Men have HIV/AIDS or that HIV/AIDS only happens to Gay people. c.) It is indirectly stating that Homosexuality equals AIDS. d.) And of course all heterosexual sex is safe, so straight people should just chuck the use of condoms." Sustained pressure by some Gay Bombay members, including a visit to the ad agency in question, led to the agency, and the client, withdrawing the campaign and apologizing to the group privately. Source: postings to the Gay Bombay List by Alok (Dated June 15, 2005) and Vikram (Dated June 16, 2005)

[52] Nayan Shah, 'Sexuality, Identity and the Uses of History' in Ratti, Rakesh, (Ed.) *A Lotus of Another Color: An Unfolding of the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Experience* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1993) p.119

[53] Bhishma-*ashtami* is a day of funeral offerings in many Hindu temples and Brahmin households to Bhishma, the legendary warrior hero of the epic Mahabharata, who died childless on the battlefield. In 2004, Gay Bombay decided to appropriate this ritual by dedicating "one GB meeting a year to remember gay friends who are no longer with us. A kind of an 'all souls day'." The agenda was to:
— "Remember some our friends who have moved on and of our personal views about our death
— Buy food that our fiends would have liked... [and]
— Share that food with a street child"
(Source: posting by zoxlnc on Gay Bombay dated Jan 28, 2004)

[54] Anthony Giddens, (Revised edition) *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2002 [2000]), p.40

[55] *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* ('The Brave-Hearted Will Take the Bride'), released in 1995, is considered one of Bollywood's biggest films and the defining Bollywood film of the 1990s – with its astute blend of ritzy foreign locations and 'Indian' family values. For more about the film and its impact, read the book *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* by Anupama Chopra (London: British Film Institute, 2003)

[56] Peter Jackson op. cit., p.21

[57] Ruth Vanita (Ed) *Queering India: Same-sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002) p.5

[58] Arvind Narrain, *Queer: Despised Sexuality, Law and Legal Change* (Bangalore: Books For Change, 2004) p.26

[59] *Pravasya Bharat* stands for the Indian diaspora. For an excellent reading of Bollywood as cultural propaganda manipulated by the central government in their bid to woo the *Pravasya Bharatiyas* (non resident Indians), see Aswin Punthabedkar 'Bollywood in the Indian-American Diaspora: Mediating a Transitive Logic of Cultural Citizenship' in *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (Sage Publications, 2005) Vol 8 (2), pp. 1-173

[60] The suggestion of drawing inspiration from and enlisting the support of the *Dalit* and women's movements was discussed with me by Bhudev during our conversations. It has been raised more recently on the politically lbgt-india Yahoo! group. See correspondence between Vijai Sai and queernls on Apr 14, 2005.

[61] Pawan Varma, (2004) op. cit., pp. 15-16

[62] Ibid, p.205

[63] Sunil Khilnani 2001, op. cit.

[64] Government of India instructions for filling up passports are available on the website: http://www.passport.nic.in/ The form required to be filled up is titled 'Form No. 2' [Application for Miscellaneous Services on Indian passports]. The instructions for filling up this form, which mention the requirements of the affidavit and the medical certificate, are available on the website http://www.passport.nic.in/ To change one's sex in the Electoral Roll, one is required to approach the office of the Electoral Commission and make an application in Form 8. This form is available on the website of the Election Commission of India, http://eci.gov.in/Forms/FORM8A.pdf.

To change one's sex on the Permanent Account Number, one has to make the required application form titled 'Request For New PAN Card Or/ And Changes Or Correction In PAN Data' and submit it along with documents in support. This form is available at http://incometaxindia.gov.in/Archive/ChangeForm.PDF.

(Source: Email posting from Vivek Divan on the lbgt-india mailing list, dated March 5, 2005)

[65] The official NACO website: http://www.nacoonline.org/ is a comprehensive source for up to date facts and figures relating to HIV in India.

[66] Sunil Khilnani 'Many Wrinkles in History Outlook Magazine 20 August 2001, http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20010820&fname=Sunil+Kilnani+%28F%29&sid=1

[67] Rama Bijapurkar 'Strategic Marketing Key to Customer Insight,' *Focus Magazine* (Bombay: Central Bank of India, January 2005) p.12 http://www.centralbankofindia.co.in/home/Focusnew/Pdf/CBI_Jan%20final%2009-16.pdf

[68] Anthony Giddens and Christopher Pierson, Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), p.77 quoted in Gauntlett, David (2002), *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*, Routledge, London and New York. pp. 94-95

[69] Amara Das Wilhelm *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex* (Xlibris Corporation, 2004), p. xxi

Appendices

[1] In *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997, p. 94) Sunil Khilnani explains that in the 1980s, most of the Indian government's revenues came from indirect taxes, which it imposed through its "protectionist regime of control and regulations simply to sustain itself, not for development reasons". Despite having a fiscal deficit of around 10% of the national income, the government continued to spend freely through the 1980s by borrowing either domestically from the national banks it controlled or from abroad in the form of low interest loans and aid. However the international climate changed rapidly in the late 1980s and Rao's government was faced with the grim reality of a country on the verge of financial bankruptcy.

[2] National Council of Applied Economic Research Data, 1996, cited in Pawan Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 1998) p.171

[3] National Council of Applied Economic Research Data, 2002, cited in Suveen Sinha 'Age of the Zippie' *Outlook* January 12, 2004

[4] Gurcharan Das, 'India's Growing Middle Class' *Globalist* November 5, 2001
http://www.theglobalist.com/DBWeb/printStoryId.aspx?StoryId=2195

[5] Sunil Jain, 'The Great Retail Riddle' *Rediff.com* July 19, 2004
http://in.rediff.com/money/2004/jul/19guest1.htm

[6] P. Chidambaram 'India is depressing for 325 mln people' *Indian Express* March 14, 2004
http://www.expressindia.com/fullstory.php?newsid=29308&spf=true

[7] 'The World's Youngest Nation' *Outlook* January 12, 2004

[8] Gurcharan Das, *India Unbound* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2000) p. 243

[9] Naazneen Karmali, 'India's Richest Businesspeople' *Forbes.com* December 9, 2004
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[11] Gurcharan Das, (2000) op. cit, p. 220

[12] See:
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http://www.expressindia.com/fullstory.php?newsid=28291

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http://www.rediff.com/money/2004/jan/31spec2.htm

[14] Industry Statistics maintained by the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India. Available on the World Wide Web on: http://www.indianauto.com/

[15] Arijit Barman 'Talking Shop' *Outlook* October 9, 2000
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[16] 'Boom or Bust' *The Week* December 5, 2004
http://www.the-week.com/24dec05/currentevents_article1.htm

[17] Arvind Adiga 'India's Mania For Malls' *Time* (Asian Edition) September 13, 2004
http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501040920-695915,00.html

[18] Madhukar Sabnavis 'India powers ahead on retail boom' *Rediff.com* December 3, 2004
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[19] 'Boom in Malls and Multiplexes' *Deccan Herald* November 19, 2004
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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid, p.16

[41] Ibid. p. 20

[42] Ibid. p. 17

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