

in plainspeak

TALKING ABOUT *sexuality* IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

2008, Issue 3



Cover:

Southern Siren – Maheshwari (from the Hijra fantasy series), digital photograph on archival paper, 58" X 38", 2006
by Tejal Shah

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We are back with more thought provoking articles and images! Sexuality, gender expression and identities, rights, culture...yes, it's all here.

In this issue of *In Plainspeak*, Angela Kuga Thas from Malaysia tells us about her work on a range of issues spanning creative projects with young people, sexuality, women's rights, and virtual reality. Tahir Khilji juxtaposes issues of young people's rights to gender expression and identity alongside sexual violence in the world of the *zenanas* in Pakistan, a world that few people know, leaving us with many troubling questions to think about.

Gender expression and identity run into troubled waters when they do not conform to what is expected. Glenn Maboloc talks about how Filipina transwomen constitute their sense of self and autonomy in a culture where social relationships are privileged over the individual.

Though we are finally getting to be able to be queer in the streets (read Campaign Spotlight to see how), it will still be a while before all of us can do that at our jobs or even between the sheets. Read what Skywalker has to say about being transgendered and finding a job or a partner.

But it's not only gender-benders who run into trouble. Gender-conforming heterosexuals don't have it so easy in the Philippines – they can't leave a marriage they no longer want to be in, and they can't have sex with someone else if they are married. Carolina Ruiz, a feminist lawyer, focuses on the absurdity of a law that turns consensual sex between adults into a crime.

In our regular features, you will find Revati Chawla's review of the much publicised book *The Wisdom of Whores* that was doing the rounds at the just concluded International AIDS Conference in Mexico, and Ponni Arasu's review of the film *About Elsewhere*. You will also learn more about microbicides – research is still ongoing, but they offer an exciting new option for people to protect themselves against HIV without preventing pregnancy.

We have also added a new section, Notes from the Region, featuring updates from our partner Resource Centres in China, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Long after you have finished this issue of *In Plainspeak*, Tejal Shah's images will linger in your mind. In Art Space, she offers us another brilliant photo-essay disrupting our notions of fixed gender identities and expressions and making the fantastical possible.

Yes... another world is possible!

As always, do send in your feedback and contributions to resourcecentre@tarshi.net.

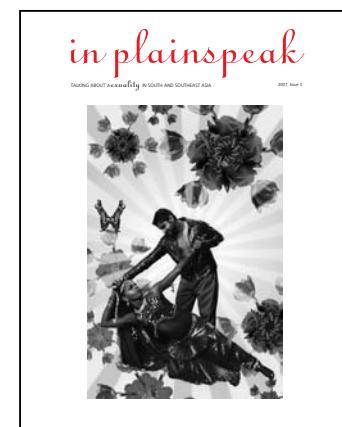
Stay well, stay safe, stay happy,

Radhika Chandramani

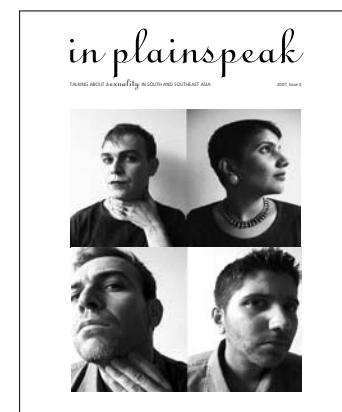
Radhika Chandramani
Executive Director



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Unfurling I
Tejal Shah



2008 Issue 3
Southern Siren – Maheshwari
Tejal Shah



2008 Issue 4
trans-
Tejal Shah

The South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality is hosted by TARSHI (Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues) in New Delhi, India. TARSHI is an NGO that believes that all people have a right to sexual wellbeing and a selfaffirming and enjoyable sexuality. The Resource Centre aims to increase knowledge and scholarship on issues of sexuality, sexual health and sexual well being in this region. It specifically focuses on sexuality related work in China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, The Philippines, and Vietnam. The Resource Centre is part of the Ford Foundation's Global Dialogue on Sexual Health and Wellbeing. Similar centres are based in Africa, Latin America and North America.

The Resource Centre has developed a range of programmes to enhance scholarship, increase access to information, and further dialogue on sexuality issues. Check out our website (www.asiasrc.org). It hosts online moderated discussions on sexuality, news and announcements from the region, links to resources on sexuality and the library catalogue. A Directory of Institute Alumni is also available on the website. It provides information about human resources available in the region and also provides alumni with a sense of solidarity/community. The Resource Centre released a Working Paper by Sumit Baudh on *Human Rights and the Criminalisation of Consensual Same-Sex Sexual Acts in the Commonwealth, South and Southeast Asia* in May 2008. You can find it online on our website. The Resource Centre also houses a library with over 3000 books and material on sexuality. You can also download an electronic version of *In Plainspeak*. For more information on our programmes and events, please visit www.asiasrc.org.

Tejal Shah is a visual artist who works in Bombay, India.

power shifts

ANGELA KUGA THAS

Angela Kuga Thas, a Malaysian, is a founding trustee of Knowledge and Rights with Young people through Safer Spaces (KRYSS). She has worked with IWRAW (International Women's Rights Action Watch) Asia Pacific on the CEDAW and with other organisations on women's sexual and reproductive health, and provision of microcredit. She monitors the local media on sexual discrimination with a small group of fellow Malaysians. As a member of the Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Program, Angela has been particularly active in gender and ICT policy advocacy. Angela is on the Advisory Council of the Global Fund for Women, is a member of the International Advisory Committee for BRIDGE at the Institute of Development Studies in the United Kingdom, and is on the Board of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID).



TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF. HOW DID YOU BEGIN THE WORK THAT YOU ARE DOING NOW?

Hmm... good question. I think I allowed life to bring me where I am now. I never imagined that I would become an activist. While I was growing up, all I ever had drummed into me was government propaganda of how the country came to be, how nice and rosy it is as a multi-racial country and how we should not do anything to destroy this cosy, rosy picture. So speaking out, acknowledging and standing up against injustices, was something I only embraced much later in my life. It was around 1996, and even then, it was a slow process of growth, of finding myself in certain positions where I can actually make a difference, where I can actually help, and of testing myself in these spaces that I found myself in, of testing my own strength and perseverance.

Before that, I was very much a person who felt that if I had a reasonably good job and if I do it well, I'd be okay. In my earlier years, I seemed to be moving towards the government sector or the private sector, but in 1990, I entered the development sector, and this was probably the slow, invisible start of my journey as an activist. Often, I feel like my path has already been set out for me, but the how of it is left to me, how I do what I do, have been my choices and my making.

WHAT LED YOU TO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE?

I had wanted to work with young people because of the increasingly challenging and narrowing spaces I see taking place in the name of morality and in the name of national security. When I was young, the issues of power and dominance were very stark realities. About the age of 13 and onwards, I remember I'd sit on a swing often in the night and wonder how come other children seemed to have parents that were different, happier with each other, compared to mine. I refused to believe that it was an incompatibility issue of culture or religion. Through the years, I found out so many things that complicated my parents' lives as a couple, which had little to do with their own culture and religion as two separate people, but often, what was imposed by society. I was a very firm believer that if more families were borne out of mixed ethnicities, we'd have a better world, one would be more compassionate and less judgmental. I still believe that this is a good solution.

The protectionist approach as a solution to everything, camouflages the real issues, i.e. the extension of existing power and control over those less empowered. I feel that young people's minds and attitudes can also challenge how we ourselves think and our approaches to the issues, as well as our analysis of the issues. So we co-founded Knowledge and Rights with Young people through Safer

Spaces (KRYSS). Working within a gender equality and human rights framework, KRYSS enables young people to deal with identity-based discrimination and creative arts in its training and activities.

HOW DOES KRYSS WORK ON THE INTERSECTION OF ISSUES OF YOUNG PEOPLE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND SAFER SPACES?

My fellow founders and I were interested in facilitating spaces for discourse, by using creative approaches to do this, specifically using creative writing and the visual arts. The arts have always been a very good space for subversive activities and expression.

From the beginning, we've used a very basic approach of 'Heart-Head-Hand'. If we can get young people to feel the issues of discrimination faced by one another, they'll at least start to question why discrimination takes place and then, hopefully, be ready to do something about it, and it doesn't have to be anything big. Often, we're working with young people who are not activists, and who are not oriented to activism or human rights issues in any way. Their knowledge and exposure is very limited. Hence, the 'Heart-Head-Hand' approach. Our emphasis has always been that 'Creating safer spaces for all begins with each of us, and it's a matter of grabbing the opportunities that come before us, to do so'. We facilitate such a space where issues of discrimination can be discussed and shared.

It's not an easy position to be in or an easy space to bring about. It can be tough when emotions run high. We work on issues of religion, ethnicity, race, sexuality and gender.

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various forms of discrimination. Our fundamental creative approach is to embrace all the realities and biases, and then to turn around and to allow judgment to be made but to make the process of judgment, and therefore, the rationalisation that permits discrimination, difficult. We also work with the understanding that power shifts, can take different forms, and, in different spaces, can lie very strongly in the most unlikely people.

THAT SOUNDS VERY CHALLENGING...

Yes, working with creative approaches has presented KRYSS with challenges, especially when we're working in partnership with different groups. We've worked in partnership with rights-based groups and the arts-based groups. The arts-based groups and community find our approach too basic, too literal and not artistic enough. I appreciate their critique of how we're working, and we're also working with young people who are, as I said earlier,

In every country, these issues differ in intensity for different young people. For some, it's more about religion and how they see themselves being discriminated against because of their religion. For some, it's more about ethnicity and race issues. For others, it's sexuality and gender.

WHAT ARE THE CREATIVE WAYS IN WHICH KRYSS DEALS WITH ISSUES OF IDENTITY BASED DISCRIMINATION?

KRYSS facilitates spaces for expression, using the arts. To encourage a much richer discourse, we complicate the issues of discrimination, bringing forth its complexities and the values linked so closely to

not necessarily activists, but also not necessarily artists.

I realise that we, as activists, can be too literal with our writing and our art as means of communication—we tell people what we want so that they will feel, think and act in alignment with our advocacy stand. But artists prefer to present complexities and are open to how people read the work that they do. It doesn't matter if the interpretation is different from what was intended, or does it matter? I'm not sure.

The *Films of Desire* event that I participated in also reinforced this understanding, and it has forced KRYSS to take a step back to look at how we're doing the work we do. How creative does the final work need to be, in stating the issues? Can we afford to be literal? What does it mean for us if we present our work and are open to what others will make of it – how they feel for it, what they think of it, what they'll do as a result of those feelings and thoughts? What kind of risks would KRYSS be taking? Would such risks strengthen KRYSS or just make us more vulnerable and our work and approaches ineffective and therefore considered unsustainable? What does it really mean to bring about behaviour change through creative approaches?

These are questions and issues that we're still grappling with. Bottom line, KRYSS feels there's value in any of the young people's work, irrespective of its literal translation or non-literal translation. But how others will value this work is, unfortunately also a necessary consideration, if our creative approach to advocacy is to be effective.

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YOU WERE ALSO CREATIVE IN A DIFFERENT WAY IN DOING RESEARCH WITH LESBIANS IN MALAYSIA. TELL US MORE ABOUT HOW YOU DID THIS FIRST OF ITS KIND RESEARCH IN 2004. WHAT DID YOU FIND?

I used the snowball technique. It was the only way to get into a closed community, and I respect the closed nature of the community, I could relate to and appreciate their right to exclude, to not want to allow others into their space, and their sense of community. My research began to move forward mainly because of friends who played active roles in the community. My own engagement and interaction with the lesbian community was further facilitated through community-based mailing lists.

Young women are more sexually adventurous, and probably because of the Internet, have had more opportunities to be sexually adventurous. The myth that women tend to become lesbians if they go to an all-girls school, I dare say, is only that, a myth. In fact, the women I had interviewed, didn't even cite that as a possible reason. Only one did. A number have had boyfriends before, or sexually experimented with boys or men. And they did want to talk. I feel that most needed that opportunity to talk, and to talk with someone who isn't sexual with them but who could understand and wouldn't judge.

For many, it's about companionship – the right to choose whomsoever they want as a companion – and least

about sexual health or even sexuality as an issue. This made me seriously consider the asexuality and bisexuality continuum as a more realistic continuum, rather than of one between homosexuality and heterosexuality. The research also made me realise that gender identities, roles and statuses have a very strong influence over the choices these women made, and that there was a need to capture in one framework, the dynamism of the process of exploring one's sexuality and the spheres of influence on the individual. When constructing this framework, I found that the issue of gender became more central as a basis of formation and evolution for all of the other elements of sexuality.

YOU HAVE TAKEN YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH GENDER ISSUES INTO THE VIRTUAL REALM AS WELL. HOW DO YOU SEE GENDER AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES (ICTS) BEING INTERCONNECTED?

ICTs are often seen only as tools and technology. Very few people question why technology is designed a certain way or how and when it is used and by whom, because this is all gender-related, and gender hardly ever is important enough to be considered an issue when it's about technology, unless it's about the marketability

of that technology. And then, when it's about marketability, only those with a certain level of purchasing power are able to benefit.

ICTs are like public roads that can allow people to communicate with each other and move from one place to another safely. Can women get onto this road (ICTs) safely? No, because not enough is done to educate women on how to protect themselves, and private data is stolen, shared or sold and women become victims of sexual harassment, or worse, violence. This kind of training, these tips and hints on how to use the ICTs and be safe, are like lights for dark roads.

Can women even think of using this road? No, because she has to consider how far away this road is (access to ICTs is not necessarily nearby; infrastructure is always urban-centred) before she can safely get to it. She has to think about who owns the road because even though it may be a public road, there are people who control access to the road or exercise ownership over it (public ICT-type facility centres). Can she afford to get onto this road? How much will it cost her? Not just financially but in terms of her pride, her integrity, her sense of self worth? Will I get to go where I need to go once I get onto this road? ICTs are often so English language driven, and demand a certain level of basic literacy, and

so where are women in this picture? It is like a new road they cannot get on to because they don't know where it will lead them, whether it will be where they really want to go or to meet who they really want to meet.

HOW DO YOU ADDRESS THIS?

I have been a member of the Association for Progressive Communications' Women's Networking Support Program (APC WNSP) since 2002. At APC WNSP issues of access, affordability and ownership as well as control (the latter two quite different from each other) are addressed through advocacy, capacity-building, research and networking. Basically, we ask people to put on their gender lens, we encourage them to do so through different types of collaborative projects such as awards-giving (for example, Gender and ICT awards) and small seed grantmaking, and if they are interested but don't know how, we show them how to do so through our various capacity-building projects.

My consultancy work with the WNSP has largely been in relation to advocacy, writing, capacitybuilding, evaluation and research. Maybe you've seen the ICT and gender e-primer for the Asian Pacific Development Information Programme?

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I also wrote an issues paper *Paddling in Circles while the Waters Rise: Gender Issues in ICT and Poverty Reduction* for the network. From March 2007, I was a full-time research coordinator for Phase Two of WNSP's Gender Evaluation Methodology project.

Currently, my work is largely on capacity-building in the design and conduct of gender evaluations for ICT projects.

WHAT WAS THE WORK THAT YOU DID WITH IWRAW (INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTION WATCH)? WAS IT CONNECTED TO THIS?

I've been more of a friend to people in IWRAW Asia Pacific, working with them on very specific work, like their CEDAW training-of-trainers manual and then their toolkit for the Optional Protocol on CEDAW. This work was spread over the years 2003 to 2007.

Working with them, has been a huge learning experience for me as well, especially just pouring through all their training content. It's incredibly amazing and a very well-developed set of resources. It gave me a tremendous amount of insight as to why if we work on any women's rights issues,

we do have to also try and work with groups like IWRAW Asia Pacific and ideally, their country partners, to strengthen the work behind CEDAW.

I'm more on the periphery of their work, but often, I do try and recommend linkages and paths of advocacy with other groups, to always link with CEDAW. This includes groups that work on communication rights and women's rights in relation to information and communication technology, and women and HIV/AIDS. However, often people don't know how to do this and so, soon forget the suggestion or immediately dismiss this.

Others, who are more familiar with all of the human rights instruments, tend to see the work behind CEDAW as largely ineffective. I don't agree with them because I feel strongly that the instrument and the processes are things we have to make work for ourselves.

WHAT ARE THE KINDS OF CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACE? WHAT GIVES YOU A SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT?

Hmmm... the main challenge constantly for me is really KRYSS. Work with KRYSS is voluntary (as in quite a bit of my other work), but KRYSS is much more demanding than my other voluntary work, and because of this, KRYSS has taken a back seat due to the various demands on me. We also struggle because we're still very small and located in a 'developed' country.

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I believe that if KRYSS can continue to contribute to helping young people achieve a better sense of self and understanding and heightened appreciation of others, we would be bringing about much-needed change in a world where permanence is as temporary as life.

MALAYSIA IS COUNTED AS ONE OF THE MORE 'DEVELOPED' COUNTRIES IN THIS REGION. DO YOU THINK THERE IS

We're currently working on ensuring a better outreach through an online platform for KRYSS. We've also been exploring different possibilities as to our institutional structure. What I feel would be ideal for KRYSS is not to be a legal institutional structure but to be able to just implement projects, something like the *Seven Samurais*. Did you ever watch that movie? Come together, do what needs to be done, then go off and carry on with your own life, till you need to come together again. That would be ideal! And that's a big dream!

But donor-type funding demands an institutional structure, legitimacy and credibility are so much tied to institutional structures and rigidity. In most ways, we relate quite strongly with Anne Firth Murray's belief, that if we can bring about even a small change through one small interaction in young people, especially young women, it would still be a change and sustainable in its own defined sense.

A MORE POSITIVE OUTLOOK ON ISSUES OF SEXUALITY IN MALAYSIA?

Not at all! The development status of any country is measured mainly by economic productivity standards and conventional measurements which really just denote a capitalistic understanding of wealth. The overall well-being of citizens and non-citizens of a country is not considered.

The Malaysian government has been on a path of growing conservatism and arrogance in how they deal with the rights of citizens (and migrants and refugees), until the last elections this year in March, where for the first time in our history, we have a strong opposition in government.

We're beginning to see some needed changes, but the changes haven't yet even begun to broach sexuality rights yet. The efforts are now focused on freedom of information and the abolishment of the Internet Security Act.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO WEAR SO MANY HATS?

I have many interests, but fortunately, they are all very much interconnected in one way or another. I believe the ability to continue dreaming drives me, and the attitude of 'never say die' and 'one step at a time'

HOW HAVE YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND COLLEAGUES REACTED TO YOUR WORK?

Colleagues and peers have been extremely supportive and encouraging. Most of my friends are really colleagues, or peers, and fellow activists. My family doesn't seem to

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really know what I do – all they know is that I work on human rights issues. It's hard to explain when they've only known government employment (civil service, public sector, armed forces sector) or private sector employment (business).

The development sector is very new to them, let alone rights-based work. I don't feel that I really need to explain the work that I do because they have never questioned my choices, but have always given me the freedom I need to do the work that I do. So in that way, they do give me affirmation and support.

It's the complete sense of trust that I receive from them that's made it so, so, much easier.

'If it is a male child, go and announce it to one and all and take something sweet with you because a boy has come into this world. If it is a female child, there is no need of any joy, go back to your work; I will take care of her. And if it is a zenana, go throw it in the river near by, it is better for it to drown than to live a life of misery and misfortune.'

the world of **zenanas**

TAHIR KHILJI

I was born with a hole big enough for me to urinate and I have no testes. I never went through any surgical process but my body is not otherwise developed like women. However, I hear that there are some Chinese doctors who have just come to Lahore and they sell some creams for breast enlargement. They have some machines as well that pull the skin of the chest and then the breasts start emerging. My friend went through this treatment and she is fine.

This statement was made by an *aqua zenana*. It is for the first time in my work of almost 13 years that I am meeting an *aqua zenana*. In the *zenana* world, there are three kinds of *zenanas*, one is *acqua*, who is born without male genitalia, then there is *chibbri*, who goes through corrective surgery to get the genitalia of her/his desire and finally there is a *zenana* who is neither *aqua* or *chibbri* but a male who describes himself as a female living in a male body.

In its literal sense, in Urdu¹ language, *zenana* is a term meaning 'female' that is still used to distinguish male spaces from female spaces or male characteristics from female characteristics. Thus, it is a way of identification of spaces such as these are the *zenana* quarters and those are *mardana* (male) quarters. This word is used mostly in a derogatory sense to identify a male with feminine characteristics. In other words, if some one wants to highlight the 'effeminate' behaviour in any male, this word would be used by observers with a certain level of contempt towards that person and the behaviour.

Every June I accompany some of my *zenana* team members to a shrine close to a hill resort in the foothills of the Himalayas. We do this every June as it is the time of the annual festival at the shrine. We spend close to four days at the shrine. It is that time of the year when we share everything, starting from living spaces to recreational spaces. This may be the only time each year that I get to see the very core of the *zenana* world.

On the surface, it is all about jealousies and manipulations but scratch the surface and there is compassion, affection, unity, innocence and the spirit to struggle. The four days are a mixture of lots of fun and frolic along with plenty of violence, gang rapes, humiliation and harassment both from the 'other devotees' and the law enforcement agencies.

Let us first talk about the fun and frolic. One *zenana* ritual that has become part of this larger ritual of our four days is the induction of new *zenanas* and this is how it happens: Upon our arrival, there is the evening of sending out the invitations. It is called *illaichi phirana*². Whoever goes out with the invitation tells the other *zenanas* that on a certain

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evening there will be the induction of a new *zenana* in the household of a specific *guru*³. Some of the *gurus* from our own team generally have one or two new inductees each year at the shrine (this is apart from those inductees that they bring in the rest of the year). The inductees who are brought into a *zenana* household during this sacred period are revered⁴.

On the day of the induction there is a lot of activity. Food is prepared for the guests, with an emphasis on sweet things, as distributing anything sweet is considered appropriate for any joyous occasion.

When the time of induction comes, a little role play is done in front of everyone. It is the same role play each year and each year it pains me with same intensity. The role play goes thus: There is an expectant mother who is screaming because of labour pains. Her female friends are consoling her that soon it will be over. A midwife comes in and announces that it is close to the delivery time. The screams get louder; her legs move apart, and suddenly a little bundle (of cloth) that is considered to be the child comes out; sounds of an infant crying are mimicked by one of the actors. The mother, before anyone else says anything, utters these words, 'If it is a male child go and announce it to one and all and take something sweet with you because a boy has come into this world. If it is a female child, there is no need of any joy, go back to your work; I will take care of her. And if it is a *zenana*, go throw it in the river near by, it is better for it to drown than to live a life of misery and misfortune.'

It hurts because it reflects the reality of my society and my role as that of someone who just views it from outside.

We move on to a more cheerful part of the ritual and that is when a young, coy and blushing *zenana* (a 10 to 12 year old boy) is brought into the room, escorted by some older *zenanas*. The child is made to sit on a little cushion and a *dupatta* (a stole), embroidered with gold and silver thread, is held over the child's head. The *dupatta* is held by its four corners by four accomplished *zenanas*, who have their own households now. Along with this there is lots of singing and

dancing. The *guru* who is taking the child into his⁵ household gets up and feeds the child with some sweet that is already set on a platter. This is the induction of the child into the *zenana* household.

The child does not know the price he is paying for the little freedom that he so much desired at his biological home – the freedom of dressing up like a little girl, the freedom of applying lipstick, the freedom of dancing to the tune of a song, the freedom of pretending to be one of the leading female film stars. As that freedom is curtailed with each growing year by exerting pressure to conform to the biological make up of the body, the child starts looking for spaces that are willing to accept him as he is. Through his own networks and peers he finally gets to a space that allows, rather encourages, him to be what he wants to be and that space is a *zenana* household⁶.

The child is now part of the household that has accepted him. If another *guru* wants to take the child then he has to pay the entire amount that the previous *guru* may have spent or pay for bringing the child under his wings. Thus, if the child wants to leave the household and move to another household, he has to have the next *guru* come up with the asking amount that has been put on the child. If the child runs away and another *guru* takes him in without paying the previous one, then the senior *gurus* get together to decide the fate of the child and the *guru* who took him in. Normally the fate is ostracisation⁷ from the community for a certain period till a penalty⁸ is paid. Generally, *gurus* abide by the code of the community.

It is interesting that though the inductee may have become part of the household only on that day, he seems to be quite well-versed in the *zenana* code of conduct. It never ceases to amaze me how this child knows exactly how to conduct himself in presence of the *gurus* and other *zenanas*. In addition to this the child knows the Farsi language⁹ and is able to go on and on in it with his *zenana* friends.

The fate of this child is sealed. He will be gang raped, he will be harassed, he will be violated in every sense of the word but he will still not want to leave this one space

The child does not know the price he is paying for the little freedom that he so much desired at his biological home – the freedom of dressing up like a little girl, the freedom of applying lipstick, the freedom of dancing to the tune of a song, the freedom of pretending to be one of the leading female film stars. As that freedom is curtailed with each growing year by exerting pressure to conform to the biological make up of the body, the child starts looking for spaces that are willing to accept him as he is. Through his own networks and peers he finally gets to a space that allows, rather encourages, him to be what he wants to be and that space is a *zenana* household.

It is interesting that though the inductee may have become part of the household only on that day, he seems to be quite well-versed in the zenana code of conduct. It never ceases to amaze me how this child knows exactly how to conduct himself in presence of the gurus and other zenanas. In addition to this the child knows the Farsi languageⁱ and is able to go on and on in it with his zenana friends.

because this is the space that provides him freedom to be what he wants to be.

This feast is no feast for me and this fun is no fun for me. I try to find someone to put the blame upon but I do not find anyone. I know that if I suggest to the devotees (as an experiment) that we create a space for these children where they can be themselves for maybe two hours in a day and then they can go back to the safety (or the lack of it) of their homes, they will not listen.

Therefore, I sit back and tell myself that I am doing my bit, may be a day will dawn when this very community

will provide such spaces to children who feel differently without charging them this heavy a price. This community has a lot of empathy. They know exactly how it feels to be 'that one child' and they know all the sufferings and longings of 'that one child', and therefore they are the best ones to facilitate him through his difficult journey unharmed and unscratched. I assure them that my support will always be with them.

- 1 Urdu is the national language of Pakistan. Urdu is a mixture of several other languages such as Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic.
- 2 *Illaichi* is cardamom, *phirana* means circulate. This again is a Urdu phrase that can be easily translated into Punjabi without changing the wordings or meanings.
- 3 The *guru* is the head of a *zenana* household.
- 4 Any such festival called *urs* (yearly celebration of a Sufi saint buried at the shrine) is sacred for most people across the board, therefore any such occasion, does not have to be at a specific shrine or associated with a certain Sufi saint for the reverence of the *zenanas*.
- 5 The gurus who are married to women play a masculine role in public as do the *zenanas*. It is only in the space of the *zenana* household that they refer to themselves in the feminine. Language is tricky here, and for this article, the editorial decision is to use the gender term they prefer to use for themselves in public.
- 6 There has not been any anthropological work done with *zenanas* in Pakistan to the best of my knowledge. This is an analysis of case studies that Vision has collected over the years. The child breaking away from his biological family and finding solace at a *zenana* household is a strong pattern that emerges in almost all the case studies.

- 7 Amongst *zenanas*, it is called *Huka Pani Bund* which literally means 'end of Sheesha/smoking pipe and water'.
- 8 This penalty is called *Dund* amongst *zenanas*. *Dund*, otherwise in Punjabi, means push ups as in physical exercise.
- 9 *Farsi* is the other word for Persian language. However, this *Farsi* has no similarity to Persian language. It is a language that does not reflect its origin through the use of words. For instance, *Darshan* means seeing someone in Hindi/Urdu, but in *zenana Farsi* it means shaving the face or having the facial hair waxed.

The fate of this child is sealed. He will be gang raped, he will be harassed, he will be violated in every sense of the word but he will still not want to leave this one space because this is the space that provides him freedom to be what he wants to be.

Tahir Khilji works with Vision, a non profit organization based in Lahore, Pakistan. Vision and Tahir, specifically, works in partnership with religious minorities living in Pakistan and with sexually marginalised and stigmatised communities such as *zenanas* (men who identify themselves as women). The partnerships emphasise community building in these groups and populations and evolve safe spaces for these communities and groups to exist. Vision is one of the few organisations in Pakistan that works at the policy level to protect the rights of these marginalised groups.

transgressing and transforming

All is not black and white... and we want to explore the shades of grey. Feminism is diverse and we don't always agree totally with one another, though we may share a similar perspective. While we don't want to silence other viewpoints, we want to focus on the finer distinctions between arguments used by people who are on the same side of the table.

The self is determined by the tug of its autonomy and by the pull of social expectations. How is the Filipina transwoman self-configured in her society? How can she define her autonomy in relation to or outside her social relationships?

self, culture and the filipina transwoman

GLENN Q. MABOLOC

The concepts of 'self' and 'autonomy' have often been raised in feminist discourse. Fairly recently, breaking away from liberalism's *autonomous self*, Marxism instated the concept of self as social. All meaning – of work, of equality, of happiness itself to the individual – is achieved socially.

Traditional Philippine valuation of the self was one step ahead of Marxism. Anthropologist F. Landa Jocano posits that Filipinos 'by cultural orientation...are relationists, not individualists... [They] always want to be part of a group and to be noticed as such. This is why [they] disdain *kanya-kanya* (each to his/her own self-interest) as a trait.' Jocano laments that Filipinos' 'current claim to individualism is derived from Western-influenced formal education... (and is) reinforced by exposure to Western-influenced media.' (Jocano, 63)

This relational Filipino self finds its most ardent expression in familism, or 'the concept (having) to do with our concern over the well-being of our families or that of our kinsmen.' (Jocano, 64) Belen Medina notes: 'The family as the basic unit of Philippine society is very significant to the Filipino. It demands his interests and loyalty more than any other institution in the larger society. Its influence is far-reaching for it pervades every aspect of his life, be it social, political, religious, or economic.' (Medina, 12)

Damdamin or emotion plays an important role in maintaining Filipino social relationships. An especially sensitive people,

Filipinos make decisions around the feelings of others. *Hiya* (shame) and *delicadeza* and *amor proprio* (proper behavior and self-esteem) are two of the norms that are followed so that '*damdamin* is not hurt and conflicts are minimized, if not avoided. [*Hiya*] is often invoked to effect conformity to local mores and practices in order to prevent embarrassment, shame or conflict. [*Delicadeza* and *amor propio*] are part of [the] cultural shield intended to protect the self from being embarrassed or shamed through public exposure. The face must be protected at all times, by all means, and at all costs...Losing face is losing personal dignity, integrity and honour as an individual and as a member of the group.'

Transwomen (and transgenders in general) disturb these cultural norms, more so than other sexual minorities by managing to be spectacles in an intensely conformist society. In fact, the probable shame prevents many transwomen from expressing their real selves. Transwomen also experience discrimination right in the hands of the 'same' people who've experienced it: gay men.

In fact, J. Neil Garcia posits that one of the reasons why the LGBT liberation movement in the Philippines has not taken off is the schism between the *parlorista* (literally, working in a beauty parlor, often transwomen; loud and vulgar) and the *pa-men* (straight-acting; circumspect). In this sense, transwomen not only challenge the Filipino heterosexual conception of propriety, but Filipino gays' as well.

Transwomen transgress these cultural norms because they unsettle the broader concepts of heteronormativity introduced by colonialism and religion.

The Filipina transwoman was regarded with respect in many parts of pre-colonial Philippines. Called 'babaylan' (priestess), she often presided over important spiritual ceremonies of her then animist society, and was found to have married and lived with men.

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But history would change her status in Filipino society. Colonial powers would reach her shores. Sam Winter

describes thus: 'Serena Nanda has described the 'sexualising' and masculinising of the Filipino culture by successive Arab, Spanish and American dominations... (Carolyn) Brewer [also] paints a vivid picture of the way in which Filipino gender and sexuality were regulated to conform to the colonisers' norms. These norms arose from Hispanic machismo (the idealization of stereotypic gender roles and the repression of deviance from them), and from closely related Christian (predominantly Catholic) attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity.'

Winter believes that because of Catholic doctrines 'Filipino transpeople are left vulnerable to accusations of immoral conduct on several levels: cross-gendered dress, abuse of body and homosexuality. As one might expect, religious-inspired transphobia percolated into broader society.' Catholicism's heteronormativity is based on its insistence on the procreative function of sex and marriage. As such, the identity of a woman is configured according to her role and/or ability to conceive.

The history of colonial and religious enslavement impacts the social perception of the Filipino transwoman. Although research has surfaced a few labels with which Filipinos identify transwomen, Marc Johnson has devised an identity model (based on his study of transgenderism in Southern Philippines) that encapsulates the general Filipino valuation of transwomen: *impotent men and unproductive/defiling women*. This construction corresponds to the historical (patriarchal) and religious precepts that have led to the disenfranchised status of the Filipina transwoman.

The foregoing describes the historical-religious and cultural context in which the transwoman struggles for self and autonomy. But while she faces undue hardships because of her identity, she can look to present trends that presage some form of emancipation.

For one, the grip of the family over the individual is loosening as Filipino society transitions from a traditional to a modern-industrial system. 'The traditional system is kinship-oriented where one's personality is subordinate to the interests of the kin-group... where interaction is characterized by particularism or emphasis on how

persons are related to one another... [or] where priority is given to the expressive and integrative needs of the group. The modern industrial system, on the other hand, is characterized by differentiation in values, interest, and goals... [or] where priority is given to the instrumental needs of the individual.' (Medina, 240)

Transwomen can thus hope to carve out a place in society through personal achievement. (Some critics have forwarded that gays have a tendency to compensate for their second-class citizenship by over-achieving.) Many have found employment in the entertainment and fashion industry, in public relations and publishing, and especially in the fast-rising call centre industry. In fact, transwomen who experience family animosity migrate to urban centres or even abroad, especially Japan, in search of a better life and meaningful relationships.

Because while many transwomen have a hard time securing long-lasting relationships, a surprising few have found love in the most unexpected places. The Christian religious society, the Order of St. Alreid, has officiated over many trans-unions in the last fifteen years. Many of the unions are between transwomen and male foreigners usually from the United States or Europe. Same-sex marriage has also been sanctioned by the Communist Party of the Philippines since the 90s. In general, same-sex or gender-variant relationships are short-lived and uncommon because they are not sanctioned by the family, the Filipino's primary source of social security (Fernandez). In this sense, the transwoman needs to re-evaluate again the connection between her *self* and her family and society.

Feminist Marilyn Friedman offers a solution in preserving autonomy in social relationships: 'Feminists tend to share with communitarians the view that selves are inherently social... This perspective on the self leads easily to the view that autonomy should also be conceptualized relationally. At the same time, a little reflection on everyday life reveals that autonomy *sometimes* results in *severing* of relational ties—that it does sometimes disconnect us from others, including those who are closely related to us... The conclusion has to be that relationships of certain sorts are necessary for the realization of autonomy, whereas relationships of certain

As can be attested by some transwomen who have been embraced by their families, Filipino culture is not a patriarchal-feudal or homophobic monolith. Filipinos also do follow another cultural norm that suggests better conditions for all transwomen are possible.

other sorts can be irrelevant or positively detrimental to it.' (Friedman, 55-56)

The Filipina transwoman today then needs to re-define the place of familial and social acceptance in her conception of self – to achieve real autonomy. While Filipino culture does not effectively ostracise her from the public sphere, she might need to re-assess just how much what her family and society thinks of her should affect her life.

The ideal would be that her family accept her as she is (as many families have done); but when it doesn't, she needs to rely on her own esteem. Chucking the family, as suggested by some feminists years back, may not be a viable option as the Filipino family still is and can be a source of social protection especially in the Third World context of economic insecurity.

As can be attested by some transwomen who have been embraced by their families, Filipino culture is not a patriarchal-feudal or homophobic monolith. Filipinos also do follow another cultural norm that suggests better

To be compassionate to the Filipina transwoman is Filipino society's test; to insist on her 'self' and autonomy in Filipino society is the Filipina transwoman's challenge. Indeed, social and individual transgressions pave the way for each other's transformation as well.

conditions for all transwomen are possible. If *hiya* and *delicadeza/amor propio* ensure that feelings are preserved in maintaining relationships, *awa* is another important norm. *Awa* means 'compassion, mercy, charity, kind heartedness, and sincerity...It expresses both [the Filipino] understanding of the situation another person is in and [his] feeling of empathy for (another's) misfortune.' (Jocano, 79) This norm has accommodated somewhat the perceived transgressions of transwomen of social mores concerning gender and sexuality, and highlights the important role of consciousness-raising in trans-liberation. Filipinos, in the end, are *pusong mamon* or soft-hearted.

To be compassionate to the Filipina transwoman is Filipino society's test; to insist on her *self* and autonomy in Filipino society is the Filipina transwoman's challenge. Indeed, social and individual transgressions pave the way for each other's transformation as well.

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Video still from "What are You?", two-channel video installation, 12min, colour, sound, 2006

TEJAL SHAH

video | photography | installation

Works from the HIJRA FANTASY SERIES and "WHAT ARE YOU?"

Gender, reality and fiction remain slippery concepts which due to their interdependence refuse to function traditionally in the encapsulating visual and theoretical space the artist has created.

Tejal is a visual artist working with video, photography and installation. Her work, like herself, is feminist, queer and political. She has exhibited widely in museums, galleries and film festivals including, Tate Modern (London), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Brooklyn Museum (New York) and National Gallery of Modern Art (Bombay). In 2003, she co-founded, organised and curated Larzish – India's 1st International Film Festival of Sexuality and Gender Plurality. She is currently finishing her MFA from Bard College (NY) and lives and works out of her laptop and Bombay city.

I started this body of work thinking about queer lives in the Indian context. Between 2005-06, I was lucky enough to work with the hijra (male to female transsexual) community from Bombay and Bangalore, both collaboratively with other artists as well as alone. In some sense, for many of us (LGBTQI people), our desires are lived in the realm of fantasy or hidden from the public eye. I wanted to breathe life into some of these fantasies. I started to speak with individuals, with whom I had developed a close relationship, about their desires of how they saw themselves in a utopian world. What would they be if they had the choice to be whatever they wished to be?

This is a portrait of Malini. She expressed the desire to be a mother, "I want to point to the moon and tell my child that s/he too can reach out and touch the moon". I decided to use Raja Ravi Varma's painting 'Yashoda with Krishna' as a reference point of departure for this image. It is an irony of history that the problematic utopian vision infusing these paintings became emblematic of colonial India's fraught modernity. This photo-fantasy of Malini is meant to function as a perverse "queering" of Ravi Varma's mythological pictures, and of the colonial history that produced them. I paid a lot of attention to art direction, casting, lighting and detailing for this series. The opulence of the chosen reference also helps to transcend the class hierarchies that prevent hijras from moving into any position of power or privilege and transgressing class barriers, even if momentarily.



You too can touch the moon – Yashoda with Krishna, (from the Hijra fantasy series)
digital photograph on archival paper, 58" X 38", 2006

Maheshwari is a hijra identified woman. I met her in Bombay during my research. I was struck by her loud laughter, sense of fantasy and belief in magic. Her desire was to become a south Indian film star and see herself in a song and dance sequence, romancing the hero and to be romanced by him in return.

Love for love. The simple human quest, forms a recurring theme in a lot of hijra narratives. Just before our shoot, Maheshwari was visiting her family in Andhra Pradesh. When I met her upon her return, she was wearing an awkward, makeshift bandana made out of a *dupatta*. Her brother had chopped off her luscious, long hair while she was asleep...



Southern Siren – Maheshwari (from the *Hijra* fantasy series), digital photograph on archival paper, 58" X 38", 2006



The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne / Burned on the water (from the Hijra fantasy series), 2006.

This is a photograph of Laxmi, a very well known hijra, human rights activist based in Bombay. Laxmi is obsessed with Cleopatra and expressed the wish to become her. Extended conversations and research preceded the conceiving of this image. I have tried to retain as much of Laxmi's personality as I could in this contemporary, queer and Indian version of Cleopatra.



Video still I, "What are You?", C-type lambda print, 14" X 26", 2006

when sex is a crime

As sexual affairs go, adultery is salacious – extremely interesting perhaps because it is associated with ‘scandal’. Yet the term is also shorthand for ‘extra-marital affair’. Beneath the layers of meaning that connote indecency and sinfulness, what qualifies as ‘adultery’ can actually be a myriad of situations and relationships, much too complex to be reduced to fit the label. In fact, in many countries where divorce is available, sexual infidelity may be a ground for ending a marriage but adultery is no longer punished as a crime. The reverse, however, is true for the Philippines where there is no divorce law but penal laws and administrative sanctions on adultery and concubinage persist.

‘Modern love-walks beside me
 Modern love-walks on by
 Modern love-gets me to the church on time
 Church on time-terrifies me
 Church on time-makes me party
 Church on time-puts my trust in god and man
 God and man-no confessions
 God and man-no religion
 God and man-don’t believe in modern love.’

David Bowie, *Modern Love* (1983)

Noli and Irene were both married to other people when they were having an affair. They continued being lovers even when Irene married another man. Neither of them could divorce their spouses (because there is no divorce in the Philippines) but Irene eventually decided to have her marriage annulled. Yet even after the court declared her marriage annulled, Noli, a lawyer by profession (and a public official) was accused of adultery and consequently disbarred.

Like any other forbidden relationship, Noli and Irene’s affair was carried on in secrecy but eventually ended up as gossip column and tabloid fodder for several weeks in the Philippines when Irene’s husband filed a petition for disbarment against Noli. Last year, their love letters (which were submitted as evidence in Noli’s disbarment case) were circulated, quoted, commented on and judged by the

adultery and the law in the philippines

CAROLINA S. RUIZ

public all over the Internet. The Supreme Court received Noli’s love letter to Irene on her wedding day as evidence of his affair with a married woman, which according to the court constituted ‘grossly immoral conduct’. Ironically, in a number of other places in the world, Noli who was obviously unhappy in his own marriage could have divorced his wife and simply married Irene without much issue, except perhaps for the usual public reaction to the affair because of his public post.

Technically speaking, however, even married couples who forgo the often-expensive option of marriage annulment on the grounds of ‘psychological incapacity’ and agree to live separately, are also committing adultery (or concubinage), when they have relationships with other people. Another administrative case, which reached the Supreme Court in 2003, involved a court employee who had been living with a man for over twenty years outside of legal wedlock. A complaint for immorality was filed by a private person, alleging that Soledad Escritor, was married to someone else when she began living with a man who was himself married to another.

In a divided court, the issue at hand (whether or not the existing rule on adultery was applicable) took an unexpected turn when Soledad Escritor invoked the freedom of religion. She argued that characterising her union which was valid under the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ rites as ‘adultery’, constituted a violation of that freedom. Earlier, the trial

court which heard the administrative complaint against Escritor held her guilty of immorality saying: ‘*(B)y strict Catholic standards, the live-in relationship of respondent with her mate should fall within the definition of immoral conduct, to wit: that which is wilful, flagrant, or shameless, and which shows a moral indifference to the opinion of the good and respectable members of the community.*’

While a number of dissenting Justices insisted on the usual application of the law, the majority decided to take note of the exception being invoked by Escritor and remanded the case for further evidence. In 2006, the Supreme Court upheld the exception. After receiving evidence from the officials of the church to which Escritor and her partner belonged, it held that the State failed to demonstrate ‘the gravest abuses, endangering paramount interests’ which could limit or override the respondent’s fundamental right to religious freedom. It also found that the state failed to show that the means it sought to achieve its legitimate state objective was the least intrusive means.

Unlike the Noli Eala disbarment case, which was filed by the husband of the woman he was accused of having an affair with, a stranger filed the administrative complaint lodged against Soledad Escritor. In fact, Escritor and her partner openly lived together as ‘husband and wife’ and even made their vows in rites acknowledged by the Jehovah’s Witnesses. At the time the complaint was filed, they also had a child who had already reached the age of majority.

On the other hand, when the story about Eala's affair was all over the news, Irene whose marriage had just been annulled gave birth to a child allegedly fathered by Eala on February 14, 2008.

As sexual affairs go, adultery is salacious – extremely interesting perhaps because it is associated with ‘scandal’. Yet the term is also shorthand for ‘extra-marital affair’. Beneath the layers of meaning that connote indecency and sinfulness, what qualifies as ‘adultery’ can actually be a myriad of situations and relationships, much too complex to be reduced to fit the label. In fact, in many countries where divorce is available, sexual infidelity may be a ground for ending a marriage but adultery is no longer punished as a crime. The reverse, however, is true for the Philippines where there is no divorce law¹ but penal laws and administrative sanctions on adultery and concubinage persist².

Most ancient laws on adultery characterised it as a violation of the husband’s property rights over his wife. Husbands were not punished for adultery both in Judaism and Roman law where the practice of polygamy was common. Within

Christianity, later Catholic teaching laid an emphasis on the sacrament of marriage and the commonly held view is that the New Testament eliminated the husband’s immunity. With the obligation of mutual fidelity, both husband and wife can be guilty of adultery. That is to say, the ‘sin’ now supposedly applies both ways. Yet in predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines, penal law continues to reflect vestiges of the Roman prohibition against adultery.

In my own experience as a lawyer working with feminist organisations and women’s centres catering to survivors of partner abuse, marital infidelity has always been considered a serious issue by many Filipino women. It is considered so serious in fact that even in cases where women experience

grave physical abuse, the act of sexual infidelity by the husband is usually thought of as the ‘last straw’ before many women seek legal assistance. In counselling women inquiring about the penalty for sexual infidelity many women react negatively to the double standard set between women and men.

Proposals include raising the applicable penalty to setting a uniform definition for adultery applicable to both wives and husbands, citing the ‘equality’ of women and men before the law.

Feminist conundrums

Much like sex work, pornography and abortion, decriminalising ‘sexual infidelity’ tends to be a thorny issue

Legally speaking, the term only applies to a married woman and a man who has sexual relations with a woman *he knows to be married*. Lacking any knowledge of a woman’s married status, the man is exempted from criminal liability. Husbands who have extra-marital affairs, however, cannot be found guilty of adultery. The crime that applies to the extra-marital affairs of Filipino husbands is the law on concubinage and unlike adultery proof of sexual infidelity is insufficient. Concubinage is defined by either scandalous circumstances or living together.

In recent years, the growing support for ‘pro-women’ legislation in the Philippines has led to a variety of initiatives to address gender inequality. Many laws penalising crimes against women were passed between 1992-2004. The ‘Violence against women and their children’ law passed in 2004 did not amend the penal provisions on adultery and concubinage but now supports a definition of marital infidelity on the part of her husband as a form of ‘violence’ against a woman. The penal provisions on adultery and concubinage have also been the subject of many proposed amendments before Congress.

within local feminist circles. For while it has been fairly easy to get a majority of women’s groups to welcome divorce legislation (even if the majority of legislators refuse to touch the divorce bill with a ten foot pole), the decriminalisation of ‘sexual infidelity’ has never been openly engaged with by local feminist groups.

In my own experience as a lawyer working with feminist organisations and women’s centres catering to survivors of partner abuse, marital infidelity has always been considered a serious issue by many Filipino women. It is considered so serious in fact that even in cases where women experience grave physical abuse, the act of sexual infidelity by the husband is usually thought of as the ‘last straw’ before many women seek legal assistance. In counselling women inquiring about the penalty for sexual infidelity many women react negatively to the double standard set between women and men. But by far, the most common reaction has been to question the lack of penal sanctions for the ‘other woman’. Under the penal law on concubinage, the penalty for the ‘concubine’ is *destierro* or mere ‘banishment’.

In certain cases, the acts of sexual infidelity engaged in by the partners of women we have counselled were easy enough to categorise as abuse. One example was a woman who complained that her husband who maltreated her physically, also demanded that she lie on the same bed while he had sex with his mistress. In another case, a woman who worked as an overseas worker for many years came home to find that her husband had used her remittances to acquire property, which he registered in his mistress’ name. Yet, many more cases are not as clear-cut.

A more common example we have often encountered has been cases where a wife makes the belated discovery that her husband either got another woman pregnant, or already has a child (or children) with another woman. In such cases, many women tend to focus on the issue of finances, support and inheritance. As I told one woman that despite the distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy in our law, a child born out of wedlock is still entitled to support from the father; in her emotional state, she ended up bitterly accusing a newborn baby of being a gold digger. Indeed such cases have been among the toughest to handle in feminist counselling. While it is important to lend support in counselling and for women to receive affirmation as they grieve over the end of a relationship, it is not necessarily empowering to peg one’s sense of justice on a set of fixed legal criteria and definitions.

Law reform has played an important role in securing justice for women and in facilitating challenges to archaic standards which perpetuated women’s subordinate role and status.

In the case of domestic violence, sexual harassment and even rape, for instance, defining the harm in penal law remains an important strategy to affirm women’s dignity and equality.

On the other hand, despite our best intentions, redefining how an act is viewed within a society doesn’t simply happen by operation of law.

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Philippine Penal Law on Adultery and Concubinage

Adultery is committed by any married woman who shall have sexual intercourse with a man not her husband and by the man who has carnal knowledge of her knowing her to be married, even if the marriage be subsequently declared void. (Adultery, Article

334, Revised Penal Code Act 3815) (1930)

Any husband who shall keep a mistress in the conjugal dwelling, or shall have sexual intercourse, under scandalous circumstances, with a woman who is not his wife, or shall cohabit with her in any other place, shall be punished by prison correccional in its minimum and medium periods. The concubine shall suffer the penalty of destierro. (Concubinage, Article 334, Revised Penal Code Act 3815) (1930)

When the Family Code was enacted in 1988, 'sexual infidelity' on the part of either spouse became a ground for legal separation, eliminating the gendered distinction between adultery and concubinage, at least as far as civil law is concerned. In 2004, a new law penalizing the abuse of women by their partners (Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act), classified 'marital infidelity' by husbands against their wives as a form of violence against women.

At the time of the Japanese Occupation during World War II, adultery and concubinage were legal grounds for securing divorce in the Philippines.

Women's 'Sexual Infidelity'

When women have extra-marital affairs, it is not only much easier for husbands to prosecute but most women also assume (often correctly), that they will be more harshly judged. Because the women's movement has remained silent on the issue of decriminalising adultery, many women who are on the other end of the equation, often assume feminists are an unsympathetic lot and that

When women have extra-marital affairs, it is not only much easier for husbands to prosecute but most women also assume (often correctly), that they will be more harshly judged. Because the women's movement has remained silent on the issue of decriminalising adultery, many women who are on the other end of the equation, often assume feminists are an unsympathetic lot and that like most other people, women's rights activists will judge them if they find out.

feared she would be rejected if we knew about it. She never expected that a women's NGO would even be open to defending her adultery case.

Indeed, even as using the law has become a preferred option in the realm of women's rights advocacy, it is important not to lose sight of the more important aspect of changing the ways we *think of law* and the ways we use the law. While certainly not an easy task, in the case of penal sanctions for cases of 'sexual or marital infidelity', the main issue at hand involves no less than engaging key notions of justice and sexual morality and moving beyond the idea of penal sanctions. In the Philippine context, this conversation will have to be explored alongside the proposals on both the practical concerns of divorce legislation as well as

like most other people, women's rights activists will judge them if they find out.

This happened in one case where we handled the custody battle between a young mother and her absentee husband. While they had been living separate lives for a number of years when the husband began working abroad, the woman's in-laws, prodded by the husband, decided to literally kidnap their grandchildren and refused to turn them over to the mother who had been in charge of their care. The woman who was our client approached us to handle the custody case but failed to disclose that there was a pending adultery case against her that was filed by her husband. At her wits' end when the information was about to be filed in court she finally told us that she had a relationship with another man and bore a child by him. She decided not to mention it first when she requested legal assistance on the custody case because she

challenging prevailing notions on sexuality and sexual morality. All these have become even more difficult in the face of renewed Catholic lobbying against ongoing women's rights campaigns that it has labelled 'DEATH' (Divorce, Euthanasia, Abortion, Total reproductive health, Homosexuality and same sex marriage)

Clearly, however, criminal law is not an effective means of emphasising the importance of fidelity as a value, whether within marriage or in the context of other meaningful relationships. What may easily fit the bill of 'adultery' or 'marital infidelity' within conventional societal standards will often not reflect a complete nor accurate picture of any single relationship or marriage.

For the women's movement, focusing exclusively on 'male sexual and marital infidelity' almost to the point of portraying (and explaining) the behaviour as a natural sex difference does nothing to acknowledge women's own sexual needs and capacities. In fact it avoids the issue of women's sexuality altogether, as has been the recognised danger in the process of legal recognition of 'Violence against Women'. As Alice Miller has pointed out, 'Women make demands and ladies get protection'. For while feminists have become experts in using law to challenge gender inequality and gendered stereotypes, securing legitimacy has also often come at the cost of reifying double standards of sexual morality. In a context laden with Catholic influences of guilt and repression of the sexual, women's entitlement to justice and equality literally results in a disavowal of the sexual. This is the very reason why sex work, pornography, abortion and adultery remain on the fringes of the women's rights agenda. When we fall into the pre-framed formulas of the law, we miss out an opportunity to challenge the very notions around which women's ideas about their self-worth, dignity and sense of justice have been confined.

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1 There is divorce for Muslims under the Muslim Code of personal laws or Presidential Decree 1983

2 Sexual infidelity became a ground for legal separation in the 1988 Family Code but separation does not entitle either spouse to remarry nor bar a criminal case for adultery.

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pride parades in India



photo by sumit baudh

In Issue 4, 2007 of *In Plainspeak* we had covered the topic of queer pride parades all over the world, and the symbolism of the parade in the lives of queer people. Though the parades have been held every year in many cities all over the world, Kolkata has been the only city to host the parade in India for the first time in 1999 and then from 2003 onwards. Not any more.

On June 29, 2008, it was for the first time held simultaneously in Kolkata, Bangalore as well as New Delhi in India.

The Queer pride parade in all the three cities this year was quite a euphoric moment for many who have been waiting for it to arrive for years or maybe decades! The idea of the queer pride parade is not new. Historically, it marks the day of the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969 when there were a series of conflicts that took place between the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender population and the New York police at Stonewall Inn. This day signifies the resistance put forward by people who do not conform to sexuality and gender norms imposed by society. Over the years this day is used to celebrate pride among sexual minorities across the world.

On June 29, 2008 there was apprehension about how many people would come to the parade, would it be peaceful, and would there be adequate and supportive media coverage. The parade in Delhi was organised by a group of more than 30 people who had come together to help prepare for the event. The preparations included seeking police permission and support, publicising the parade, and arranging for rainbow flags, masks, candles etc. There was a conscious move not to represent organizations during the parade especially the ones who are members of Voices Against 377 (VA377). VA377 is a coalition of individuals and organisations who are working towards reading down of section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which is a colonial law discriminatory towards same sex desiring people. The coalition aims to put adult consensual same sex activity outside the purview of the law. Because VA377 is one of the petitioners for the on-going court case in Delhi, it was thought better not to mention or display the names of organisations and the coalition for the parade. However,

despite all these apprehensions people turned up and that too in large numbers!

The parade in Delhi began at 5:30 in the evening at Tolstoy Marg and the colourful crowd proceeded towards Jantar Mantar amidst much revelry. There were approximately 600 people present including gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgender and straight people, families, children and even a large dog, a Great Dane who aroused as much interest as the flamboyantly bedecked transwomen! The overall atmosphere was of joy and happiness. Faces gleamed with pride and the hope for a new world with more tolerance, empathy and understanding for each other. Of course, there were also people who wore colourful masks as they were not comfortable to reveal their identity for fear of discrimination from family, friends and society.

Public statements were made against section 377. At the end of the walk to Jantar Mantar, there was also a peaceful candle light vigil to show solidarity for the cause. The response of the onlookers was mixed – some people were curious and interested to know more while some others showed their disapproval. But the overall spirit was that of exuberance.

Not only was the parade successful, the media coverage has also been immensely encouraging and gratifying. There were parades in Bangalore and Kolkata too on the same day. In the first-ever event of its kind in Bangalore, the sexual minorities community of the city came together to celebrate their sexualities. The march started from National College grounds in Basavanagudi and culminated at the Town Hall. People sported messages such as 'I am the pink sheep of my family', 'Repeal IPC Section 377' and 'Love knows no gender'. Similarly, in Kolkata, lesbians, gays, transsexuals, bisexual and heterosexual people marched through the streets from College Square to Esplanade East on a 'Rainbow Pride Walk'.

People walked away from the parades with the hope that there would be many more spaces in the coming years that people can claim without being judged or discriminated against because of their sexuality. The crowds walked back home with the euphoria of having created history.

about elsewhere

Not Just 'Another Gay Movie'¹

A review of
ABOUT ELSEWHERE
Priya Sen / 29 mins / 2007 / English / India

PONNI ARASU

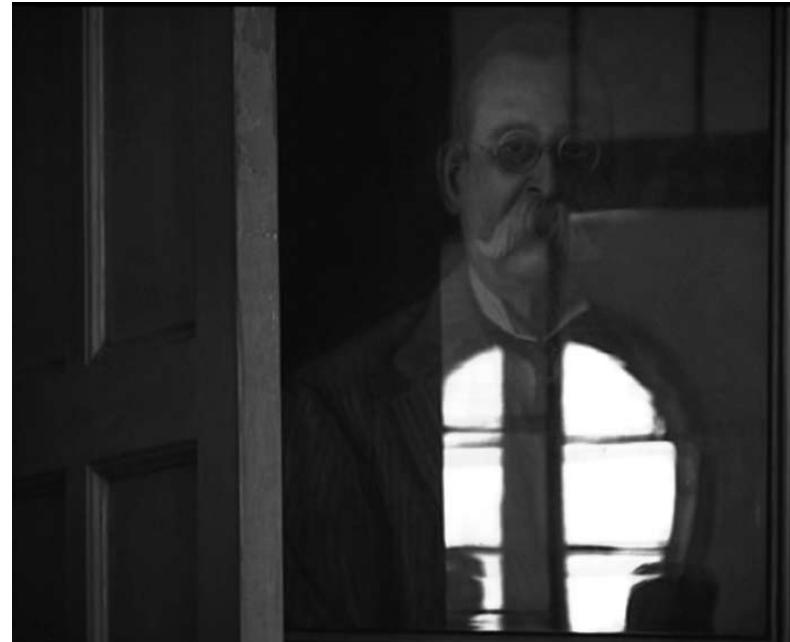


Many LGBT people in India spend a significant amount of time trying to catch every remotely LGBT-themed film in town in theatres, film festivals and gatherings in friends' houses, given the paucity of images restricted to the historic but sometimes inadequate *Fire*² to the flawed and often insensitive *Girlfriend*³; the comedy track of *Kal ho na ho*⁴ to the more serious *My Brother Nikhil*⁵. With regard to documentary films a few films have been made discussing the position of LGBT people in the country and their rights or the lack thereof. Few other documentaries like Nishit Saran's *Summer in my Veins*, for instance, tell poignant personal stories. It is in this context that Public Service Broadcasting Trust, New Delhi stepped in and commissioned various films about themes relating to sexuality, sexual and reproductive rights and health. Priya Sen's *About Elsewhere* was made as part of this. The film has had small screenings, showed at film festivals abroad and had one screening on Doordarshan⁶. Apart from the smaller screenings I also got to watch the film on Doordarshan. The experience of watching a film on sexuality on Doordarshan itself merits analysis.

About Elsewhere is not just another gay movie for many reasons. It casually and beautifully talks of the lives and images of queer people⁷ (even if you don't read the other endnotes, do read this one. It's important!), while not taking a simplistic or compartmentalised approach to this expression. In fact, it challenges notions of fixed identities within the sphere of sexuality and refers to sexualities as

journeys. It traverses two cities the filmmaker cherishes as her own while not losing sight of the different cities within the city. The film is as much about the two cities in question as it is about sexuality. Through images, it makes constant connections between the inhabiting of spaces and the processes of life, including experiences of sexuality. It juxtaposes various articulations of gender, sexuality and desire on a popular medium such as the radio with queer expressions that the filmmaker has experienced in her spaces. It subtly brings in a discourse of control in general which can then be read also within the context of sexuality among other things through a child's voice showing simultaneously the idiosyncrasy and grimness of these articulations. Using an interesting method of separate sound and visual tracks at different points, the filmmaker manages to leave us with a few stunning moments. The film addresses issues of the natal family and other support structures and the filmmaker's perceptions of both, not through a talking heads method, but by a barrage of crisscrossing images that often flow with one another and at other times aesthetically conflict with each other.

The image of the 'shell' is an important part of the film. The film sometimes seems like a photograph of the inside of the filmmaker's personal shell that she inhabits. Having said that, it is not a simplistic portrayal of her journey through notions of gender and sexuality but makes clear comments on the context of queer struggles, lives, as well as heteronormative structures. All these articulations echo





for us as viewers, from within that shell. The filmmaker's voice is hardly heard in the film (except for the occasional background sound of which she might be a part) and neither does she provide us with her 'personal journey' – a trend common among many South Asian, diasporic and other queer filmmakers. Rather, she describes her shell which consists of many images, sounds, cracks, processes and conflicts.

Having said all of this, one needs to go back to the experience of watching it on Doordarshan and contrast that with another time I saw the movie with a few friends. Many of us in the latter gathering were LGBT people and believe in a broader queer politics as well. We related to the film at a rather emotional level and it did reflect some parts of some of our journeys. I then saw the movie again on Doordarshan at a friend's place. I couldn't help but wonder how the film would be perceived by someone who has not embarked on these journeys the filmmaker describes or is not aware of or willing to acknowledge them. The film has no fixed agenda and so it is hard to state anything about it within the trope of 'impact'. It might however be perceived as 'abstract' and 'confusing' and maybe even pointless.

One is not sure, if this is entirely fair as the film has enough images and sounds to not know what effect it might have on a viewer. The crisscrossing images, sounds, non-traditional methods of filmmaking may leave some perplexed and others touched. On the whole, Priya Sen's *About Elsewhere* is a relief from the usual 'showing discrimination and

demanding rights' documentary film genre while not falling comfortably within the sometimes self-obsessed and often non-contextual 'my personal journey' genre within films about sexuality. It goes without saying that the significance of these two genres in queer filmmaking, their limitations notwithstanding, within the Indian context are beyond measure.

I wouldn't screen this film in isolation for a workshop on the theme of sexuality in India, for instance, for an open audience, but would couple it with a few more straightforward films that set the basis of LGBT people not being 'diseased' or 'abnormal' and that sexuality is an important issue that has to be discussed. Once the stage is set, *About Elsewhere* may ring a bell with many trying to traverse through notions of gender, sexuality, space, structures and so on; LGBT or not. *About Elsewhere* is a welcome addition to the list of queer Indian films that explores the layered context of queer lives in India including the city, space, philosophy, body, popular culture, individual processes and social structures.

Ponni Arasu is a queer feminist activist. She currently works with Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore, India

- 1 *Another Gay Movie* is an American gay chick flick made in 2007. The plot description on IMDB.com reads as follows: In the dirtiest, funniest, most scandalous gay-teen-sex-comedy-parody ever, four young gay friends make a pact to lose their virginity by the end of the summer. The boys soon face giant sex toys, naked celebrities, masochistic teachers and an uncontrollable romance with a quiche. With a dozen jokes a minute and a who's who of gay celebrities (including Graham Norton, Scott Thompson, Ant and Richard Hatch) as you've NEVER seen them before, *Another Gay Movie* is a candy-colored romp where getting laid is all that matters!
- 2 *Fire* is a film with a lesbian theme made by Deepa Mehta in 1996. It was the first overtly lesbian-themed movie to hit the Indian movie scene. It saw a lot of opposition from Hindu fundamentalists in India and also led to public protests opposing the fundamentalists by LGBT individuals and groups.
- 3 *Girlfriend*, made in 2004, by Karan Razdan portrays the relationship between a lesbian, her woman friend with whom she has a physical relationship one drunken night, and the latter's boyfriend. It evolves into a thriller portraying an emotionally disturbed and maniacal self-proclaimed lesbian from whom the innocent heroine and the hero protect themselves.
- 4 *Kal ho na ho*, a popular Bollywood film made by Karan Johar in 2003, has three big film stars. The two heroes of the film pretend to be a gay couple in front of a scandalised housemaid and this joke continues as a comedy track through most of the film. Namita Malhotra's *Kaun Mile Dekho Kisko* (<http://media.opencultures.net/queer/>) is an interesting parody of *Kal ho na ho* where the two heroes actually do end up with each other in the climax; Bollywood style!
- 5 *My Brother Nikhil* made in 2005 by Onir Sen tells the story of a talented swimmer dealing with HIV/AIDS and the role of his sister and his male lover in supporting him.
- 6 Doordarshan is India's state run television channel. While it does not have a viewership as widespread as cable TV, a sizeable number of people still watch it. A screening on Doordarshan is an important recognition both for the film and the issues it hopes to address.
- 7 The term Queer offers a critique of heteronormativity extending beyond sexual identity. It is a perspective that engages with a larger world view that recognizes and critiques complex systems of class, caste, gender, sexuality, race, region, religion etc. For more, see Nivedita Menon, 'How natural is normal? Feminism and compulsory heterosexuality' in *Because I have a Voice: Queer Politics in India*, Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2005, pg. 33-40. In this review Queer is being used as a term to refer to those individuals who embark on journeys around sexuality among other things and are willing to acknowledge the same, irrespective of their sexual preferences/practices. Usage of 'queer' is apt for this review as the film in question does not work within fixed frameworks of sexuality but is about journeys.

The Wisdom of Whores:**Bureaucrats, Brothels and the Business of AIDS | ELIZABETH PISANI**GRANTA BOOKS, UK
2008

Based on her experiences working as an epidemiologist and consultant to Family Health International (FHI) and UNAIDS among others, her book encourages policy makers and programmers to take a closer look at what works and what does not, in the fight against AIDS and to base interventions on scientific research and evidence. She encourages leadership within governments and in the UN to take on the tough issues, and the unpopular issues, even though they won't get them the votes.

No two words can capture a reader's attention as effectively as the words *free* and *sex*. I think the word *whores* should be added to the list. The title of Elizabeth Pisani's book is more focussed on grabbing a reader's attention than it is about the wisdom of whores, bureaucrats, brothels or the business of AIDS. But once you do start to read it: the book is an interesting and easy study, albeit a little repetitive.

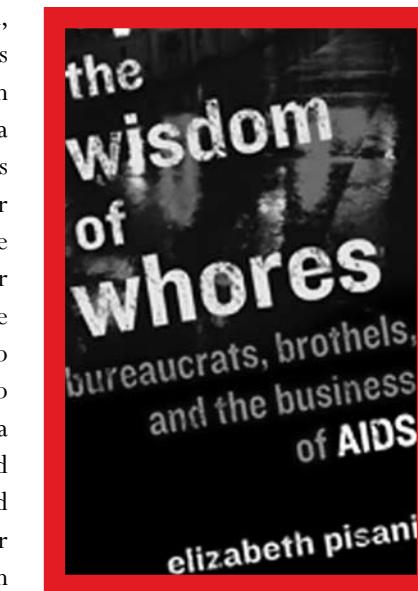
Based on her experiences working as an epidemiologist and consultant to Family Health International (FHI) and UNAIDS among others, her book encourages policy makers and programmers to take a closer look at what works and what does not, in the fight against AIDS and to base interventions on scientific research and evidence. She encourages leadership within governments and in the UN to take on the tough issues, and the unpopular issues, even though they won't get them the votes. Experience has shown that a few key actions have been successful in preventing the spread of HIV in the region and these should be the priority for action.

For those working in the field, her messages are nothing new: harm reduction works, particularly in prison settings, abstinence programmes are a waste of money, preventing HIV transmission among sex workers and their clients is the best way of preventing the spread of the virus to the general population, and that Asia will not face a generalised epidemic like the one in Africa.

However, she does touch upon a few interesting issues such as the effectiveness of peer-based education and outreach

programmes; they don't always work, especially among groups of sex workers who are actually in competition with one another rather than part of a community. Peer-based outreach works best among communities who consider themselves part of a collective, like the gay (and lesbian) community. Her description of and interaction with the *waria* community in Indonesia is also interesting and strikingly similar to the *Hijra* community in India. *Waris*, a term for transgender people is derived from the words *wanita* (woman) and *pria* (man). Many *waris* sell sex for a living, mainly because of the high stigma against them and the limited job options open to transgendered people. As long as society looks down on such persons, they will have limited livelihood options, and they will continue to sell sex to survive. One cannot address HIV without looking at this aspect of society as well.

However, the book is contentious on some counts: Firstly, the author believes that women are not trafficked into sex work. While I believe this to be true to some extent, one cannot ignore the fact that in South Asia, many minor girls are trafficked into sex work. In fact globally, an estimated 800,000 people are trafficked each year, of which women account for 80%. Of this 80%, over one fourth are minor girls. Majority of women and girls are trafficked for sex



making them increasingly vulnerable to HIV; and the younger they are the more vulnerable. Those who continue to stay in sex work by choice when adults, is a different issue, but the number of young girls being trafficked into sex work is real. Studies such as one by J Silverman (2006) found that the mean age of girls trafficked into sex work from Nepal to India had fallen from 14-16 years old in 1986 to 10-14 years old in 1997. Of these, the younger they are, the more vulnerable they are to HIV, with 60% prevalence among rescued sex-trafficked Nepalese girls and women aged 7-14 years compared with 31% prevalence among the 18-32 age group.

Secondly, yes HIV is a health issue, but it is also a development issue and it is fuelled by poverty and inequality. Unless these foundations change, unless the way men and women relate to one another change, HIV is not likely to disappear. By introducing HIV and sexuality education into school curricula, this change in gender norms and the foundations of the relationship between men and women is being challenged. It may not help prevent new HIV infections in the short term, but it is a long term investment in society and particularly in women: so what if it is using HIV money? After all, there is money in HIV unlike in women's health, maternal mortality or women's sexuality.

REVATI CHAWLA

I can't help thinking that the book is a Westerner's perspective of an issue meant for Western readers, and any persons referred to as experts are also of that genre; with the expertise of the region edited out. As a South Asian working on HIV in the region, I have seen my fair share of Western experts, most of them overrated and overpaid, fly in for a few days, do their 'magic' and write up reports that have no relevance to the complex reality of the region.

Yes, there is big money in HIV, and we are constantly reminded of this in the book. The money may be a little less than there was a few years ago, but still there is money. Along with money comes the corruption, the underhand deals and kickbacks. But this is true of any sector, not just HIV.

I can't help thinking that the book is a Westerner's perspective of an issue meant for Western readers, and any persons referred to as experts are also of that genre; with the expertise of the region edited out. As a South Asian working on HIV in the region, I have seen my fair share of Western experts, most of them overrated and overpaid, fly in for a few days, do their 'magic' and write up reports

that have no relevance to the complex reality of the region. The other big mistake is to generalise one Asian country's experience to the rest. The author's main perspective of Asia comes from Indonesia and I would be cautious in generalising the Indonesian experience to apply to the sub continent.

Although the wisdom of whores isn't really their wisdom, but rather an interpretation of the lessons the author has learnt from travels in the region and interaction with marginalised communities, for someone who has not worked on HIV, the book comes across as an eye-opener and is worth a read. Full of politically incorrect words such as whores and drug addicts, the books is written in a popular anecdotal style with easy to understand language that someone who is not a development professional can easily relate to, pick up and enjoy.

If you work on HIV however, be warned, it may irritate you. Not only could it have said exactly the same thing in less than half the length, but you may also land up feeling like me: a little patronised.

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Revati Chawla is an activist working on HIV/AIDS, gender and sexuality issues in the Asia Pacific Region. She is based in Sri Lanka.

microbicides

A *microbicide* is a substance that can substantially reduce transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) when applied either in the vagina or rectum. A microbicide could be produced in many forms, including gels, creams, suppositories, films, lubricants, or in the form of a sponge or a vaginal ring that slowly releases the active ingredient.

The word 'microbicides' refers to a range of different products that share one common characteristic: the ability to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV and other STI pathogens (a pathogen is the agent that causes an infection) when applied locally.

Microbicides are not yet available. Scientists are currently testing many substances to see whether they help protect against HIV and/or other STIs, but no safe and effective microbicide is currently available. Right now, there are over 30 product leads, including 10 that have proven safe and effective in animals and are now being tested on people.

A microbicide could prevent HIV and STIs by either killing or immobilising pathogens, blocking infection by creating a barrier between the pathogen and the cells of the vagina or rectum; or preventing the infection from taking hold after it has entered the body. Ideally, the product would combine these mechanisms for extra effectiveness.

Scientists hope that some of the microbicides being investigated will prevent pregnancy whereas some will not. It is important to have both non-contraceptive microbicides and 'dual-action' microbicides that prevent pregnancy and infection, so that women and couples can protect their health and still have children.

Microbicides, like all other experimental drugs, must go through a carefully controlled series of tests for safety and effectiveness in laboratories and humans before they can become available for general use. Women's health activists and researchers are working closely together to ensure that the clinical testing of microbicides in humans is thorough and ethical. Many of the substances and mechanisms of action under investigation are already commonly used in over-the-counter products.

The microbicides field has been characterised by an unusual interplay between advocacy and research. The earliest articulations of the need for a woman-initiated prevention method came from women themselves rather than policymakers and scientists, unlike the call for HIV vaccines which came from scientists. This was long before most people working in the field of AIDS understood or appreciated the huge impact of the epidemic on women.

Virtually all microbicides research to date has been conducted by non-profit and academic institutions or small biotech companies. Studies are being funded by charitable foundations and government grants. Large pharmaceutical companies have not invested significantly in this field, primarily because microbicides are a classic 'public health good' which would yield huge benefits to society but for which the profit incentive to private investment is low.

For more information on microbicides please visit www.global-campaign.org. Microbicides 2008, the fourth biannual international conference on microbicides was held in Delhi in February 2008. For an update on the conference please visit www.microbicides2008.com

... on how sexual rights affect one personally, and how they are affirmed and/or violated in one's local cultural setting.

notes from the region

SKYWALKER

I am a transgendered person. That is what I have been told by rights activist and in medical terms. But a 'normal' person will say that I'm crazy because in their world there is no such thing. To be honest, I don't know what I am. I know I'm human, I have a female body but my brain and my consciousness say that I'm a male. I am more comfortable being a male which comes to me naturally. I do not force myself to feel or think this way. It has always been like this ever since I can remember.

In medical terms I'm suffering from 'gender dysphoria' and the only way to 'cure' me is through sex reassignment surgery along with hormone therapy. Even though this does not 'cure' my sickness hundred percent it's the closest I can get to being 'cured'.

It has been said that sexual rights are fundamental and universal rights. Sexual rights have become a major issue in today's world. This is mainly because governments, religions and cultures have imposed a lot of restrictions and barriers on the sexual behaviour of human beings. I think it should not be anybody else's business. As long as an individual is not forcing or harming another person to satisfy his or her sexual needs or is not using adolescents and children, everybody else should keep out of other peoples' sexual lives because it is a very private matter.

For a person like me who has a major issue in accepting the body that I was born with, sexuality is another confusing

matter. Sexual needs are bodily needs but if a person is not comfortable with his or her own body how can that person satisfy a body that they refuse? If a person has undergone a sex reassignment surgery and if that person is happy with his or her new rearranged body then that person can pursue his or her sexual needs without much hesitation.

Finding a partner is not that easy for some one like me. Straight women are attracted to men but I'm not totally a man. Lesbians are attracted to women but I'm not a woman. Bisexuals are attracted to males and females but I'm neither. This does not mean that it is impossible to find some one understanding. Friends just like me are living a happy life with their partners.

There are many other issues that I worry about every single day. One of the major issues is finding employment. My appearance happens to be a 'BIG PROBLEM' to many employers. It does not matter if I qualify for the job or if I'm a hard worker or not. Appearance is the most important thing for them. They do not want to think for a second that this person has applied for this particular job because he or she wants to make a living. May be they think people like us are not supposed to live. My sexual rights haven't been violated by any one else but me. I do it because I need to live first then only can I think of other needs in my life.

Skywalker is a pseudonym.

UPDATE FROM THE CHINA SEXUALITY RESOURCE CENTRE

The China Sexuality Resource Centre (CSRC) was established in 2005 and is directed by Prof. Pan Suiming. It is affiliated to the Institute of Sexuality and Gender (ISG), Renmin University of China. CSRC will start a new round of programmes on sexualities from 2008-2010 supported by the Ford Foundation. The programme will focus on the sustainable development of the field of sexuality and aims to mainstream sexuality in China. It will be based on individual and institutional capacity building and networking, strengthening the work of the CSRC, further improving the research and activities within the Chinese context with a human-rights oriented perspective, and facilitating the dialogue in the nation and internationally.

Activities under the new round of programmes include:

- 1 Lobbying with the University authorities to provide resource support to CSRC for sustainable development of the sexuality field.
- 2 Organising national and international conferences on sexualities in China to strengthen the networks between different disciplines.
- 3 Continually editing, publishing and disseminating Chinese newsletters and books nationwide.

- 4 Continually providing grants and awards to encourage young scholars to be involved in sexuality research and set up courses in the universities.
- 5 Translating English materials into Chinese and vice versa.
- 6 Being more actively involved in practices or facilitating practices by organising training workshops or seminars and providing lectures for different parties and organizations such as family planning association, disease control centres, media, and other related NGOS.
- 7 Facilitating more effective dialogue between different parts of China, China and the region, and the international world by sharing information, exchanges, visits, participating and organising panels in international conferences and e-communications.

UPDATE FROM GAYA NUSANTARA ON THE INDONESIAN SEXUALITY FORUM

The current public discourse on sexuality and sexual and reproductive health and rights in Indonesia, as represented in emotional media debates and proposed legislations tabled by conservatives on polygamy, adultery, pornography and erotic dancing, to mention but a few phenomena, shows a lack of thorough understanding of the complex issues.

On the other hand, a small but significant critical mass of Indonesians have been educated in various sexuality institutes using a critical and emancipative approach to the subject, to the extent that a well-thought-out response needs to be constructed. At the same time, the fact that most sexuality institutes are held in the English language has meant that more people who could enroll in them otherwise have been barred due to a mere lack of language proficiency.

Realizing all that, a group of Indonesian non-governmental and community-based organizations came together to put our expertise and skills together to educate each others' constituencies, namely married couples of reproductive age, midwives and health providers, religious leaders, young people, LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersexed and queer and questioning) people and people with different abilities, about sexuality and sexual and reproductive health and rights using a critical and emancipative approach.

In this pilot program, called the Indonesian Sexuality Forum, which can be expanded and replicated in other communities after appropriate monitoring and evaluation and later revisions and adaptations, a core module has been composed to be used by trainers, hailing from the different organisations in the Forum, in training the various constituencies. In addition, community-specific modules will also be developed.

The Forum dovetails with the work of the South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality in that GAYa NUSANTARA Foundation, a member of the Forum, is the liaison between it and the Resource Centre. News and other pieces from the work of the Forum will be translated into English and included in the Resource Centre website

and *In Plainspeak*, and the other way around. The program will also identify potential participants from Indonesia in Resource Centre activities. It is envisioned that this collaboration will inform the region about Indonesia and vice versa.

UPDATE FROM THE INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES IN VIETNAM

Under the Ford Foundation's support, the Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS) set up a Resource Centre on Sexuality and Sexual Health in 2002. The Centre has been known by researchers, practitioners, lecturers and students, not only because of its wide and multi-format collection of national and international teaching and reference materials in the field, but also because of its informative and user-friendly website. The Centre has also conducted a series of seminars, which is perceived as a forum for those researchers who want to come and share, seeking ideas for their work.

Set up subsequently, JVNet, a bilingual English-Vietnamese listserve and newsletter on HIV/AIDS has up to now had more than 2000 subscribers. More recently, the newsletter Living with HIV, a forum for and by People Living with AIDS (PLWA), has been warmly received by not only the PLWA network but also by many authorities and functional organisations and agencies at all levels. The circulation of the second issue was 2000 copies, double that of the first.

Currently, the Centre continues to excel in its mission to serve readers by maintaining the websites and seminars, producing more publications and, probably more importantly, opening up linkages with universities and research institutes and with international and regional

centres such as the South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality in India, and The National Sexuality Resource Centre (NSRC) in the United States.

In 2007, the Ford Foundation and UNFPA charged ISDS with the responsibility to conduct a National Survey on Sexuality and Sexual Health in Vietnam. This project is intended to run for over three years and will set the standard for research of this type in the near future.

The overall objective of this project is to produce an empirical foundation for a comprehensive understanding of the key issues of sexuality and sexual health in Vietnam and the promotion of sexual well-being, sexual rights and gender equality as indispensable factors for socio-economic and human development in Vietnam.

To this end, the project aims to:

- 1 Explore and map present knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and practices (KPAP) towards sexuality of a nationally-representative sample of the Vietnamese people.
- 2 Identify parameters/boundaries and determinants of Vietnamese sexuality.
- 3 Trace changes in sexuality KPAP over the past 50 years and the relation between these changes with human development in Vietnam.
- 4 Identify major sexual health issues and their relationship to people's sexuality KPAP.

We are currently in the process of revising the questionnaires after the consultation meeting. Also, as this is the very first survey of this nature in Vietnam, omission is almost inevitable and therefore any feedback or recommendations for inclusion at the later date would be gratefully received. Please find us at isds@isds.org.vn.

We thank **Pan Suiming** in China, **Dede Oetomo** in Indonesia, and **Khuat Thu Hong** in Vietnam for preparing these updates.

AT THE RESOURCE CENTRE

READ *In Plainspeak* Online

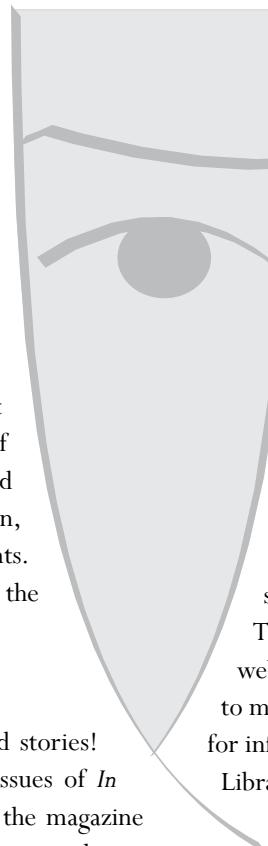
Every publication of *In Plainspeak* is available to download in PDF and in HTML format on our website – www.asiasrc.org. To receive a hard copy of *In Plainspeak*, send your mailing address to resourcecentre@tarshi.net.

BROWSE our website at www.asiasrc.org

The website contains information about Resource Centre programmes, a database of library materials, links to organisational and electronic resources throughout the region, journals, news articles and announcements. You can join our mailing list through the website.

CONTRIBUTE to *In Plainspeak*

Calling all Writers! We want your ideas and stories! We are inviting submissions for the next issues of *In Plainspeak*. Please indicate which section of the magazine you think your article best fits. Send in your articles to resourcecentre@tarshi.net. Remember we use gender-neutral and non-judgmental language. To write for the I column, please begin your first sentence with 'I...'. Calling all Artists! We hope to showcase a diverse range of images throughout the magazine in each issue.



In Plainspeak is calling for images on sexuality for inclusion in the magazine. Poetry is also welcome. Submissions should be sent to resourcecentre@tarshi.net.

VISIT the Resource Centre Library

The South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality library hosts a collection of classic and contemporary books on sexuality, fiction, newsletters, CDROMs, newsletters, organisational material, electronic files, conference papers, journals and other periodicals, on sexuality, reproductive health, and rights. The library is open to use by professionals working in the field, NGOs, academics, researchers, and students.

The library page is hosted on the Resource Centre website (www.asiasrc.org). Users can access web links to many useful journals, and browse the library catalogue for information on materials in the library

Library Hours: Monday to Thursday, 1:30 to 5:00 pm.

Telephone: 91-11- 65642624

GIVE us Your Feedback!

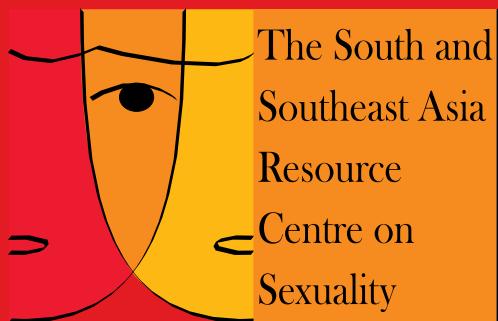
What did you think of this issue of *In Plainspeak*? We welcome your comments, suggestions, and ideas. Please send your feedback to resourcecentre@tarshi.net. We look forward to hearing from you!



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