

The background is a complex, textured artwork. It features a central, pale, bald figure with closed eyes, looking slightly to the right. The figure is surrounded by a dense, chaotic pattern of colors including red, yellow, blue, and purple. The overall style is reminiscent of a pointillist or digital noise texture. The text is overlaid on the lower right portion of the image.

**A Critical
Examination Of
Sexuality Discourses
In India**



**A Critical Examination Of
Sexuality Discourses
In India**

This mapping is supported by American Jewish Word Service

Any part of this report may be used with an acknowledgement of the source.

Publisher : Nirantar

First Edition : June, 2016

Cover illustration : Sutanu Panigrahi

Design : Sadia Saeed

Research team : Jaya Sharma, Purnima Gupta, Rituparna Borah

Editing : Priya Raghavan, Apeksha Vora

Support & Coordination : Archana Dwivedi

Printing : Durable Printers. 9810529858

For copies contact :

Nirantar Trust

B-64, 2nd floor, Sarvodaya Enclave,

New Delhi 110017, India

Phone: 26966334; Fax: 26517726

Email: nirantar.mail@gmail.com

Web: www.nirantar.net

Nirantar Trust works towards empowering women through education – by enabling access to information, promoting literacy, and engendering educational processes. We achieve this through direct field interventions, creating educational resources, research and advocacy, and training.

Actively involved with the women’s movement and other democratic rights movements, Nirantar brings concerns central to these movements into its educational work.

Nirantar was set up in 1993.

Contents

Lists of abbreviations	6
Acknowledgements and Introduction	7
Sexuality and its Intersections with Caste, Class, and Religion	15
Sexuality and Sex Work	32
Sexuality and Health	39
Young People and Sexuality	47
Sexual and Gender Identities	57
Conclusion	93
Annexure	106

Lists of Abbreviations

AIDS - Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
AJWS - American Jewish World Service
BC - Backward Caste/Class
CPM - Communist Party of India (Marxist)
EPW - Economic and Political Weekly
F2M - Female to Male
GBV - Gender based Violence
HIV - Human Immunodeficiency virus
ICF - Integral Coach Factory
IUD - Intra Uterine Device
LBT - Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender
LGBTQ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
M2F - Male to Female
MBC - Most Backward Classes
MoRD - Ministry of Rural Development
MSM - Men who have sex with men
NALSA - National Legal Services Authority
NCERT - National Council of Educational Research and Training
NREGA - National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OBC - Other Backward Class
RTF - Right To Food
RTI - Right to Information
SECC - Socio-Economic Caste Census
Section 377 - Section of the Indian Penal Code that reads "Unnatural offences.—Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine."
SRH - Sexual and Reproductive Rights
SRHR - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SRS - Sex Reassignment Surgery
UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAW - Violence Against Women
WHO - World Health Organization

Acknowledgements

We at Nirantar have learnt tremendously from those who agreed to be interviewed and share their views with us so generously as part of this mapping. We hope that we have been able to do justice to the extremely rich insights shared with us, and that this document will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on sexuality and gender transgression in ways that are valuable for all of us who are involved in processes of change towards justice.

Introduction

Aim and Intention of the Mapping

This mapping sought to create a space for a “coming together” of various different conversations around sexuality in India towards a positive political integration of sexuality discourses. Spanning from marginalization of gender and sexual identities to broader links of sexuality and gender transgression with social, economic and political structures around caste, religion and class, and ways in which all these interact with law, education and health, the mapping brings together some critical insights and questions.

Having engaged with issues of sexuality in our work and activism, Nirantar had various curiosities and excitements in mapping the discourse around sexuality over the years. This coincided with a request from American Jewish World Service (AJWS) to take stock of the current discourses that could better inform its efforts. This report draws on conversations on sexuality among activists and development practitioners based on a series of semi structured interviews conducted in 2013-2014. Through the mapping we present a critical appraisal of existing approaches at the level of understanding sexuality alongside concrete thematic recommendations. We find ourselves placing emphasis on the former because we believe that the strengthening of



approaches will better enable actors to identify and address specific gaps that emerge in their work.

Respondents in the mapping included queer feminist activists, lawyers, trans activists, Dalit writers and activists, a Right to Food advocate, a trainer and activist working on issues of masculinity as well as persons involved in various capacities in the fields of health, young people's rights and Muslim women's rights. A full list of the respondents and a short background on each is annexed to this report.

Through these conversations, the research team wanted to get a sense of the diverse ways in which we speak of and understand sexuality and where we locate it in our work and politics, amidst complexities in and around us. In trying to make sense of what we were hearing, a few questions particularly confronted us. Among these were questions around caste, class, labour, marriage, identity politics and movement building, and interactions with law and the state, all of which pushed the boundaries of our current understandings and articulations. This mapping is thus framed to start with current discourses and moves towards unpacking some of these conversations and constructions that challenge conventional understandings of and approaches to sexuality.

The intention of the report is to provide a starting point in taking this dialogue forward and expand the discursive envelope with a view to build movements and forge alliances around sexuality and related themes.

Approach and Methodology

Our Approach to Analysis

Since 2006, Nirantar has been working on issues of sexuality from a political and positive approach. This approach seeks to build an understanding of why sexual norms exist, in order to strengthen our ability to resist and challenge norms and to build solidarity. Nirantar believes that sexuality is a dimension of empowerment that education needs to address.

Nirantar's engagement with this approach is seeped in our history as part of the women's movement. By this, we mean the need to go beyond a simple assertion of rights, to establishing why certain rights are critical and why they have sought to be denied, and how an exploration of these 'why(s)' is crucial to building a political consciousness around issues. Though it appears to be similar to the intersectionality approach, an important point of departure is the in-depth analysis of how distinct dimensions of caste, class, gender etc. are rooted in particular material realities, institutions and structures. This mitigates the risk of norms being thought of as in a vacuum, and addresses the tendency to ignore the economics and labor related dimensions of sexuality, and in so doing, addresses specific structural dimensions of power.

A political approach will also bring our ways of understanding and address sexuality closer to lived realities. It will help to ensure that we recognize and challenge the multiplicity of interlinked norms that seek to constrain us.

Interviews

The mapping was informed by semi structured interviews with 27 persons (list of interviewees in Annexure 1) who have been intensively engaged with community based work, activism, research, capacity building and advocacy (often along all these axes) on issues related to sexuality and gender transgression for several years and have made significant contributions at the junction of theory and praxis. These included people who are working with particular identities such as LGBTQ, Dalit and Muslim women and young people. The mapping also included those who have been working in particular sectors of action like law, health, livelihoods. The analysis captures patterns that emerged in the responses of the persons interviewed, but more importantly, it shares critical learnings from the dynamics of sexuality and gender that emerge from highly specific locations of region, caste, religion, class etc.

For this mapping, we interviewed Arvind Narain, Chayanika Shah, Shals Mahajan, Sunil Mohan, Dr. Paromita Chakravorty, Akansha, Malobika, Rajashri Chakraborty, Fatima Burnad, Aniruddhan Vasudevan, Kavin Malar, L Ramakrishnan, Dr. S. Anandhi, Sheelu Francis, V Geetha,



Pramada Menon, Hasina Khan, Deepa, Maya Sharma, Biraj Patnayak, Sankari T, Akshay Khanna, Nivedita Menon, Renu Khanna, Meena Saraswathi Seshu, Satish Singh, Gowthaman, Dr. Jaya Sharma.

Broadly, our interviews aimed to understand:

- The present context with regard to the particular identities/issues that the respondents were engaged with
- Current debates and dilemmas
- Reflections related to sexuality and gender transgressions
- The gaps, issues and challenges both at the level of sexuality discourse overall, and within the respondent's area of focus with respect to community level work, laws and policies with regard to the identity/issue.
- Research and capacity building
- Concerns and suggestions related to funding

The selection of the respondents was done on the basis of –

1. Contributions that they have made in the field of sexuality and gender transgression, based on their experience and in depth engagement with the issues as well as their involvement with both conceptual/political and community-based work. For instance, the academicians we interviewed have also been involved in grassroots movements such as the Dalit or women's movements, and have drawn upon this engagement in forming their conceptual understanding.
2. An approach to sexuality that addressed issues of desires, and not only violations. We spoke to individuals who adopted a political approach, by which we mean an approach that believes in addressing underlying ideologies and structural material realities.
3. Engagement on themes or areas beyond gender and sexuality and often more than that.
4. Respondents included queer feminist activists, lawyers, trans activists, Dalit writers and activists, a Right to Food advocate, a trainer and activist working on issues of masculinity as well as persons involved in various capacities in the fields of health, young people's

rights and Muslim women's rights. A full list of the respondents and a short background on each is annexed to this report.

A key methodological factor was the existence of a relationship of trust with each of the respondents, derived from a shared political commitment and often a history of working together or having been part of common forums and movements. This familiarity and trust allowed high levels of honesty and openness in sharing of thoughts. This openness allowed for deeply reflective and introspective conversations, which have significantly enriched our data and understanding. Trust and openness were further encouraged by ensuring the anonymity of respondents. Importantly, the interviews were conducted in a personal capacity, and none of the respondents were representing their respective organizations through the conversations.

Who we are

Nirantar – A Centre for Gender and Education was founded in 1993 and works towards enabling empowering education, especially for girls and women from marginalized communities. Nirantar believes that to critically understand and address lived realities, one needs a clear understanding of Gender and Sexuality. Nirantar has been active in the women's movement since its inception and has also been engaged in other movements for justice. As part of the women's movement, Nirantar has been involved in fighting against sexual violence and violence against women more broadly.

Our engagements with Sexuality

Nirantar has also been working on helping organizations see the linkages between GBV and Sexuality and incorporate them in their interventions.

Nirantar has been an active member of 'Voices Against 377', a coalition of groups engaged in women's rights, sexual rights, and child rights, who have been working towards the rights of same-sex desiring and transgender people, including for the decriminalization of sexual acts deemed to be 'against the order of nature'.



Nirantar is also developing an understanding of young people's issues from a feminist perspective in partnership with organizations that work with young people and want to take forward this understanding to work with young people and young people's sexuality. We aim to have positive programs that are rights-based, young people-centric and empowering.

Our Approach

The mapping does not claim neutrality. It was undertaken by Nirantar, which is highly invested in promoting a positive and political approach to sexuality. This, along with our experience of working on gender, sexuality, education, and gender-based violence strongly informed the selection of those interviewed, the questions asked, the probes and the dialogue that took place during the interviews. Those who were selected to be interviewed also share a political commitment to addressing issues of sexuality in a manner that pushes forward processes of change and justice. Thus, our approach and findings are firmly situated in our particular approach to sexuality and are framed to address our goals of deepening a positive, political understanding of sexuality.

Context

Far from being as sexy as they could be, the discourses around sexuality in progressive movements and the development sector of the global south, including in India, are weighed down by a focus on risk, danger and disease. Whether it is the women's movements' articulations around sexual violence and sexual harassment or the overt focus on HIV and AIDS driven by global funding patterns, we have struggled to engage with more positive aspects of sexualities. Within mainstream society and progressive movements alike, sexuality gets relegated to secondary status, an issue only for those labeled "pervert, abnormal, western and un-Indian¹". Having been written off as such, we struggle from the margins to point out how central sexuality is in shaping all social relations, and influencing all aspects of human interactions.

For the mapping, this approach draws our attention to the ways in

1. Shalini Mahajan, <http://indiatogether.org/combatlaw/vol2/issue4/edit.htm>

which even positive approaches to sexuality run the risk of examining it in isolation, failing to correctly identify and characterize its deeply embedded and interlinked nature, and association with the adjacent issues of caste, class, religion, etc. By virtue of participating in progressive movements, we're not new to this feeling of marginalization, of making demands, claims and complaints to a system that is at best disinterested and at worst actively silencing our voices. However, when the sexuality question compels us to turn the lens inwards, is what we find that different from the mainstream? There is an implicit linear hierarchy across which we place needs and issues – so violence and violations unquestioningly get ascribed primacy and ascendancy, and other issues, perhaps of pleasure and desire pay the price, by being dismissed as 'trivial'. While some groups engage on issues of pleasure, the linkages between danger and pleasure need to be made more explicitly. Such a compartmentalisation of rights is counterintuitive to what we know about the messy intersections of various dimensions of our lived realities. This road ends in a pervasive attitude towards socio-economically marginalized groups that treats them as asexual beings who do not have sexual needs. Therefore, many groups which work with Dalit rights, tribal rights, Right to Food, poverty do not consider sexuality as an important lens to work with.

Within this backdrop, the sex workers' movement and the LGBTQ movement have both disrupted the lack of engagement with sexuality, while the funding for HIV and AIDS has helped to break some old taboos and silences, and opened up spaces to talk about sexual rights of target groups. That said, the discourse on HIV and AIDS keeps sexuality located firmly in the realm of vulnerability while discourses around sex work is still largely considered exploitative. Through this report, we hope to listen more closely to these movements and the ways in which they challenge our own normative notions of sexuality and pleasure and push an expanding but still highly contested discursive terrain of sexuality, from its early exclusive association with violation and disease to an increasingly positive, political integration of sexuality.

We find that the sexuality discourse in India is thus divided into many issues - SRHR, LGBTQ, Young people's Sexuality, sex worker rights, which are all very specific and focused but have no place to all come together and examine some cross-cutting issues and dilemmas that affect us all. This 'mapping' is thus an effort to chart out current and



identifying potential discourses around sexuality and all its intersections with individuals, movements, sectors and issues. A key aim of this report is to broaden the frame and understanding of sexuality itself beyond sexual identities, to develop a lens of sexuality, much like gender, class or caste, that has implications within and across various socio-economic groups and structures. Through the report, we hope to build sexuality as a cross-cutting frame with significant implications on elements of all of our existences.

Contents

We begin with an examination of sexuality in the context of class, caste and religion, in order to build on the political economy lens to sexuality. In keeping with a constant reference to material realities, the third section examines sexuality within the context of the laboring body, looking both at and beyond sex work as domains where sexuality importantly mediates access to resources. We then move to sexual and gender identities, an understanding of the landscape of their challenges and struggles, and a discussion of the movements they have birthed, their potentials, gaps, and challenges. Building upon these, we focus our attention on accessing resources around health care and the challenges that exist therein. Finally, the mapping turns to understand sexuality as it applies to a key contested demographic - young people - and ties together the multiplicity of respondent insights into how this particular segment negotiates sexuality.

The mapping, therefore spans a wide expanse of a still contested terrain. The last section attempts to synthesize some of the key findings and their scope for further exploration and discussion, presenting the current contestations and posing some questions for further interrogation.

Sexuality and its Intersections with Caste, Class, and Religion

Through this chapter, we explore the ways in which respondents made sense of the interactions of sexuality with structures of caste, class, and religion. We're also exploring how a 'sexuality lens' helps us complicate our understanding of how caste, class and religion play out in our lives. At the level of articulations, we were curious if it is limited to violations alone or is there also space for more positive dimensions of sexuality across each of these structures? At the level of actors, is the discourse limited to those on the "outside" of that section of society who are identified, or do they include actors within as well? Is the framework to understand sexuality one that is dynamic to account for all the changes taking place across time and space? When understanding these dynamics, do we also consider enabling factors as much as disabling ones, and everything else in between? Do different understandings of class, caste, religion address social and economic dimensions related to sexuality, the macro level, political-economic factors as well as contextualized specificities that impact sexuality?

Dalit women and their bodies emerged as a site where caste dynamics play out. We began with the most known of these interactions – the exploitation of Dalit women's sexuality at the hands of upper caste men. This is an articulation of violence. Through the mapping, however, various respondents raised questions about Dalit women's own desires and the spaces in which they articulate. These questions also broadened the frame of our understanding - from inter-caste dynamics (between upper castes and Dalits) to intra-caste dynamics - and the ways in which Dalit men's desires, masculinity and the wider struggle for a recognition of the Dalit identity play out at the site of Dalit women's sexuality. This is further complicated when we look with a political economy lens to interrogate how markets and labor influence this space. The interplay of religion and caste further complicates this picture, we see the ways in which Sanskritization has contributed in constructing the "good Dalit woman", and through this, exerted control over Dalit women's desires. This lends itself to a wider understanding of role played by religion in the construction of the good woman, and



of controlling any articulation of inter-caste and inter-religious desire. When we turn our attention to class, we're immediately confronted by the silence that exists around it, and how little class has informed how we understand sexuality. Through the mapping, we got insights into how working class women might approach sexuality, challenging assumptions about communities and creating spaces to speak about sexuality in contexts considered to be conservative. We also found the ways in which articulations of sexual violations turn blind to class dynamics.

Caste and Sexuality

A Space for Dalit Women's Desire

There have been various contestations around Dalit women's sexuality, ranging from an articulation of oppression and exploitation at the hands of upper caste men, as feudal landlords making demands of Dalit women that they had to fulfill. These discourses have also stressed on how historical sexual exploitation continues to exist and has been institutionalized today through sex work, bar dancing, etc. At the same time, there have also been some voices who demand the recognition of Dalit women having greater space to express their own sexuality in positive terms.

A researcher who we interviewed had interacted with Dalit women across generations. Reflecting on the passage of time and the shifts in spaces available to Dalit women to express and negotiate their sexuality, she shared that the older Dalit women feel that they had relative freedoms in the household. She pointed out, "like for instance there was space for drinking alcohol along with men and expressing the desire for men openly outside marriage. If a woman was married but interested in another man, they would immediately call a panchayat and she would say that she no longer wants to live with so and so. Then she makes an oral break with this man. Then the other man will say that he is interested...No elaborate separation."

This space is shrinking not only for the expression of Dalit women's desire but also for their ability to talk about their oppression. A respondent

also shared some accounts from the older Dalit women interviewed in a study on masculinity, with regards to negotiating sexuality. She said, “One woman was saying openly how twice a month she would go to her landlord’s house and she had to sleep with the man very often, whenever he called. This was by force due to the bonded labor system. Her husband had no control over the situation. She would come back, narrate her experience with the landlord, laugh it out and make fun of it... I tell my husband how impotent the fellow is”. In these ways, Dalit women had the space to subvert the landlord’s demonstrative masculinity and also quell the anxieties of her husband.

Within changing contexts, where caste equations have changed in the village, education and other sources have brought greater exposure for Dalit young girls to the “outside” world, and the ways in which television and media have put forward a highly commoditized expression of desire, the respondent said, “It is no longer a blunt-talking of desire.” In this, she echoes the voice of the old Dalit woman who stated “The younger generation is impatient. They think I am cooking up stories because they have not seen landlords of this kind. It is their own husbands who are all the time screwing them...The next generation, my daughter in law and son. He is someone who will never talk to his wife freely about sexual desire. She said he is so rigid. I don’t know from where he learned this. I don’t see them talking equally about their marital life. They have children and they will eat, sleep, work and this is what their life is all about now. We work hard but we still find a tree where we will sit and drink and talk about everything”.

The narrative of the older Dalit woman points to the changing dynamics not only vis a vis upper caste exploitation of Dalit women’s sexuality, but also the nature of expressing and fulfilling desire with other Dalit men.

Political Economy, Caste, and Sexuality

To understand the complexities at play that lead to these changing dynamics, we look at the situation from a political economy lens. The changing economic realm, with waning agrarian bondage, urban migration, and informal livelihoods represent the reality of a growing number of Dalits. Young Dalit women now find themselves in unprotected contract jobs, where they are entirely vulnerable to



exploitation by supervisors who are invariably from upper castes, and at the same time seeking to be employed by companies who have “notorious, stereotypical, gender norms saying that unmarried women are better potential workforce”.

We would like to take you to Tamil Nadu, and try and understand the story of how sexuality relates to young Dalit women in new industrial belts, as told to us by one of our respondents. The respondent, an academician whose work includes a focus on gender and caste, stressed on the specificities of age, in the way that “young” Dalit women interact with the processes of industrialization, which offers jobs to them and not their brothers or fathers. There are many processes at play here – the falling away of feudal control over Dalit women’s sexuality by upper caste landlords which creates the space for Dalit men to finally feel like they have the possibility of exercising control but find that they cannot and the ensuing frustrations. The ways in which, for example, brothers may encourage certain sexual relations and disallow others all within the wider context of upward caste mobility. All these processes impact a young Dalit woman’s sexuality.

On the one hand, young Dalit women negotiate their working conditions through sexual bargains and articulate this as having progressed and modernized compared to the rural exploitation, the identity of stigma and untouchability. As the respondent explains, “Here, they feel there is some level of their own agency and a sense of entitlement. If I want my work to be done, I need to negotiate it and if my body is enabling me to negotiate, I will get involved in that... They can negotiate little things over time. Money for overtime... Taking off without telling the manager. There is some way you can absent yourself. Going out of the industrial belt area, somewhere with the supervisor. All that is possible if you have certain ways of sexual negotiation. So there is a level of consensus also here.” At the same time, there are greater aspirations and risks involved. She explains, “(the aspirations) of a different kind of love relationship (not marriage) as the supervisor invariably is from a backward caste or upper caste. They are either married or they are fellows who are very clear that caste is a barrier to a serious, long-term relationship”. The risks are that she may be fired from her job, following which these same encounters are recollected with a sense of exploitation and deprivation.

This displays the complex interplay of exploitation, agency, and expressions of desire or sexuality. These expressions of desire articulate not only in the form of sexual negotiations, but also in the form of dressing up and expressing one's feminine beauty. The academician constantly reminded us of the need to contextualize. She said, "For instance, these young girls need to decorate themselves. The older women who are still doing only agricultural work were saying, 'When we went to the field to do harvesting or seeding, we never put on such great attire.' Now these girls get up in the morning, buy a huge bundle of flowers, dress properly and go to work. When we talked to the young girls, in a focus group discussion, they shared that, one of the important change is, the pleasure of working in industries. In the pharmaceutical companies, they can dress up well...How this adds up to the decency of work and self which their mothers never had, their parents didn't enjoy."

However, in a context where young Dalit women find themselves more "employable" than their fathers and brothers, these economically triggered liberties to their expression of sexuality face rigid surveillance within families by the men. In the feudal contexts of sexual exploitation, such surveillance had no meaning for Dalit men. Several respondents interviewed in Chennai spoke about how the increasing mobility of Dalit women and their access to job opportunities, with the accompanying frustration on the part of unemployed Dalit men and their anxieties about women's sexuality has led to an increase in domestic violence over the last ten years.

As a respondent highlighted, "The girls' sexual status is very crucial to the family and the caste status of the family. If she gets raped or she gets molested by upper caste fellows... it is a humiliation for the caste," with respect to consensual inter-caste relationships; sexual or romantic. The response of the family depends on whether there is a possibility of marriage. "Because Dalit families value an inter-caste marriage. They mostly respect such marriages. They never look down upon or have any taboos about inter-caste marriages."

Dalit boys, within this context, assume the role of the surveillant, particularly given their struggle finding employment in the same spaces, "The boys in the absence of being a provider to elevate the family status



would like to see their role as protectors of family status and honor. This they do by surveilling their sisters who go to work in companies/ industries. The control over sexuality of the girls is crucial for their caste mobility.... Surveillance starts if a girl is just roaming around and ... with many boys, not with one fellow. So the brothers are supposed to keep an eye on her to see whether it results in a marriage or not... It is not about not looking at anybody. Look in the right direction, they'll advise them. Alright, I saw you with that boy but what is he saying? Ask him to come and speak to me. I will see what will happen. So basically, the control over her sexuality is also a very calculative kind of a control. It's because negotiation grounds have changed. It's not like older times where Dalit women's sexuality was monitored only by the landlords for whom they were working. Here there are layers of monitoring that happen in which parents and young boys respond to the sexual life. Mothers are very keen that the girls work and they earn money and save it for dowry."

Despite the tremendous significance of issues of Dalit women's sexuality, there is at present very little space to speak about Dalit women's sexuality except in terms of sexual violence faced by them at the hands of non-Dalit men. The need to create such spaces was captured by a respondent when she said, "I feel that more and more meetings of Dalit women based on sexuality should be conducted because if you talk about the Dalits, people only talk about caste eradication, untouchability... They are not talking about individual human development, personal development or sexuality. In our culture, you know, we have to really plow through these ideas... I would like us to discuss sexuality."

Caste, Religion, and the Good Woman

Sanskritization and the political project of constructing the 'pure, chaste' Dalit woman

The mapping revealed that Dalit women have historically been seen by 'upper castes' as being hypersexual, 'available.' Therefore, processes of Sanskritization have resulted in an impetus to construct and project Dalit women 'respectable'. Speaking about processes of Sanskritization, a

respondent said, "As a woman, you have to be 'pativrata' and today Dalit women have to follow that because of Sanskritization and they also follow it very strictly... Earlier they had their own gods and goddesses. Now they have only the Hindu religion to follow... "

A respondent spoke of the increasing masculine anxieties of the Dalit movement and "the need to watch our women because our women bring status to us." She also spoke about how important political parties were instrumental in this project, as became clear during the Khushboo case² . She says here, "We saw a Dalit political party which we all felt was a radical political party... suddenly took a stand against Kushboo which was very surprising. The stand was very clear - that the Tamil ideal of 'women's chastity' is something that Dalit women must value. What they meant to demonstrate here is that the widely accepted notion that Dalit women have no sexual morals is to be condemned and protested. However, in turn they promoted Tamil nationalist notion of ideal woman and 'Karpu' (chastity)."

Another expression of this anxiety related to Dalit women's sexuality is the denial of the existence of Matthamas who are part of a tradition in some ways similar to the Devdasi tradition, although involving only Dalit women. There are not many Mathammas³ remaining. However, what is telling is the complete denial of their existence and this practice altogether. According to a respondent, "Many of these Dalit male activists would rush to reassure you that such things have been rooted out and don't exist. In a sense, I think, the overall stigmatization of Dalit sexuality and the construction of Dalit women as whores or as easily available or dirty is also internalized by Dalit men in some ways. The model, of course, is the pure, chaste woman."

Reservations are the context in which the processes of Sanskritization - also, has economic implications for sections of Dalit men. As a result of their husbands having access to better paying, more urban-based jobs, Dalit women are increasingly confined to their houses while previously they were independent and visibly occupied public spaces for work and other socio-economic functions. A respondent shared,

2. She was accused of outraging public decency by claiming that a modern man should not "expect his bride to be a virgin" had sparked demonstrations across southern India.

3. Mathammas are Dalit and are exploited as cheap sex providers and every year in July and August they do dancing in many villages and earn.



“Because of reservation, all of them have got some job. They are in Railways or they are in ICF (Integral Coach Factory) ... 20-30 years back, all the mothers and mothers in law were working women, as construction workers or agricultural laborers. But now these people are not working... The improvement in economic condition has not improved the gender relationship within the family. They do work in the home and they don't have control over anything. They don't decide about their children's education. The men decide. So these women are there as a caretaker in the house as it happens in other castes. Earlier they would go around on their own, do many things. Now they don't go out." There is also part of the overarching impetus towards becoming the 'modern' woman, a key element of current Sanskritized respectability. Dalit women are increasingly assuming the role of the woman who is "enlightened, minimally educated, who knows her worth very well... the good woman... sexually, you're decent. Whatever that means. That will fetch some honor and status to the man."

The Construction of the Good Woman

We have already seen how important it is for the construction of Dalit dignity to claim that 'their' women are good women, and not lascivious and lustful as they have been labeled and portrayed historically. This section seeks to understand how the institutions of caste and religion construct the good women, a crucial exploration as this construction is at the heart of processes that seek to control women's sexuality, including those that women themselves internalize. This, the inhibitions and compulsions, both external and internal, experienced by women who are activists, staff members of NGOs, researchers, and policy makers are critical to understanding why they do not even consider raising positive dimensions of sexuality. The implications of the construct of the good woman goes beyond linkages with caste and religion, to the very heart of why the sexuality discourse in the country has been almost entirely focused on violence.

We share below a case study shared by a respondent which will illustrate the in-depth, historical, and intersectional approach needed to understand the construct of the good woman.

"Today, the Nadars⁴ are not going to be happy if you confront them with their nearly untouchable past... They are OBC, or in Tamil Nadu, they would be MBC. They are interesting as a community... The Nadars were basically palm tree climbers, toddy tappers. They benefitted from two major things that happened in the colonial period. One, cotton cultivation and opening up of the cotton trade. They set up these little trading centers which helped transport cotton and eventually became small-time grocers. So today, the Tamil word for a grocer's shop is Nadarkade. Any small grocer's shop in any small village is usually run by a Nadar. The second aspect is Christianity. They were all converts and education took place in a big way. Today, the upper classes of the Nadars are extremely proficient. The entire fireworks industry is run by them, etc. A substantial section is also very powerful economically.

One of the interesting things about the Nadars is Hindu Nadars and Christian Nadars intermarry freely. In the same family, you will have Christian daughter and a Hindu mother. The sense of being Nadar is more important than the religious affiliation. They have had to fight status battles within the Christian Church, asking for positions for themselves within the Church hierarchy, saying they are being overlooked.

In that sense, Christianity has been very central but there have been some studies on what it did to gender. There has been a study by this American woman called Eliza Kent⁵ who has looked at Christian home journals of the 19th century and practices that were imposed on Christian women. One of the most famous things that happened is called the Breast Cloth controversy. Nadar women, in the south of Tamil Nadu, which was part of the old Travancore state, were forbidden from wearing the upper cloth. They had to go bare breasted, like in Kerala. After they became Christianized, the church felt it was immodest. And since it was a question of status, lower caste women were the once who had to stay bare bodied, and there was a Breast Tax and all kinds of punitive taxes. If you cover your breast you are taxed. You have to not cover your breasts... The Christians took up the struggle saying they are Christians. They have dignity and modesty. They have to cover their breasts. Eliza Kent argues that this cuts both ways. Fine, cover your

4. Nadar (also referred as Nadan, Shanar) is a caste of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, South India. The term, Nadar, in Tamil literally means one who rules the land.

5. Eliza Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Christianity in Colonial South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)



breasts and fight upper caste imposition but you are also domesticating women by another standard.” She also talks about the domestication of Nadar women and Victorian Christian virtues of modesty, reticence, and the good woman.

The current situation for some feminists in Tamil Nadu who are Christian and Dalit is also like a double bind. The fight against caste is gendered. Some of that has stayed with the Christian communities of Tamil Nadu, the notion of a good modest Christian woman. A respondent said, “You will find many bigoted attitudes towards sex and sexuality among believing Christians, in both Dalits and Nadars. Extremely intolerant attitudes, and if some of them become counselors and social workers, you can imagine what the repercussions are... Not only nuns but also lay persons have had to really work within this culture of being a respectable woman. They have to work at deconstructing that. It doesn’t come to any of us naturally. There are some honorable exceptions but for many talking about sexuality except in a victimized sense, in light of this notion of a good woman, is not easy to let go.”

Inter-Caste and Inter-Religious Desire

The issue of inter-caste and interreligious relationships and marriage is one that is critical not only for the rights of those in such relationships, but their significance also lies in the challenge that they pose to the institution and ideologies that maintain caste and religion. Speaking about the subversive potential of such relationships, a respondent said, “Ambedkar’s Annihilation of Caste makes the argument that the only thing that will destroy caste is when blood begins to mix with blood... Erotics is a very important part of destabilizing current structures as it were, which is where actually my point on love comes in; I mean it’s an emotion that you can’t control. You can’t be controlled by existing social structures of caste and religion. It’s something that which has the potential to destabilize and destroy these institutions. That’s why we support inter-caste, inter-religious marriages... Because we understand the power of sexuality and erotic love... We need to have a deeper level of conversation also about the premium placed on romantic sexual love as opposed to sexuality which is focused on sexual desire and not on emotional attachments as well as the need to have discussions

about the problems with the institution of marriage per se, whether same caste/religion or across caste/religion.”

When people involved in an inter-caste or inter-religious relationship choose not to marry, the perceived threat is even greater, "Sexual relationships are happening at multiple levels which men are very anxious about, they are not providing any kind of status for men, and for families and caste. These kinds of relationships are the problem for them."

How such relationships are, however, disproportionately vulnerable violence from their communities, eager to dispel these aforementioned anxieties caused by threats to the institutions of caste and religion. A respondent shared an incident, "Ilavarasan is a Dalit boy who married the girl Divya who was backward caste, they were from neighboring villages. After they eloped, a squad searched for them and found them. The girl's mother went and asked daughter to come back home. Divya refused saying- if I come, you will kill me. Within half an hour, Nagarajan, Divya's father committed suicide. Many think it was a murder. In one hour, with petrol bombs, heavy weapons, sticks and whatever could be arranged, people came in big lorries... about 2000 men came. This was well planned. Suicide could have been just a playing card. Many people suspect this is not a suicide, but there is no evidence. Everywhere, even in the Police, there are caste-ist people, so they can arrange post mortem reports. The girl was in trauma after the death of her father. She was not in a condition to believe that it was suicide and not a murder. Illavarasan has gone underground. Divya has gone back to her mother. But we don't know where she is. Nobody knows."

Reflecting on the tensions between gender and caste that get triggered by sexuality, a respondent said, "I think there was huge pressure on Divya... She broke down in court. She said, 'I don't want to go back but I think that I will.' Now, very interestingly, Dalit men will say, 'All non-Dalit women are like this.' Some Dalit women also indicated that this has brought us so much trouble, so much sorrow. It's not untrue but she didn't intend to, of course. But no one is going to look into the nuances of such things. Within the context of a caste divided politics, a feminist solidarity is not easy to achieve. "



Addressing Class: Working with and Learning from Women in Slums, Rural Areas

This section details experiences and reflections related to working with women in slums, and rural women. These include assumptions that are often made about the impossibility of talking about issues of sexuality with women in these communities, what makes these conversations possible, as well as what more 'educated' sections of society might learn from working class and rural women about sexuality.

A political economy approach helps us make linkages between labor and sexuality and understand women's sexuality is part of their labor power. The respondent who gave us insights into a political economy approach to sexuality, explained, "Women's sexuality has always been an aspect of whatever labor power they've had at their disposal. They've had to negotiate around their sexuality every time they got out into public space to work. The sex worker is a full embodiment of sexuality being a source of her labor power. Even on a construction site or in a production context or even with marriage, a woman's sexual identity is a point of negotiation for her, whatever else she might have to do. She might be a mother, a worker, or someone who supervises the building of something but basically, her sexuality becomes a part of every negotiating context that she finds herself in. Women have not shied away from doing that. Women have done this many ways, sometimes accepting it, fighting it, feeling puritan. My point was there is no such thing as free sexual labor. It is not entirely a matter of choice neither is it entirely coercive. It figures every time women put themselves out in the labor market or the marriage market. It has been impossible for women to be laborers like it has been for men, without bringing in their sexual nature, so to speak."

Invisibility of class issues

Within the range of linkages between sexuality and caste, class and religion, the set of linkages with class are both highly powerful yet receive the least attention in public discourse. This manifests itself, for example, in terms of the nature of Right to Choice cases, where inter class relationships are the least reported.

This compromised attention to the dimension of a class is particularly problematic given of the deep and inevitable linkages with caste. This was brought out in the following experience and reflection shared by a respondent, "I am on the Sexual Harassment Redressal Cell of IIT-Madras for the past six years. One of the fascinating things I've ever done in my life. They're a very earnest committee...but we are...trying to criminalize a social complication...Many of the complaints have to do with the way you have different social segments coming together in a place like IIT where the demographic profile of the male students has changed dramatically over the last ten years. You have a situation of English-speaking, middle class, upper caste girls and OBC/BC boys. It's a tinderbox. Every other social tension is played out as a sexual tension. Nobody wants to admit to that, including the girls. 'How dare a person of his status come and stalk me'. So I said, 'If someone of your status come and stalks you, you're okay?', I asked her. She'd say, 'Ma'am, you can't say that'. 'Tell me, if it's okay, then there's no complaint! Next time, someone stalks you and hits on you, you can't complain if the status is what matters' I said... We tell the girls also...We have always said, the girl always has a right to say no even at the last minute. But what does it actually mean in practice? The girls also use every social trick around them. They pull class, caste... weights of different kinds. Some of these are social tensions."

The issue and acknowledgment of class also remain abysmally absent in various activist efforts within the public realm. A respondent spoke about this in the context of the slut walk in Kolkata, "In Kolkata, the slut walk was a bit of a washout. One of the reasons for this was because of the route which was chosen. People were upset about the route. This is about the 'sexual cartographies' or the mapping of the city and the relation between city, spaces, and sexuality. They decided to start with Jadavpur and walked up to Deshopriyo park... it's all south Calcutta, fairly posh areas, safe areas. (Earlier during the planning) Some people had suggested Sealdah station, which is used by daily women commuters- vegetable vendors, women domestic workers and a lot of harassment happens there, especially at night. And so many people felt that conversations around women's safety should happen in such spaces, where it has some meaning, rather than having it in other areas." The walk did happen, but many people didn't want to be a part of the walk. She said that the issue of class has come up again and it's important. She says, "The issue of class was there even in the



90s with the sex worker's movement. But that was slightly different because there was some consensus about the need to organize. Now that is missing."

Talking Sexuality with Rural Women and Women in *Bastis*

This section covers reflections from conversations and engagements with sexuality both amongst members of organizations, as well as with communities. A key observation was the widely-held assumption that it is not possible to speak to women in the communities about sexuality. A respondent, using the example of residential programs said, "People assume that women will not be ready and therefore organizations are also not ready because they get it into their heads that women will never come. Often we try to impose on other what it is that we believe. This is highly problematic."

Based on her experience of speaking with Muslim women in the community the respondent said, "Women speak in a very open way. And in that openness, many layers unfold... I did not want to get married. I did not consent to it. I was forced to marry. I wanted to study. I wanted to achieve something in life..."

As an illustrative example of what is possible to talk with women in the community, two respondents highlighted that contrary to expectations, it is also possible to address issues like homosexuality. During the controversy surrounding the film *Fire* in 1998, one of the organizations distributed posters and organized protests. Several Muslim girls, many of them wearing burkhas, attended the protest.

Respondents underlined that the way in which one spoke about sexuality in the community was important: "How we talk and how you build an environment... we have worked very hard to build that environment... What will our words be, what will our body language be... I remember in the early days... There were 15 women from the community, we used to meet every month, we got together at about one in the afternoon and leave at 10 the next morning. We used to start with some songs, films,

which songs do you like, talking about the songs... next time bring along songs that you like... write names of films that you like...some of us who liked writing, wrote. We also read these writings, and then slowly we started talking about sexuality... and I remember it is these 15 women who emerged as strong members of a women's network."

When asked about their strategies for capacity building, one respondent said, "Depending on the nature of the group, we give our input. At the community level, we are very careful about the discussions. It is only our core group which handles the discussions. The sexuality training is only for our core leaders group. These discussions on sexuality are part of a two-day training in which we do a societal analysis from which we move on to a gender analysis and then we come to sexuality... What we would do is facilitate a discussion for them to understand that our needs are different, our choices are different. Even if you are watching a film or listening to a movie... Even the dresses they wear, the food we eat. In everything we have our own choice, then why not in others. That is how we try to bring in the diversity of interests each one of us has and there is so much of diversity within us... This we used to talk about the rights of homosexual and transgender people. We also give a general input to children about choice and desire. To treat everyone equal. There should not be discrimination in society."

In some organizations, members reserve some space and time to talk about issues of sexuality in their monthly meetings. This is a significant provision- the women's movement has long been silent on issues of desire. While many women's organizations have platforms to talk about violence faced by their staff members, few provide opportunities to talk about desire or pleasure.

Working class and rural women - a greater ease with sexuality

Several people interviewed spoke of how much more relaxed working class and rural women were, about issues of and discussions around sexuality. One spoke of her own greater sense of comfort in uttering certain words which were considered to be more risqué with women in the community rather than with others in the organization, who would say to her, don't use this word, use that word instead, because



it was more respectable. "But the women who lived around us in the neighborhood, they really liked it and they themselves used to speak in this very open way."

Another respondent also shared her experiences and reflections related to what women from economically marginalized sections of society bring to engagements with sexuality: "One of our most active members was a Dalit woman. She came from the nearby basti. She first came and said, 'I want to work here. Nice to see so many women' and so on. Then she decided to tell people to come to the group. She had the most amazing friends. The area where our office was located was a pickup point. Late evenings, sex workers would hang around. It was a semi-upper class. It was one of those upper-class meets working class kind of neighborhoods. She would bring Shakira, a Muslim sex worker who was hanging around for a long time who felt a bit sad and didn't want to go back home. So she had this attitude of bringing whoever she thought would get a bit of power from being part of a women's group... this Dalit woman, had a transgender person as a friend. She would bring her - he/she was still in male clothes- and then she had an interesting sociology of transgender people. She said, a woman doesn't mind her husband having sex with a transgender person because she doesn't see this as a real threat to her marriage. In fact, transgender persons can go out of their way to ensure that the wife is kept pleased and happy. She will buy her extra rations and so on. It was a much nuanced understanding and I think, it is also a very expansive worldview. I don't know if it is a particular feature of only Dalit women. Working class women are less rigid about sexual attitudes on the whole, whatever caste they belong to... Contrary to every kind of stereotype about Muslim women, that I have been working with... men would shudder if they listen to some of their jokes!"

Another significant reflection highlighted key gaps in urban feminist understandings of sexuality, "I feel the culture of sexuality has not been grasped by us feminists in all its complexity and it's not just Dalit women's sexuality. It has to do with the culture of peasant societies, of societies that have always tolerated a range of permissive behavior as long as certain kinds of things are never ousted or made public. We know only that many people, so whatever you say is based on what you know, it's very limited, but say, if you were to take something like

fiction, which is also a good index of attitudes... Like Bama, the Dalit woman writer who has been writing a lot on Dalit women's lives. She doesn't talk explicitly about women being free or sexual but there is always a sense of something that Dalit women know about sex which is more than what is there on the printed page or that they deal with it in ways that Bama thinks is alright but she doesn't tell you so in so many words. Whether it is leaving behind a bad marriage and walking out or whether it is alright to be single and have your options open. While there is a narrative of victimization also, even in her writing there is a sense, that things are not what you expect them to be."



Sexuality and Sex Work

This section discusses sexuality as it relates to the laboring body primarily within the particular context of sex work, while also employing a broader sexuality lens to interpret the various manners in which sexuality converses with women's work. In the previous section, where we broaden the framework to look at labor and sexuality through a political economy lens, we find that women's sexuality is integrally a part of women's labor. While sex work shows this relationship most clearly, we highlight how marriage or any other negotiation around labor does find a woman's sexuality as inherently a part of it.

In this section, we take this discussion further and hope to unpack the question of sexuality, labor and caste as it relates to sex work. There is a long standing tormented debate around sex work and Dalit women's sexuality with two polarized sides. On the one hand, oppressive caste traditions such as sex work and bar dancing are seen as necessarily oppressive for Dalit women, whereas on the other hand, there is strong support for sex work and bar dancing as a right that Dalit women must have if they consent to it.

It is critical to keep engaging in this debate, however difficult, because what is at stake here is the space for Dalit women's sexuality as well as rights related to their livelihoods. The mapping seems to have the potential to take the debate forward through the example of Tamil Nadu where Dalit sex workers are an integral part of Dalit feminist activist forums, thereby challenging the inevitability of the conflict.

We hope to put forth two frameworks within which to understand sex work, one of 'sex work as work' and the other of "consent" (rather than choice). These frameworks also help inform us how other actors may respond to sex worker's rights. We then look at sex work as a site for the interplay between caste and sexuality, examining the lessons that feminists can learn from sex work, and alliances between sex worker's movements and women's movements. Following this, we explore the existing gaps in funding, and conclude by fleshing out linkages between sexuality and labor beyond the central debate of sex work.

Re-framing Sex Work

While the concept of sex work as work is hardly novel, it is worth emphasizing given the failure of the State and various sections of civil society to recognize it as such. Another key question is whether sex workers choose to do sex work or not, and the role that consent may play in this discussion. Both of these are key questions given the current debate around sex work, and we argue that they're more than an academic exercise, and can play a crucial role in recognizing and realizing rights.

Sex Work as Work

With respect to the framework as it relates to sex work as work, the arguments put forward by a respondent were as follows. "We want to be accepted and seen as workers, and for the State to recognize us – because sex work is work... Rag picking and agricultural labor are also considered as work, even though clear cut employer-employee relations do not always exist in these professions... If sex work is included within labor, then labor rights will be accepted and labor laws will be applicable." The respondent and several others interviewed come from a position that transcends demands for decriminalization, and makes a much more substantive claim of recognition of their labor as worthy of the various protections and privileges accorded other forms of work.

Consent vs. Choice

The other framework which the mapping shed light on was that of choice. The debates around sex work in the country have often encountered deadlocks around the issue of choice. Those who maintain that sex work is necessarily exploitative argue that sex work is inherently forced, while those in favor of sex work assert choice and agency in women's decisions to sell sexual services. A key complication of this dilemma of choice is the reality that if the situation is understood as one of choicelessness, more feminists are willing to engage with the case from the frame of sex workers as victims. There remains often an acute discomfort within feminist circles with accepting sex work as a matter of active choice.



A respondent argues that this framework of choice is in itself faulty, and that the question at the heart of the matter was, in fact, that of consent. She drew an analogy to marriage, where often marriage is not necessarily a proactive or ideal choice, but a circumstance women consent to given their particular decision calculi. She provided, in particular, the example of a women who only consented to marriage to ensure she could remain and work in a particular place, and that she did not have to move back to her village. The basis of consent (as opposed to choice), as per this respondent, was what we assess to be the best possible option within a particular context and situation. Thus, sex work, while not often the ideal or aspirational proactive choice, can be consented to as the best available option.

Sex work as a site to understand the dynamics of caste and sexuality

Sex work provides an important site to understand the interplay between caste, sexuality, and gender. A large number of sex workers are Dalit women. According to a respondent, a majority of brothel-based sex workers are Dalit, while here is a greater diversity in terms of caste and class among street-based sex workers. Dalit sex workers appear to hold the key to pushing forward the tormented debate on Dalit women's sexuality, and as we see below the regional and political diversity of the manner in which Dalit sex workers are perceived by women's groups and Dalit groups, also holds the potential to push forward the debates introduced in the section above on sexuality, caste, religion and class linkages.

As shared earlier, in many parts of the country, the Dalit movement and Dalit feminists have tended to strongly oppose sex work and regarded it as a continuation of the historical sexual exploitation of Dalit women. There are, however, significant regional variations to this position. For example, as became clear during the mapping, this was not the case in Tamil Nadu. Here, we found that Dalit sex workers are very much a part of Dalit feminist spaces. In Maharashtra, on the other hand, the resistance is very strong. According to a respondent, anti sex-work sentiment is strongest in states where the influence of Dr. Ambedkar

is deeper, such as Maharashtra. A separate respondent described the situation there as follows: "Caste and sexuality are something we are constantly struggling with and trying to figure out how we will articulate our understanding of sexuality so that we are able to be just in our understanding of caste. It continues to be troubling for us till date, when Dalit groups stand up and say that you talk about sex workers, a majority of the sex workers are Dalit and there is difference in the way in which they want to look at Dalit women's sexuality from how they look at Savarna (upper caste) sexuality. I think that as (organization) we struggle with this... We definitely believe that people have rights over their body, we definitely believe that sex work is something that is alright... We don't want any compromise on this position but at the same time, we understand where Dalit groups come from when they raise these questions and we are still trying to find the language in which we can speak of both of these so that they don't become contradictory. Both of these are realities and how do we talk about these realities together so that we don't disregard people's life experiences of many years... Woh hai, usko hum nakar bhi nahin sakte (that's there, we can't negate it) this is a prime issue within the women's movement". Commenting on the apparent clash between Dalit women and sex work, she said, "There should not be a clash because finally many sex workers are Dalit, and they are saying that this is our right."

A respondent also spoke about how while there is a recognition of Sanskritization and of the control of Dalit women's sexuality on the part of upper castes, there is less acknowledgment of the control of women's sexuality within Dalit communities themselves, a serious omission. Offering an analysis of the opposition of Dalit groups to sex work, she argued that as part of the larger caste politics in the country, there is a tendency to look at all non Dalits as exploiters and all Dalits as exploited. When Dalit sex workers say that they do not feel that they are being exploited, this is often dismissed- "Sex workers from the Dalit movement tell their leaders – you are suppressing our voice, you are not giving us the ability to do what we consent to do." Writing off the assertion on the part of Dalit sex workers that they are not being sexually exploited is a shortcoming respondents found both the Dalit movement as well as the women's movement guilty of, ignoring lived realities and assertions of agency in damaging ways.

Sex Work and the Women's Movement

There currently appears to be stillness in what used to be a heated debate about the issue of sex work within the women's movement itself and also with sex worker's movement. This stillness is because the anxiety and discomfort of feminists who used to oppose sex work as being patriarchal in nature, have come to grant that sex workers have rights that must not be violated. This allows them to avoid the much more fraught issue of whether sex workers have a right to do sex work. The lack of resolution of the relationship was captured by a respondent who said, "I don't think till date sex workers' movements feel that they are a part of the women's movement... the women's movement also does not feel that sex workers are part of them... I think lesbian issues are much more assimilated, sex workers' are still not assimilated into the movement."

The fundamental reason underlying the discomfort on the part of sections of the women's movement relate to the fact that expressions of sexuality continue to seriously challenge the ideologies and institutions of mainstream society and can evoke deep resistance, most often at a subconscious level within activists. They may themselves not be aware of their internal resistance or the reasons behind it. This is uncomfortable territory but needs to be unpacked if efforts for the actualization of the rights of sex workers are to be taken further with the active participation of other groups and movements.

Other than the framework of the right of sex workers to do sex work and the framework of consent rather than choice, the assumption that needs to be interrogated is that the sex worker is a woman. This assumption is at the heart of the view that sex work is necessarily a manifestation of patriarchy and the implications that flow from it. There is an urgent need to recognize that sex workers also include transgender sex workers and to understand what the implications are for the perceived linkages between sex work and patriarchy.

As previously indicated, some respondents argued that feminist engagement with sex work is limited to a frame of choicelessness - "There is a lot of discomfort with sex, discomfort with one's own body... Patriarchy has sold the idea of monogamy very well. Property...

person as property, physical property... everything. ...The State and religion teaches us monogamy...monogamous sexual relationships, monogamous sexuality, monogamous morality. Monogamy comes with all sorts of support systems – house, family etc. The response is linked to the superstructure. Sex workers break monogamous sexuality and morality."

In an interesting insight, a respondent spoke about how she felt that while LGBTQ people are still struggling to varying degrees to claim respectability, that sex workers pose a deep challenge to notions, including those held by feminists, of the good woman. As the respondent shared: "I also came into the queer movement from the sex-workers rights movement and I also felt that the sex workers are much sharper in their critique of patriarchy, morality, and monogamy."

Feminists can learn tremendous amounts from sex workers as sex workers subvert and challenge many notions of sexuality that feminists have long imbibed.

Lessons learned by a feminist from sex workers

A respondent described how almost everything she learned about sexuality as a young woman, she learned from sex workers. These learnings, she felt, were fundamental to unsettling all notions of a good woman that the respondent had been receiving, not only from the family but also friends and colleagues.

"I learned everything about sexuality from the sex workers movement...They were extraordinary women, who were leading the movement at that point. One of them was a woman called Shikha... We didn't have a vocabulary as middle-class girls and we only spoke of sex in English and the fact that there was this vocabulary available in Bangla was all new. It wasn't trivializing sex, but to be able to laugh about it - that is something that I learned as a joyous, happy, funny thing and not a serious thing. But as simply dealing with life and messy clients. For example one of the funny things that Shikha would say is that half the time the clients are so drunk that they don't know if they are inside me... and they come on my thigh and she would giggle about it. For me all this was so funny! It was liberating... Many of them were also performers, so there was a lot of singing and dancing in the meetings, which I had never encountered before. Women's groups meetings were all about sitting and chatting. They would have these conferences, and have large tents, with sex workers from all over India and Canada. Durbar had a lot of international links at that point. We would stay for nights with them. There were these cubicles behind the tents where they would perform sex work and come back, and get



back to the discussions! Those were learning moments, to take it casually and at the same time be hugely committed to someone, and wanting to slash your wrist. The distinctions we made between romance and love, and the idealism around it, it was all shot down by them...I remember when they came into the university campus, there was a group of these women, who I knew from before but one of them I confused as somebody else. There was somebody called Mala, and I mistook someone else as her. So I said hello to her, and she turned around and said 'all sex workers look alike to you?' It was like a slap on my face! I learned to question myself, and I knew where she was coming from...she also was a friend, but at the same time she showed me that they were different. These friendships did not preclude possibilities of confrontation and challenge, which were important. This is not there to the same extent in the LGBT movement."

The Need for Funding Beyond HIV/AIDS

In terms of funding, one of the challenges that need to be addressed is that currently, the financial resources available are almost entirely as part of HIV and AIDS related work. There is no funding, according to respondents, for work related to sex workers rights per se. The linkage of funding with HIV and AIDS also means that states with low prevalence have few funded groups, and fewer opportunities and resources to organize for rights.

A respondent also spoke about how the problem with funding as it relates to sex workers is the same as the larger problem with funding. She said, "It's only coming in silos - violence...health..." For example, there is no funding for women's rights per se. Similarly, there is no funding for sex workers rights per se. The additional danger associated with this phenomenon is the possibility of an instrumentalist approach to supporting sex workers, linking funding to particular issues and themes as opposed to the general empowerment and upliftment of the group.

Sexuality and Health

This chapter examines how the health sector has, or has failed to, engage with issues and questions of sexuality. It begins with the challenges the sector poses to individuals from certain gender and sexual identities due to certain harmful assumptions and inherent biases in priorities. Following this, in keeping with the mapping's focus on understanding sexuality beyond identities, the section turns to examine the extent to which the health system and existing interventions are able to engage with sexuality and cater to all women, whether or not they are breaking or seen to be breaking sexual and gender norms, and what this might have to do with sexuality. Health here refers to sexual and reproductive health as well as general health.

Exclusionary Nature of Health: Barriers to Access for Particular Sexual and Gender Identities

Unhelpful Assumptions and Stereotypes:

There are a number of barriers to accessing health care that are faced by same-sex desiring as well as transgender people. Firstly, there are the assumptions made by health care providers. Two key problematic assumptions are that of the gender binary, and of heteronormativity. With respect to lesbians and bisexuals, a respondent shared that by default, they are treated as "single heterosexual women..." Particularly with respect to women, there is also the assumption that they are sexually active only after they are married. (This is, of course, discriminatory towards all women who are sexually active outside of marriage including heterosexual single women, widows, sex workers etc.) There is additionally an implicit hierarchy of sexual acts within which peno vaginal sex is accorded primacy, and all other sexual acts are considered to be, to varying degrees, unnatural and abnormal, and speaking about which becomes daunting and fear inducing. There is also the fear of stigma and discrimination which inhibit the patient from sharing information regarding their health situation in a complete manner.



Same sex desiring people are often imagined in a hyper-sexualised manner, and assumed to have an elevated understanding of their own bodies. Another product of this sexualized view is the notion that all LGBT-identifying individuals only have SRH concerns, with a lack of recognition of their more general health needs. There is a particularly pronounced gap in understanding the health needs of transgender individuals, who are currently almost exclusively addressed through AIDS/HIV-related interventions.

False assumptions and judgmental attitudes on the part of the health providers and fear on the part of the patient combine to militate against a sound and rigorous process of diagnosis on which treatment ought to be based. If one musters up the courage (and it is indeed unfortunate that one should have to seek courage to avail of medical health services, a basic human right), respondents highlighted the critical issue of LGBTQ people having to explain to medical health professionals about themselves, who they are etc. "How much to keep explaining what we are, what we are not... Will the doctor understand or not." Government hospitals are particularly insensitive to transgender patients, refusing to cooperate with requests for separate rooms for check-ups and x-rays. There is also the vulnerability of transgender male assigned at birth persons to being sexualized and ridiculed by doctors who have access to their bodies during examinations.

Transgender Health and Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)

At present, the framework and access related to SRS are almost entirely catered to transgender persons assigned male at birth. This too is a manifestation of patriarchy. In terms of research, there is a strong bias globally because most of it is directed at transgender persons assigned male at birth. It is also true that many transgender persons assigned female at birth do not want to have their genitals transformed but opt instead for what is called 'top surgery' or removal of breasts as well as taking hormones which alter the voice, hair growth etc. Such interventions, though less invasive and easier to administer remain less accessible.

Despite its relative prevalence, the conditions of SRS for transgender persons assigned male at birth is far from ideal. A representative indicator of this is the situation in Tamil Nadu, where tremendous strides

have been taken with respect to transgender rights and entitlements. A respondent spoke about how in Tamil Nadu even though the government covers SRS, the quality of medical procedures is very poor. The staff undertaking SRS are not equipped with information and were "learning on the job and that puts the life of everyone who gets the surgery under peril." Even this provisioning has come to a standstill now because the Aravani board has become a "sleeping board" because of the change in government.

As a result, most SRS now takes place through quacks under the following abysmal conditions: "HIV test is done through the tri-dot. If it's positive they take 5000 more. If it's negative they take that much less. It cost anywhere around Rs 30,000. For me the surgery took only 15 minutes... Yeah, they cut the penis-testicle and just put one stitch. They don't even wait for the glucose to drop down and it's over. The next day also they don't keep us there, they discharge us immediately. Even for the medicine they don't even give a prescription. They just write in a normal white paper, so no one can trace it back. After that, in our community, they pour hot water and so on and do something to make it slightly better... There are some problems. Urine flow is a problem. Anesthesia is not given properly. For me, even now I have back aches where the anesthesia was given. But even if my life had gone, I would have been happy that I died as a woman and not as a man."

This narrative provides compelling evidence of how critical it is for transgender persons to be able to alter their bodies, often despite grave health risks. It becomes all the more crucial, therefore, to ensure that these procedures are accessible and safe.

Focus and Priorities of the Health Sector

The health needs of same-sex desiring people are also impacted strongly by the current focus and priorities of the health sector. With respect to lesbian and bisexual women, as detailed in the section on SRHR in a later chapter, these include an overwhelming focus on reproductive health rather than sexual health or health in general. Areas of reproductive health such as conception and pregnancy might not be of relevance to many same-sex desiring or trans individuals. The other focus of the health system which militates against same sex desiring and trans people is the virtual absence of mental health in the

paradigm of health, which is defined almost entirely in terms of physical health, both by State and non State actors. Given the silencing and the tremendous pressures and violations meted out by heteronormativity, the mental health implications for same-sex desiring people are tremendous. In addition to this, the practice of reparative therapy as part of which same-sex people are sought to be cured of their desires continues in cities.

Pleasurable safer sex

In a context in which work related to health, especially that related to sexuality, is mostly fear based, the respondent shared an initiative which focuses on positive and pleasurable ways of having safer sex.

"Orinam has been organizing workshops around safer sex. We try to not scare people away. Typically safer sex workshops will show you a lot of ghastly photographs of ulcers, lesions, warts and genitals and get you to try safer sex. We try to talk about how safer sex can be pleasurable. One of my colleagues, Anupam Hazra who is in Kolkata, actually, he's involved in The Pleasure Project⁶. He made a video. We've got influenced by some of that work."

One of the issues highlighted during the mapping was that the HIV and AIDS related work was not addressing violations. Much of HIV and AIDS related work has been limited to condom distribution, messaging related to safer sex, conducting large-scale surveys about the pandemic. On the positive side, many cases of HIV and AIDS related interventions have also created drop in centers which have served as social spaces where for example transgender persons assigned male at birth can express their gender in a safe community setting. However, the vast majority of HIV and AIDS related interventions have not however been addressing human rights violations or livelihood concerns.

An LBT activist shared that even those who used to work on rights earlier have now shifted to service provision. Another LBT activist analyzed this as being related to funding- given the tremendous competition organizations have not been able to come together under a single umbrella given in-fighting. In this space, interestingly, LBT groups are

6. The Pleasure Project is an educational resource promoting safer sex to women and men. Most established educational programs give the impression that safer sex and good sex are mutually exclusive. These programs usually use fear and the risk of disease to motivate their audience to practice safer sex. Pleasure project promotes safer sex by focusing on the real reasons most people want to have sex: desire and pleasure.

not seen as rivals or threats in access to funding. Those critical of the current priorities of HIV/AIDS interventions all noted that the factors were mostly beyond the respective organizations' control- given limited time and resources, there is simply no space for rights work- a scare and insidious phenomenon.

A Critical Neglect of Sexuality by the Health Sector

The primary concern with regards to health and sexuality raised during the mapping was that the health sector is not addressing sexuality holistically, across groups and populations. Reflecting on this a respondent said that the health sector has separated out reproductive health and sexual health, such that "Reproductive Health is for normal people and Sexual Health is for vulnerable groups."

One of the many problems with this particular fabricated bifurcation and association is that, work on health, including reproductive health is not complete and cannot be effective if one does not address issues of sexuality. A respondent placed before us four sites in which the lack of engagement with sexuality means ineffective health related work.

The first illustration related to contraception. She drew attention to the reality that one cannot promote the use of condoms without engaging with sexuality, and yet for many years work on contraception has been done without any discussion of sexuality whatsoever. It is therefore unsurprising that there has been highly limited success with respect to condom use, and that husbands do not allow use of condoms. "You can't push commodities without talking about sexuality" said the respondent.

The second site which makes visible the damaging implications of a non engagement with sexuality is that of health problems related to sex or reproduction. Recalling the time when she started work on health, she said, "My whole education (about the implication of not addressing sexuality) on this began in the late 80's. We were working with women on pelvic infections... One woman told me that she had pain during intercourse but she said, 'I am not able to tell my husband that he should lay off.' There are innumerable examples... including of sexual coercion within marriage."



The third site in which the implications of a lack of engagement with sexuality for health can be clearly seen was health problems which had nothing to do with sex or with reproductive organs but still could not be addressed because of the construct of shame, at the core of which is sexuality, which disallowed women from reporting the health related complication. Shame could be associated with a part of a body considered to be sexual such as breasts or vagina or about diseases which are associated with sex even though there are other routes than the sexual one. Shame was often overcome only when the health situation became such that the women had no choice but to seek help. Again, recalling lessons learned when she first started working on health our respondent said, "In the 80's women used to come to us with RTIs which were caused by malnutrition which in no way is sexually transmitted! But people still think it is related to sexuality."

The fourth site which illustrates the implications of not addressing sexuality in health related work is that of knowledge about the body. The current situation with respect to women's knowledge about their own bodies continues to be abysmal. Shame on the part of women, as well as shame on the part of those who might be able to provide information about the body, collude to deny women basic knowledge about their bodies. According to our respondent, "Thirty years ago when we started working on health, notions about the body were problematic. There is no change as such now. Women are still ashamed of their body... many don't know from where urine passes, from where menstrual blood passes... how we conceive."

Reflecting on why healthcare professionals and other staff associated with the sector are reluctant to address sexuality, our respondent highlighted the lack of comfort and various anxieties associated with such discourse, and the relative ease of a non-problematic, distant engagement with nutrition, menstrual hygiene, etc.

Crucial Gaps to be Filled by the Health Sector

In addition to what has been referred to above with respect to the need for people, in particular, women to know about their bodies, the need to counter shame, including on the part of health service providers, we share below the other gaps related to health and sexuality which the

mapping uncovered. The first relates to health services as an entitlement issue and the other two gaps are underlying factors that need to be addressed if the 'health' of the sector is to substantively improve.

Poor SRHR Services

Although it is highly significant that most abortions are not illegal in India there is the issue often of women having to accept sterilization or IUDs (the former being more frequent) after the abortion, particularly in government hospitals but also in private ones. Other than the violation of bodily integrity the problem with IUDs in particular, respondents shared was that most women are anemic and rates of infections are very high. There is a strong chance of infections getting aggravated. It is important to first treat the infection but this is not done most often.

The Need to bring back 'Personal is Political'

In the eighties several women's groups had a strong and intense involvement with working with the body, knowing one's body, including fertility awareness. It was as part of this that pioneering material like Shareer ro Jankari (Information about the body)⁷ was brought out in Rajasthan with the active involvement of rural women. Respondents reflected that the situation with respect to SRHR is in many ways worse now. One factor relates to the context of growing commercialization. "This whole array of beauty products... images of the perfect body... several layers of opaqueness are created." The context is also one in which the women's movement has undergone a fundamental change. "I think the whole ethos has changed. We began from personal is political. Now we speak of women as though they were a third party. It's no longer 'me', it's 'the women'...in an objectifying way. Some of us constantly want to begin from 'myself'... what is that I believe...not just those women out there. It's sad...but some of us are constantly trying to bring back that ethos".

Shifting the Paradigm from Women to Gender

The health sector, including progressive civil society actors, is still using the framework of 'women' and not 'gender'. There is much that has

7. A booklet brought out by health rights activists in Rajasthan.



been documented and researched on the women's burden of disease. However, there is very little that the health sector knows about the needs of transgender people. There is an urgent need for collaboration between those working on health and LGBTQ activists. A respondent also highlighted the need to work with sexuality with boys.

Sexuality Education for Health Professionals

Several people interviewed spoke of the need for curriculum reform in the medical establishment. The respondent shared about a particular intervention she was involved with to make the government health systems more gender sensitive, particularly through changes in curriculum as well as through capacity building. As part of this there is a national initiative involving courses on gender and medical education. One of the sessions is on sexuality and VAW, another on human rights and health rights as well as on Sexual Health and Reproductive Health. Sharing about the experience of transacting the module on Sexual Health and Reproductive Health, the respondent said, "To generate discussions on sexuality participants are presented with several different situations around which there are intensive discussions among themselves. Discussions are critical for value clarification. What we are trying to do is to open up the whole arena of sexuality in a context in which mindsets are very repressed. The challenges also stem from egos related to masculinity as well as the professional pride."

Such initiatives have been intensive and multi pronged. One of the interventions involving a review was undertaken from a gender lens of text books and the curriculum relating to 7 disciplines within medical health. This created a rich body of knowledge which has been published in EPW and brought out as a collection of papers. These interventions have been supported by WHO programme, Macarthur foundation and UNFPA.

Another positive development according to a respondent is that the health system is beginning to recognize gender based violence. There are instances in which gender based violence linkages are made with health services. One such initiative is done by CEHAT, an NGO based out of Mumbai, where when survivors of domestic violence visit hospitals, care has been taken to address issues of domestic violence.

Young People and Sexuality

The mapping brought to light the importance of recognizing and addressing the specific situation and needs of young people with respect to sexuality, particularly as they relate to their learning needs and the education sector. It also draws attention to the importance of recognizing what the engagement of young people brings to any issue that they are involved with. The issue of involvement of young people in groups and movement is highly significant as it relates to the crucial issue of new leadership. We begin with what the mapping offered with respect to the involvement of young people in groups and movements, and move on issues that arose related to learning needs, primarily with respect to education and including some reflections related to social media as a space for learning and expressions related to young people's sexuality.

Involvement of Young People in Groups and Movements

The present context is one in which there has been a surge of participation of young people in activism. This was first seen to be precipitated following the Delhi gang rape and murder incident in December 2012, and also after the Supreme Court judgement regarding Section 377. Speaking about the latter, a respondent said, "When I think of all the conversations I have had with so many people (after the judgement) ...they come and say...we are very interested in the idea of equality you were talking of... can you tell us more about it. These are the conversations I have had...all younger people. So I am like hey, this is a great opportunity to get more people involved in this entire issue. We had a meeting in Bangalore post the judgement and some 85 people landed up. We all felt like activists, we all felt like we want to do something now. That's the energy we really need to capitalize on."

Young people's involvement in activism is important, not only to generate a substantial and lasting impact, but also to recognize the



unique contributions they make to the movements. A respondent spoke about the importance of working with young women through her experience with her organisation, "(The organisation) has all the energy for the women's movement now and also there is an investment in the second line of leadership which I think the women's movement has completely abandoned. Our generation of feminists have been unable to build generational bridges. They have arguments but there is a lot of investment and energy in those arguments. I miss that in the mainstream women's movements. The younger girls are not like this (victim mode) ...They are more in the celebratory mode."

Given the possibilities and the need to ensure that young people are not excluded in the ways that they often tend to be, the mapping also underlined the need for mentoring. As one respondent said, "There is a need to build leadership among the younger generation and to support initiatives, including of groups whose politics at present might be different from ours. We should do events with a political agenda and put out a call to a range of people."

Support for Young People Forced to Leave Home

It emerged from the mapping that there is a need for institutionalized, systematic support for young people who are forced to leave home for reasons related to their sexuality or gender expression, including but not limited to LGBT. While the lack of access to shelters and such spaces faced by the LGBT community in general has been previously discussed, here we share the reflections that emerged about the particular nature of problems that young people face when they have to migrate, the current form of support being provided to them and the limitations of these efforts.

Regarding the nature of problems faced by young people who leave home, a respondent said, "We learnt from our study⁸ that normally

8. Breaking The Binary Understanding concerns and realities of queer persons assigned gender female at birth across a spectrum of lived gender identities(2013) is a study by LABIA – A Queer Feminist LBT Collective. Based on a research initiative that began in 2009, its findings question and challenge many of our fairly basic assumptions about gender, sexuality and sex. That sounds alarming – but only until we realise that this questioning of rigid norms leads to more and more ease that allows people to live and breathe in their own skins rather than suffocate inside somebody else's impossible boxes.

when someone migrates from the village, they have a community, a network. If someone is coming from Rajasthan, they are from a particular community. Say they work as cooks in Mumbai. If you work with them, from there you will find work elsewhere... but the minute your connection with your family breaks, the connection with the community also breaks. You do not have social capital. You do not have skills. So how do these people get to a place where they then make a choice that this is what they want to do. We haven't spoken to persons assigned gender male at birth. But I am sure that within them those who are trans, they must be experiencing a lot of violence too. Can you imagine a ten-year-old 'boy' saying that she wants to wear a skirt, no family is going to take it. For those trans people who are female assigned at birth, it is still possible to get away with pant, shirt and short hair. But it's very important to look at what happens to young boys in schools, in homes...and what kind of support they need. They often only have the Hijra network if they want to run away. There you do get some skills. You also get some protection. But it's a very limited scope. More information is definitely needed for younger people who are assigned gender male at birth and how they negotiate gender is something that nobody has looked at."

The amount and nature of support available to young people who are forced to migrate, is highly inadequate, "There are no shelter homes for these young people who leave home to go to other than homes of activists. Government run shelter homes are so bad that actually no one can be sent to them." There needs to be a structural response to the needs of these young people, as seeking shelter with activists is an ad hoc and often tricky option.

Another important limitation is the lack of recognition and addressing of situations of young people below the age of 18, "Till now we have been speaking only of those who are above 18. One has to start thinking of 16-18 and maybe gradually go to younger ages."

With respect to what needs to be done several persons interviewed spoke about the need for scholarships and fellowships for education, skill building and livelihoods related opportunities, previously discussed in the section on sexual and gender identities.



An important note of caution was struck by one respondent: "There is a need to distinguish between these people and those young people who want to join the struggle for change. "“With respect to young people who we want to support, we need to draw on what we learnt very quickly within the women's movement; that the women who come to us with their cases do not necessarily want to become part of the political project”.

Sexuality Education for Young People

The context is one in which considerable work is being done with young people in the development sector in areas that are directly or indirectly linked to sexuality and a lot of resources are being invested in this work. These include adolescence education programmes (implemented both by schools as well as by NGOs), SRHR interventions as well as interventions aimed at child/early marriage. This section evaluated how elements of sexuality are incorporated and problematizes elements of content and delivery.

Approach of Interventions with Young People - Denial of Sexuality

The mapping threw up several concerns related to the way sexuality is approached in adolescence education and SRHR interventions.

Within many of these interventions, young people's desires are invisibilized, the messages about appropriate sexual behaviour and the manner in which the 'good girl' is constructed a respondent said, "What is really, really scary for me, is the amount of work going into working with adolescents. Everyone wants to work on early marriage, child marriage whatever name you want to give it, they all want to do SRHR. They want them to be transformational leaders. What are they teaching in sexuality? We know that (organisation) has manuals which tells that you can have urges but you've to learn to control urges...So the stuff that you're doing in SRHR is at the end of the day about marriage, postpone the time of marriage and sex can happen after that... So there is no question of desire, there is no question of any of the other stuff that you should be talking about...So ultimately what you're doing

is, you are getting them to be good mothers, getting them to be good girls but you're challenging any of the ideas."

Reflecting further on the approach towards girls' in the myriad interventions currently aimed at them, in which many funding agencies today are investing significant amounts of resources, our respondent said that the approach is one that assumes "that children are pure and that we need specially to protect our girls...There is a focus on women... catch them when they're young and make them into better citizens because at the end of the day it's not her that she's going to look after. In my understanding, it's about caregiving...because men are not going to do any of it."

Another gap in the manner in which sexuality is approached is the assumption of heterosexuality. There is a fundamental assumption that heterosexuals don't have sex! Because there is a obsession with the idea of trafficking or child marriage, or girls education- and in all of these the fundamental thing is sexuality. But none of these people talk about sexuality. Ones who talk of child marriage, talk of poverty, social mores etc. But the fact that the child has no other ways to explore sexuality beyond marriage, that no one will talk about."

Even some NGOs working on sexual rights are reluctant to address the issue of homosexuality. Their argument is that young people are not ready for this. In response to such arguments a respondent rightly queried "Since when has homosexuality become the next step?!"

The inability to address sexuality on the part of those implementing interventions for young people, including progressive organizations, translates into a failure to respond to "to the everyday-ness of their lives...", key to the view of sexuality this mapping seeks to push for.

The failure to address sexuality also has serious implications for the ability of development and rights related interventions to be effective. In the context of education, it is beginning to be recognized that sexuality, in particular the fear that girls might engage in sexual activity before marriage, is an important inhibitor to girls accessing school education.



The mapping took this analysis further by looking into the extent that young people are able to respond to education, given their unfulfilled and agitated sexuality. Some respondents were of the opinion that girls are bored with the kind of education imparted in schools which gives them neither livelihood options, nor any intellectual stimulation or alternative life worlds. An interviewee shared one of her interactions with girls as part of a research study she was involved with. "We were working in this place called Bauria, which is not even 30 km from Calcutta... one of the things that the girls repeatedly said was that they had a code word which is- 'go to the river', which means to have sex. And we asked them what they were interested in- whether it was go to school, swim, watch a Salman Khan film, and they said they wanted to go to river."

It is not as though education is altogether silent about sexuality. There are messages being given, whether explicitly or not. The stated and unstated message is that sexuality is to be feared, avoided and repressed. Reflecting on these gaps a respondent identified, "The need is for rights based sexuality education which does not pathologize sexuality, which talks about sexuality in a positive way."

While on the one hand there are serious problems with the approach to sexuality in adolescence /life skills education, even if this were to be altered or strengthened, the reality is that it has a highly limited reach and it is given very little priority in the education system (as reflected in the number of hours, which is often as little as 16 hours in the entire annual curriculum).

A denial of sexuality in working with young people extends from education to trafficking, which is gaining popularity in terms of resources allocated to it. A respondent spoke about how critical links between sexuality and trafficking, particularly to do with the recognition and complexities of consent. Speaking of situations in which "Girls are actually eloping, running away from the village, they are promised jobs or sexual gratification" she said there is a strong sexual element to it. "But when we talk of trafficking, we don't talk of sexual curiosity or need to express sexuality."

While addressing issues of sexuality is itself a challenge, even those interventions that are able to do so successfully and sensitively are

confronted by the reality that the young people, girls in particular, do not have the support required to be able to act on these insights.

Commenting on the considerable gap between what is communicated to the girls during the trainings and what they can act upon, a respondent said, “You end up teaching girls a lot of progressive stuff, you tell them to fight, you change their outlook etc., but then you get up and leave...These girls are then dealing with this on an everyday basis, and they may or may not have the support of other people who are as progressive as you are...I’ve heard enough stories that young girls who were part of all programmes have stood up and given bhashans (lectures) on oppression by men in a public meeting. Now the point is that while you want to bring down these structures, you have to figure out a way to go about it slowly... At the end of the day what are the support structures that we’re creating because obviously our outreach is not all that large.... So the backlash I feel at the individual level can be severe.”

Inhibitions of Teachers and Staff Members Working with Young People

A significant factor underlying the denial of sexuality in interventions with young people is the inhibition of various relevant actors in dealing with issues of sexuality and desire. At one level, as one respondent shared, it is the fear that students will start having sexual relationships, that it will bring a bad name to the school or institution, that they might run away from school etc. At the second, there are deep seated anxieties related to teachers’ and trainers’ own discomforts and fears around sexuality. Training teachers in particular can be a challenging process, said F and as a trainer one has to deal with the horror, shock and resistance of the participants.

Even when participants, at one level, accept what is being sought to be communicated, there are challenges at the level of implementation. Reflecting on a training with staff members of an organization which works with young people, a respondent said, “They’re (participants) willing to understand what you’re saying. The point is whether they’ll put it in practice. Academically they’re with you, they understand the logic and points you’re making. I feel that at the end of the day a lot



of them will want to say that marriage is the best thing and hold on till marriage. The reality is different because a lot of the young women were telling us, oh you know how they're attracted to some random man, what should they be doing about it but those are the questions that are not asked...If you're 40 and living in Patna, you're the person who is implementing the programme, this is not the conversation you're going to have with a young person."

Therefore, in work with teachers and staff members, there is a compelling need to address internalized norms related to sexuality, which are simultaneously enabling and equipping them to actually engage with young people on these issues. This underlines strongly the need for intensive capacity building of teachers and trainers to be able to respond to young people's lived realities.

In addition to these forms of capacity building, another key factor missing in current discourse is the need to address teacher and trainers' own sexuality. Speaking about West Bengal A said, "There is this whole obsession with teachers' clothes in West Bengal. There are government memorandums, which say teachers can't wear sleeveless blouses or lipsticks. This is not new in West Bengal. This started with the CPM, but it has not changed. You can't even wear salwar kameez⁹. They have to only wear saris. I have known teachers who had to travel in local trains to remote schools. They had to carry saris. These orders have also been passed in Karnataka." The manner in which the sexuality of those within the education system is policed is not limited to schools- a respondent shared about her experience working in a progressive university as a single woman: "On my first day at work, one of my colleagues who had also been my professor, said that he thought I would wear a mini skirt and not sari. He thought this would be funny." Such discomfort around sexuality of those in the education system needs to be urgently addressed. This points to the gap in sexuality education not only in schools, but in higher education institutions too.

9. A piece of Indian Cloth worn by women- a long top with a loose pant designed in a particular way.

An effort to address gender and sexuality in Adolescence Education

An important gap in the present context relates to curricula and training materials with an empowerment perspective that teachers can use in order to address issues of sexuality. There have been very few efforts to fill this gap. One respondent spoke to us about one such effort to rework the approach and content of Adolescence Education Programme started by the NCERT in a collaboration involving UNFPA and a number of organizations, including Nirantar, several of whom had first come together when sex education¹¹ was banned in 2006. The collaboration was aimed at approaching adolescence education in a non-ear based manner which was positive and also addressed lived realities of young people in an empowering manner. As part of this effort the teachers training manual was revised. One of the important changes was the inclusion of gender and sexuality issues. Speaking about some of the positive shifts from where we were in the previous decade when the focus was exclusively on abstinence, our respondent's assessment was that a concrete movement has been made in the right direction towards an empowerment framework. An important aspect of this she felt was the collaborative process which involved civil society organizations that have been working intensively on issues of gender and sexuality for many years. She also felt that the training curriculum had managed to present sexuality as "nothing dirty" in different ways.

The Internet, Young People and Sexuality

The internet is fast becoming an important space for young people to express and explore their sexuality. A respondent spoke about how someone who is linked to her organization, 19 years of age, in a college in new Bombay comprised mostly of students from a middle class background, speaks of how active young people from that demographic are in exploring their sexuality on the internet. It is clearly not only an elite phenomenon. She said that sexting and sending 'sexy' photographs were widespread phenomenon amongst her friends. For the younger generation which has grown up in the digital world, this is a medium as legitimate as the non-digital one.

10. National Council for Educational Research and Training is an organization set up by the Government of India to assist and advise the Central and the State Governments on matters related to school education.

11. Also known as Sexuality Education, Adolescence Education Programme, Lifeskills education, which is a non-credited course in schools to enable young people to understand issues related to their bodies and lives.



Along with these positive, emancipators dimensions, the respondent also drew attention to how many girls feel unduly pressured into sending such photos to their romantic partners. There is also a strong dimension of peer pressure resulting from the social association of coolness in sending sexy, sometimes semi-nude pictures. Respondents reflected on this situation and said that it is not easy to draw a line between choice and coercion.

Sexual and Gender Identities

In a context where gender transgression and non-heteronormative desire have existed and been negotiated through society for centuries, the emergence of LGBTQ movements across the country have brought forward a new discourse and language to articulate issues in a rights based framework. While a large section of this struggle has been one of assertion of the rights to citizenship for those that find themselves on the fringes of “heteronormative” gender and sexual identities, there have also been groups for whom the struggle has always been multifaceted. These groups, on women we will try to focus, have articulated themselves not only in terms of rights but have also brought a political and intersectional lens to the sexuality discourse.

Some LGBTQ groups have engaged not only at the realm of discourse but also through building support spaces for each other in the community, protests, media advocacy and engagement with other movements. Labia, for instance, engaged with issues related to morality and sexuality, beyond LGBTQ issues, to include those of sex workers, bar dancers and also issues of communalism. In Tamil Nadu, by building ties with existing movements mobilized around caste and class, transgender activists were able to bring a political economy articulation to their issues. As echoed by a respondent from Tamil Nadu, “It is easy for many of them (Dalit and feminist activists) to speak of transgender people in Tamil Nadu...Transgender people are part of the greater subaltern community here and people understand that register well...It’s a political economy question. That is a major challenge. This is very central to Tamil politics.”

Through a similar engagement with women’s movements across the country, transgender people have troubled the gender binary on which the women’s movement was earlier premised, and asked a crucial question to the feminist project – “Who is the subject of feminism? Is it the biological woman?”

Many were able to offer sympathies to trans-people in recognition of their struggles but not to those whose desires did not conform to heterosexual norms of society. These reflections pointed to a larger



reality that there are deep fears and aversion to engaging with any issues of sexuality. Even violence in the context non-heteronormative desires skips the attention of progressive groups and movements which reflects our aversion to talk about anything related to sex.

The struggle to find recognition, inclusion, rights and access, and space to raise crucial questions, both within political and civil society spaces, as well as in wider society is far from over. In this chapter, we draw out various gaps and challenges as they relate to individuals and communities who identify with non-conforming gender and sexual identities. Recognizing the specificities of challenges, perceptions and realities of sexual and gender identities, this section attempts to trace both the commonalities and the distinctions of their struggles. The attempt is to be careful to not conflate the two and drown out nuance, but to remain constantly mindful of how issues of gender and sexuality are best examined in conjunction rather than in isolation.

One of the reasons why sexual orientation and gender identity need to be recognized as distinct is the reality that as compared to gender identity, there are less likely to be visible markers of sexual orientation or identity. This invisibility means that the assumption of the person/s being heterosexual is almost inevitable. It has been argued by some activists, particularly in the past, that this invisibility also creates a greater space for breaking norms without being found out. There is much evidence however, including from the interviews, that this invisible space is a highly fragile one. Silence and invisibility constitute a critical site of violation related to sexual orientation and present a key vulnerability of non-conforming sexual identities.

This chapter will begin with an examination of how members of particular gender and sexual identities face barriers to access crucial services, policies and programmes. This is followed by a discussion on interactions between these groups and the legal register, and implications of these contestations for the movement and discourse. Finally, the section details at length the challenges and potentials for activism across and within the LBGQT spectrum, tracing existing and possible linkages, gaps and possible opportunities. Within this, we have also conducted an examination of some of the key debates and dilemmas or contestations brewing within these groups and the spaces they engage with.

The Challenge of Access

Right at the outset, we would like to state that the mapping highlighted how gender, as it relates to female assigned at birth people, still plays a critical role in influencing the lived realities of those who transgress gender and sexuality norms. Energies and financial resources even within this spectrum are often focused on those who identify as 'gay' or transwomen, and away from lesbian, bisexual and transgender (female assigned at birth).

We are labouring this point because it speaks to the important role that one's gender plays within sexual identities. For example, the intensity of the pressure to get married, the extent of economic dependence and control on mobility, have strong implications for the ability of those who are female assigned at birth to follow their sexual desires, whether they identify as women or transgender.

Without doubt, sexual orientation is an issue for all genders, not only those who identify in the binary framework of gender, and this reveals that much like other issues of gender and sexuality, gender and sexual identities must also be understood and studied in conjunction, with a constant and simultaneous appreciation for their uniqueness and contradictions.

Exclusion from Spaces and Interventions

Since much of the efforts of LGBTQ groups have focussed on issues of inclusion, this section aims to identify areas where this battle is still an ongoing one. As we read through, it may help to ask ourselves where the possibilities exist to move away from an articulation of benign inclusion and "victim mode"¹² towards resetting the lens in order that it no longer distorts existing realities, towards an articulation of how gender and sexuality co constitute each other.

12. Referring to reflection shared by a respondent about alliance between LBT and rest of women's movement in Kolkata. "It is an inclusion framework and not deeper than that and it's because our organisation has done a lot of shouting. And it's all in a victim mode."

Violence-related Interventions

The existing framework and scope of domestic violence work, particularly Violence Against Women (VAW), is limited and skewed, when it claims (without even having to assert the claim) that it caters to all women. In reality, it only addresses Violence Against Women Who (VAWW) subscribe to the norms of gender and sexuality. This means that women who are same sex desiring or transgender people or even those who break other norms around sexuality, such as sex workers, sexually active single women and widows are also excluded.

This articulation also excludes transgender people, who often experience violence because they transgress gender norms. A broader framework of Gender Based Violence (GBV), one that hasn't yet gained currency in the discourse around violence, may also help us recognize this violence, along with violence on boys who resist norms of a certain hegemonic aggressive masculinity.

The exclusions of all but 'violence against women who conform to gender norms', exist both in state policies, programmes and laws as well as civil society discourse and interventions. The discourse and interventions are out of sync with ground realities, in which innumerable women do break existing norms. In the importance placed on spousal violence, there is an unstated, underlying assumption that there are other types of violence and categories of victims, for example that the natal home is often a site of violence, not only for LBT persons, but anyone who transgresses heteronormative norms (whether or not they identify as LBT).

Homes and Shelters

Many lesbian and bisexual women have to leave home and are forced to migrate to cities because of violations faced within the family. Shelter is a critical issue in such situations. Currently, there are three options available to such women, shelter homes run by the state, shelter homes run by women's organisations and homes of other queer activists.

As with interventions for violence against women, the norms for 'who' can access state shelter homes is also very limited. Clearly, the doors of shelter homes are open only to women who are or are assumed to

be heterosexual and female bodied. Further, accessing state shelter homes may be far from the solution because these homes may often impose even greater patriarchal restrictions on the women who live there. Not only are the physical conditions often unfit for habitation, but the strictness of the rules and the manner in which the residents are treated is as akin to the treatments of criminals in jail.

The second possibility is of living in shelter homes run by women's organizations. However, the experiences here have not been positive either. Respondents from West Bengal shared that there were strong stigmas and fears associated with the possibility of LBT individuals making advances towards the other women in shelters, and often required signed letters assuring “good behaviour” from LBT organisations on behalf of women seeking shelter.

The last option is when queer activists often fill the gap left by the absence of shelter homes. This is also challenging in itself, when it comes to negotiating boundaries with LBT persons in distress. It may happen that vulnerable LBT individuals may take the support being offered for granted.

These issues point to the need for more long-term, structural change that can systematically provide for LBT individuals, ensuring that they do not have to depend on the generosity of activists for their shelter and safety, and to ensure that individuals who transgress gender and sexual norms have access to spaces where they feel safe and supported.

Educational institutions

Schools as sites that are organized around and strengthen the gender binary pose serious challenges to the well being and rights of those that transgress gender and sexual norms. This is particularly true of young transgender people, who are more visibly marked than those with non-normative sexual identities. Forms of persecution range from the jibes from peers to more violent forms of bullying to the lack of support of teachers who themselves have similar socialization and attitudes as the students they teach, to having to wear school uniforms and play sports, forcing them to perform a gender at odds with their own gender identity. Such institutional persecution increases the rates of drop-outs amongst transgender individuals, further reducing their



livelihoods and inhibiting their ability to live as the gender that they experience.

Reflecting on his own experiences, a transgender educationist we interviewed, shared, "These kids are also targeted by peers and don't have peer support. So only teachers can play an active role in making the other peers realise, so that these people are not teased. But we see that teachers take a lead in bullying students. There is an urgent need to sensitise teachers first about what trans means and their problems. From my personal experience of 14 years of teaching in school, many transgender children either leave education when they attain puberty and feel that they are totally different from others, or if they are very meritorious they complete their education, but are unable to socialise."

Being unable to socialise or worse, to be excluded and bullied by peer groups can have a lasting impact on young people. It is also perhaps important to realise, as highlighted by a queer rights lawyer from Bangalore that "Kids don't identify as transgender at such a young age!", which is critical to be mindful of as many young people may transgress gender norms (and be bullied for it) without identifying as transgender. Commenting on the "reservation policy" for transgender students implemented in parts of Karnataka and Kerala, the lawyer iterates the argument and the solution proposed by the educationist, that it is as much about keeping students in school, as it is about creating school environments that are sensitive and open to transgressing gender norms. In this regard, concerns were also raised regarding the need to alter the curriculum, including the adolescence education curriculum. Commenting on the Lifestyle Education (Jeevanshaili) curriculum in West Bengal, the educationist said that "it just strengthened stereotypes and has been of no help to the trans community."

Within higher education as well, there is an articulated need for a paradigm shift from 'woman' to 'gender' in all educational curriculum, including in higher education. The lawyer commented that, "Gender studies department should be opened. Except Jadavpur University, there are only Women's Studies departments in West Bengal."

Livelihoods

Economic independence enables the ability to make choices related to one's sexual desires and preferred gender expressions. This is particularly urgent for LBT women who face marriage pressures. When LBT people leave home in such situation it needs to be identified as a forced migration addressed as such, with its concomitant gravity and multiplicity of challenges related to rehabilitation of the displaced person.

Often, publicly assuming the gender identity of their choice limits or eliminates livelihood options for transgender individuals, with respondents citing examples of individuals losing jobs on this basis. As a result, respondents noted that transgender (M to F) people turned to the ways in which hijras may earn, which are either sex work or Launda Naach. This is further complicated by the fact that these options tie transgender individuals to the social structures of the guru chela institution, which many are unable to leave due to livelihood dependence. Respondents noted that very little work was done on transgender livelihoods, mostly because a large part of the focus (funder-driven) remained on HIV-AIDS. Under-explored options include the possibility of small businesses and entrepreneurship, as well as renewed support for an entirely neglected part of the transgender community- folk artists.

There is also a need to ground livelihood interventions in the lived realities of their particular existences. There is a need to build an understanding of how livelihoods options chosen by transgender persons relate to their gender identity, particularly in a larger socio economic environment which is highly hostile. For example when we asked a respondent about whether options such as those offered under MANREGA¹³ might be appropriate for some transgender people living in rural areas, he located his response in the following context. "In rural settings... whether you are transgender, man or woman, at a certain age you must get married. Once married, all the responsibilities of keeping up a family, wife, children come in...They dress as a man, because if you don't have money you can't afford clothes...If you are transgender,

13. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural employment Guarantee scheme as part of which a rural person is entitled to 100 days of work in and around their villages.



you will wear the lungi in such a way that if the person knows you, they can tell...They may join the hijras or even folk art groups, but they will not do physical labour...because it takes away my uniqueness. By acting in a female role, people are curious, so if I work in the NREGA programme, the uniqueness will be lost.” A similar view was expressed by some of the other people interviewed. We would however like to add that given that there has been insufficient engagement with the livelihoods situation with respect to transgender people in rural areas, it would not be possible to conclude that options such as NREGA are not appropriate.

The family assuming centrality as the unit of access to state and other entitlements is an issue that affects non-normative sexual identities as much as transgender people. When one no longer has the support and inclusion within a family, they may equally be excluded from all other opportunities to sustenance, which raises a central question of configuring structures to cater to the individual, rather than the almost inevitably hetero-normative traditional family structure.

It is clear that there is a need for a wider range of livelihood options. Another example of the need to understand livelihood options in the context of gender identity is the reality that despite all the violations related to sex work, this is an option which many transgender persons assigned male at birth people might actively want to exercise. There is a need to strengthen efforts to ensure that they have access to rights and protections as sex workers. At the sametime it is important to remember that they might actively want to engage with sex work and not view it merely as a livelihood option that they are turning to for lack of anything better. We were cautioned of this when a respondent shared how she felt about doing sex work: "I also get some kind of added credibility of being seen as a woman.”

Interactions with the Legal Terrain

Section 377 has come to dominate the discourse on LGBTQ rights and legal contestations. Today it appears to those outside of the LGBTQ spectrum and also to several of the younger members within the spectrum, that Section 377 is the only struggle which has been waged by LGBTQ people and groups. The mapping places the significance of

Section 377 in a historical context, is critical to retrace at this juncture. The mapping also underlines the need to look at the outcome of the Supreme Court judgment in terms of the significant opportunities that it has yielded. (It should be noted that some interviews were conducted before the Supreme Court judgement).

History - 377 was not the primary battleground

Even within the realm of the law, Section 377 was not the only, or even the foremost struggle and it is only in recent years that it has assumed this degree of significance relative to other dimensions of the struggle for LGBTQ rights. Queer activists from the women's movement recalled that at a national level meeting in December 1997 (a significant marker in the history of the autonomous women's movement) three equally significant issues related to the law were raised. One was Section 377, the other was law as it relates to intimate relationships (across sexual orientations) and the third was the need for a broader anti discrimination law which would cover all forms of discrimination, not only those based on sexuality. It was only later that Section 377 became the national agenda after groups working on HIV and AIDS raised it and then a large number of groups agreed upon it. Initially, it was Naz foundation and Lawyer's Collective but later when several groups raised the issue that they had not been involved in the process, national meetings began to be called on Section 377 and it grew to become the common national agenda of LGBTQ groups. Issues such as forced marriage, family based violence or transgender rights were not issues around that made it to the national agenda.

Sharing their analysis of why there was a consensus on Section 377 and not other issues, respondents said that due to greater funding, the number and resources of groups working on HIV/AIDS were the largest, as were their power, outreach and ability to set the agenda. The arrest of the staff members of a Lucknow based NGO Bharosa Trust under Section 377, and other such events that happened at the time gave currency to the issue.

Further, when certain groups with a queer politics (rather than a narrow focus on LGBT rights)¹⁴ joined the legal fight against Section

14. Please refer to the glossary of terms for the difference between LGBT and Queer.

377, other queer groups also came on board. They were referring to the entry of Voices Against Section 377¹⁵ which brought into the legal case "a shared perspective, politics and understanding of sexuality... with which the scope of the arguments changed."

Implications of the Legal Struggle - Altering Discourse and Activist Energy

Within the history of the legal battle it is important to recognize that they were made possible by social and political struggles, which still need to continue alongside and beyond the legal struggle. The mapping also drew attention to the significant contribution made by the legal battle to the ongoing social and political struggles along two axes - firstly with respect to the discourse on sexuality, even beyond sexual orientation, and secondly in terms of giving a renewed push to the very activist energy that had made possible the legal battle to begin with.

The three markers in the legal struggle have been the Delhi High Court Judgement in July 2009 and the Supreme Court judgment in January 2014 on Section 377, and the Supreme Court Ruling in April 2014 related to transgender people (NALSA vs UOI). Although the Delhi High Court and NALSA judgements were considered victories and the Supreme Court judgement a loss, the mapping looks at the positive and negative implications of all judgements.

Implications for Activism

While the Delhi High Court judgment was phenomenally significant, it is also true, as commented upon during the mapping that there was a dip in activism since there was something akin to a complacency that set in - an illusion as it were that everything was alright now. A feminist queer academician noted as part of this phenomenon, a fall in numbers at the Delhi Queer Pride, "Because it's like we won...Now we don't have to do this." The Supreme Court judgment in December 2014 changed this. Far from complacency, the LGBTQ communities

15. 'Voices Against 377' is a coalition of 12 Non Governmental Organisations and progressive groups based in Delhi . It is a point of intersection and dialogue between various social movements that these groups represent, where a united voice is being articulated against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalizes adult and consensual sexual acts deemed to be against the order of nature.

suddenly found themselves facing realities which had not changed, and some that had worsened.

Sharing some of the "incredibly negative consequences", a respondent said, "In the affidavits...what the police is saying is that 'The Supreme Court has given a judgment - don't come to the public space anymore, don't come to the park. Be inside!' ...Those kinds of statements. We also see a rise in the level of popular animosity against the LGBT community. We've also seen the impact on families. I mean, this guy I was just speaking to here before this interview...he was telling me how till the judgement the family was ok but post the judgement, his parents said that it was illegal so we want you to get married. So there has been that kind of an impact as well." Respondents drew attention to the particular vulnerability to section 377 of those do not have the privilege and privacy of their homes in which to engage in sexual acts¹⁶.

Respondents also argued that while Section 377 affects certain privileged sections, the Supreme Court judgment affects a much wider range of people who break gender and sexual norms in a visible manner, including those "who look different", run away couples, women who oppose marriage and others who are trying to lead their lives in their own way but who are visible and therefore particularly vulnerable. Even in the absence of Section 377, other axes of oppression, which include family, institutional and state abuse etc. The fact that it is the more privileged, urban educated classes who have more of a stake in Section 377 is not to undermine the deeply problematic nature of Section 377, but to recognize that the Supreme Court ruling has wider implications.

Despite the negative fallout of the Supreme Court judgment those interviewed also spoke about the energy that it unleashed. Several respondent spoke of the potential of greater awareness and the strong need and desire to be part of what it takes to change the existing situation.

16. There are a few queer activists and researchers who believe that the legal struggle has deeply negative implications for the more socially and economically marginalized sections of the LGBTQ spectrum such as transgender male assigned at birth people who are also more visible in the public domain. These implications, it has been argued, have not been taken into account by more privileged sections of the LGBTQ spectrum who have given section 377 more importance than it had earlier precisely by focusing their activist energies on this particular cause. This position did not feature in the views of those interviewed for the mapping.

Implications for the Discourse on Sexuality

The Supreme Court judgment on Section 377 was also considered to be a larger set-back in terms of how it framed and addressed sexuality. " In a sense whatever our campaigns for sexuality rights, it is taking us back... because sexuality always gets linked to morality... The way that the Delhi High Court had defined morality, in a sense the Supreme Court judgment is snatching that away from us. So it's not only that when we now approach the courts for LGBT rights that we will no longer have the Delhi High Court judgement with us. It will impact us whenever, in whatever context we say that we do not want to be dictated by public morality, the matter should be treated within a constitutional framework. This is not in our hands anymore. Also this understanding that sexuality as something which each person carries with them all the time wherever we go, all this was nowhere in our legal discourse. We talk about all these things in our work but in the legal discourse these had come from the Delhi High Court."

Separately, on 15 April 2014, The Supreme Court affirmed the constitutional rights and freedoms of transgender persons, including those who identify as third gender and those who identify in a gender opposite to their biological sex, i.e., persons, assigned female sex at birth, identifying as male and vice-versa in *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India & Ors (NALSA vs UOI)*.

The Court observed that "the gender to which a person belongs is to be determined by the person concerned" under Article 21. The decision recognises the right of a person to identify in the gender that they relate to, that is, male, female or third gender, irrespective of medical/ surgical intervention. Under Article 19(1)(a) the Court held that "no restriction can be placed on one's personal appearance or choice of dressing, subject to the restrictions contained in Article 19(2) of the Constitution." The Supreme Court also firmly secured the right to equality and equal protection for transgender persons under Articles 14, 15 and 16 by prohibiting discrimination on the ground of gender identity. The judgement mentioned dignity cannot be realized if a person is forced to grow up and live in a gender, which they do not identify with or relate to.

However, several other activists mostly, female to male trans persons

have critiqued the judgement on many accounts. One critique is about the invisibility of female assigned at birth trans persons in the judgement. There are few mentions of female to male trans persons which makes activists wonder whether the benefits of the judgment will reach out to them as much. The media too focused mostly on male to female trans women and mostly Hijras.

Glimpses from Tamil Nadu's struggle for transgender rights

The situation as it relates to transgender persons assigned male at birth people in Tamil Nadu has seen significant dramatic changes in the last few years. An respondent described and reflected on some of these.

"Earlier, we couldn't even get a SIM card, because we did not even have an ID proof. You know in the bank, I had to sign as Shankar - it was such an embarrassing situation. Now my bank account is in the name of 'E'. Transgender people can now also get ration cards in which 'transgender' is an option. If F2M person wants she can also write female or male. All transgendered people get a BPL ration card."

The Aravaani Welfare Board, while initially successful has come to be inactive under the new government. A key learning from this is that such boards are better created under laws than government - "Larger structural changes are definitely what are required. When it becomes your right it is always better... It'll be better if the Aravaani board is a Minorities Board, it will have a better foothold."

With respect to change in social attitudes, there has also been a lot of change. "15 years ago when I walked down the street, if I spotted ten guys, I'd walk another way. I don't need to do that anymore. They don't tease...abuse so much now. Now, I can walk into this hotel (where the interview was conducted). But even now the security person asked me to go confirm on the first floor and then go up. So it is lesser but it's not like it has disappeared completely... It's like...we do get houses, but in slum areas only, and they take more rent from us." A feminist Dalit activist from Chennai also said, "Public humiliation of a transgender is quite impossible. I don't think it is possible anywhere in Tamil Nadu."

With respect to health, the respondent shared that "All hospitals are more or less open to Araavanis. It's highly unlikely that there will be a case of discrimination. Money, like for anybody else, is the main problem. Around eight or ten years back, the situation was much worse."

Reflecting on what has made such shifts possible, the respondent explained that their strategies have never been only about 'sensitization' or only about advocacy- there has also been a strong element of protest and the street, and it is this combination that she felt has worked. "It's not just training. You have to hit the streets... rallies and protests are important..."

There have also been some changes with respect to the police and their conduct, particularly with transgender sex workers. Several of the people interviewed in Chennai spoke in positive and enthusiastic terms about the role theatre has played in these processes. A queer activist and Lawyer from Bangalore shared about the theatre group Katiakaari that uses "theatre for social change and bring together Dalit, feminist and transgender issues. A lot of their actors, even though it may be a play about Dalit feminism, are transwomen. They have other plays that discuss trans issues."

Movement Building: Linkages within and Beyond

Margins within Margins

When talking about gender and sexual identities, we are confronted with a reality of “margins within margins” sub-groups which have compromised access and heightened vulnerability even within non-conforming gender and sexual identities. Margins are always defined in opposition to a ‘centre’- a core group that typically subscribes to and defines norms, and has disproportionate access to resources and power. While the LGBTQ spectrum itself lies at the margin of a largely heteronormative, cis-gendered centre, the margins we speak of here are those which operate within the LGBTQ movements. This section focuses on reflections of dynamics within the LGBTQ spectrum including how different identities might perceive each others as well as the hierarchies within, particularly as they relate to gender, caste and class.

We will discuss in detail the experiences and reflections shared by activists and researchers interviewed in Tamil Nadu, not because this is representative in any way, but because the specificity of the Tamil Nadu context as well as the efforts underway there give much food for thought. These reflections are shared in the hope that these divides can and will be addressed.

Marginalisation of F2M Identities

Mostly, transgender people are equated with Male to female persons, Kothis or Hijras. The marginalization of transgender persons assigned female at birth within the category of transgender is a theme that most persons interviewed highlighted and expressed serious concern about.

An indicator of the space that transgender persons assigned male at birth are able to occupy as compared with those assigned female at birth is the number of terms which exist to denote different identities related to the former (and the men who are their partners) such as kothi-panthi, jogappa, aravani, shivshakti etc. There are on the other hand very few terms used by transgender persons assigned female at birth to describe their identities, and even the one's that exist are little known. This gendered dimension spills over into the realm of sexual orientation also since transgender persons assigned male at birth are often in relationship with men. Therefore, this translates into a greater space for identities related to sexual relationships between males assigned at birth as compared to sexual relations between females assigned at birth.

The marginalization extends to the realm of entitlements. For example, in Tamil Nadu, many of the tremendous gains that have been made with respect to transgender rights translate in tangible terms as rights for transgender persons assigned male at birth. According to a respondent, "Many things have happened in Tamil Nadu... the Welfare board was set up... free SRS surgery... but only for M2Fs. Even the name of the board that was setup for SRS is called Aravaani Nalavariyam."

The marginalization can also be seen in the realm of literature. While commenting on the space for gender and sexuality in Tamil Literature a respondent spoke about how there is much more that has been written by transgender persons assigned male at birth than those who are assigned female at birth. Further, there is also almost no research that has been undertaken on F2Ms. Research, as we know, is an indicator of the priority accorded to different identities and practices within policy and other spaces. Even when research has been undertaken it is little heard of.

The mapping provided some clues for the marginalisation of F2M identities within the frame of patriarchy. While male assigned at birth trans people grew with certain privileges accorded to men in a patriarchal society, including crucial freedoms and enhanced mobility, female assigned at birth trans individuals grew up confront the various challenges and limitations patriarchy enforces on women. This has direct implications on F2Ms abilities to collectivise and claim rights. Accessing LGBT communities is often the crucial first step to claiming



rights and space. F2M people, however, seldom have access to such spaces, and such communities are hard to come by.

Margins of Class/Language

We share first the issues that were shared during the mapping as they relate to class, a strong vector of difference and power within LGBTQ communities. The issue of class is strongly linked to that of language. It is most often the transgender persons assigned male at birth who tend to be from more economically marginalized sections and non English speaking. Respondent shared experiences of Tamil speakers slowly leaving conferences and meetings conducted in English even when there were translators present. These were all transgender men or gay men. Others shared experiences of the negative and class biased attitude of some lesbian women towards transgender activists despite them being actively involved in providing support to lesbian women in crisis situations who have had to leave their homes.

Sexism within the spectrum

During the mapping several people spoke about how the lack of understanding of gender within the LGBTQ spectrum resulted in negative attitudes and prejudices. A key example is that of sexism on the part of gay men or transgender persons assigned male at birth. The mapping alerted us to the reality of a deeper expression of sexism related to the pressure to perform gender in particular ways in a highly hostile external environment which seeks to enforce gender norms. He said, "...So the issue of male privilege and taking up space.... it's something you will also find among some...transmen. I'm not saying this to finger-point or be accusatory, but in the spirit of acknowledging that everybody has issues to work on. In their anxiety to fit in with the dominant model of masculinity, there are female born transmen who are quite sexist also".

A respondent also commented that in his experience he has witnessed how offensive and sexually aggressive transgender persons assigned male at birth can be when they speak of women (female assigned at birth who identify as women) who they might have grievances against. "They would say that gaand maar denge (slang for having forceful anal sex)...so they have a sense that they have something... These terms

they use brings out the privileged position visa vis the women who they think have power (who they were countering in that particular situation) but they (transgender persons assigned male at birth) also feel they have some power. Some other kind of power."

One of the highly positive developments that needs to be mentioned here is that in the recent past lesbian and bisexual women's groups who have been active for many years and have a strong presence, have now morphed into lesbian, bisexual and transgender (transgender persons assigned female at birth) groups.

Talking gender with trans person assigned male at birth

Two respondents spoke about their experience of conducting a gender and sexuality workshop with transgender persons assigned male at birth:

"There were 35 participants. We wanted to know what are they thinking? They would call us and say that- we are women, so why don't you take care of us, why can't we get membership of the organization that the respondent belonged to. One of the members of the organization who is a mental health professional is engaged in counseling the Kothis...If you see them on Face Book, they are all married! And that too with huge dowry! Younger members of the organization were challenging their notions... M2Fs were saying 'I am a real woman', 'I have a husband, and want to cook for them', 'I will take care of the household'...So they (the young organization members) said, in your notion, what is woman? What do they have to do and what they don't have to do? ...You are trying to be a woman of 100 years back and trying to push us back. Why do you walk like this? Do I walk like this? Am I walking like this? Am I not a woman?" They (the M2 Fs) didn't get angry. It was wonderful. They said, "as we are not real women, we have to perform... you don't have the pressure...I have to perform, absolutely 100% as a woman"

Marginalisation of cross-dressers

A respondent said how men who have cross gender desire, spanning the spectrum from just wanting to cross dress to being transvestites, to transgender, transsexual and everything in between still have their primary erotic affiliation is with women. "They're not interested in men or not that interested in men and they want ideally to be out to their wives and struggle with being unable to do it, for multiple reasons. They don't want their wives to think less of them". The respondent highlighted how this desire may vary for different people, from being



a fetish, to being something they want to do all the time, to something they wish to share with their wife and for cross dressing to be a part of how they relate to their wives. The respondent added that if someone from this group meet an Aravani group, they receive snide and sarcastic remarks.

Lack of understanding and engagement with Intersex people

While there is the need to deepen our understanding of the gender continuum within the LGBTQ spectrum, there is also a need to begin to understand the continuum of biological sex, beyond the biological binary of man and woman. While there is much more understanding today outside and within the LGBTQ spectrum about the gender continuum, there is almost no understanding about the biological continuum, or recognizing that we are not just born either as male or female and how in fact most of us are far from being in these clear cut biological categories and are at different points of the continuum. Those who are towards the middle of the biological spectrum and have a considerable mix of the male and female, whether in terms of chromosomes, hormones or sexual/reproductive organs, we consider them as intersex but very little is known about them.

There has been little discussion within LGBTQ groups about the issue of intersexuality. There is also confusion about whether intersex people are or should be part of the LGBTQ spectrum. In the meantime, intersex people do not have any groups or spaces which they can turn to for support. A respondent spoke about how some people with intersex variations from all over Tamil Nadu (not limited to Chennai) have tried to get involved with gay and bisexual men's groups. He says, "And they have found they have been put down because they have some breast development, or they are more effeminate than is to the comfort of the gay men in the group." Interviewees also spoke about how they received queries from medical doctors who were supportive but concerned and confused and did not know how to engage with people with intersex variations or even what terms are to be used for them. Some of them asked whether they should be referring to them as Hijras. They said they don't know how to write prescriptions.

Hierarchies related to body modification

There are also perceived hierarchies within the transgender assigned male at birth community of three distinct types. One is that Hijras who underwent emasculation (our respondent underlined the importance of the use of this term rather than castration perhaps because the word emasculation is more reflective of an active choice to remove a symbol of masculinity) tend to perceive themselves as being more brave and therefore superior to those transgender persons assigned male at birth who undergo surgery under anaesthesia. The second hierarchy is between those who have undergone surgery and those who have not. The third level of perceived hierarchy was the superiority of those who use pills etc. to enlarge their breasts to someone who has silicon implants.

Marginalisation of forms of desire

Marginalization of bisexual desire

The mapping drew attention to a range of prejudices and marginalization related to desires within the LGBTQ spectrum which fell outside of same sex desire, breaking in a sense what we might call homonormativity of sexual desire. One set of such prejudices are directed at those who are bisexual. Some of these attitudes stem from resentment about bisexuals being able to choose to get married, to appear to be and to enjoy privileges bestowed upon those perceived to be heterosexual as well as the fear of the bisexuals leaving same sex partners in order to be able to enjoy such privileges.

A core problem is the lack of understanding about bisexuality. This manifests itself in different ways. A respondent shared how amongst gay men, speaking about being attracted to women might invite sniggers. During the interview, we also discussed whether there might be a gender dimension at work with respect to the extent to which one is able to feel comfortable about one's bisexuality. We spoke about how it might be relatively easier for women to allow themselves to explore and also to be open about their bisexuality. Perhaps male sexuality has been so rigidly defined while there is a greater fuzziness around women's sexuality and this might create more space for women to be able to explore bisexual desire.



The respondent reflected that "For men, it's somehow stuck in a particular, this versus this. Some scientists have tried to argue that male desire is much more binary and women's desire is much continuous." At the same time the respondent felt that there were other factors which, on the other hand, made it difficult for women to be bisexual. He said, "It may be easier for a woman to be out as a bisexual in a mainstream context where it's cool and trendy but much more difficult for a woman to be bisexual in a predominantly lesbian context. You're sleeping with the enemy."

It is also true he pointed out that in certain ways it is easier for men to explore bisexual desire particularly given "the large amount of social sanction given to homo-sociality... male bonding...Men singing songs to each other in Bollywood. A lot of what we pass off as yaari or friendship among men may have an erotic ring to it." Despite all of this within the LGBTQ spectrum the respondent said that bisexual desire is "definitely marginalized".

It was striking that even within organisations with explicit positions to include bisexual women, actual bisexually identified membership is very low. This perhaps indicates something worth exploring regarding to what extent women feel comfortable to explore and articulate cross sex desire within such spaces.

Marginalization of trans - trans desire

Another set of prejudices and lack of understanding related to trans-trans desire.

A respondent shared "So there is a friend of mine, a transman who is actually in a relationship with a transwoman. He found that the rest of the community, other than his partner, belittled him because he didn't have a penis... it's all very phallocentric... not having one does not qualify you for masculinity... transwomen and transwomen as couples...or a transwoman with a lesbian identified woman. All of these are marginalized."

A telling instance of a lack of understanding and its implication for how sections within the LGBTQ spectrum that was shared during the mapping related to how many in the Hijra community consider same

sex desire to be unnatural since as a respondent said, "They think that they are women and they can sleep with men, so men sleeping with men is abnormal. Women sleeping with women is abnormal." In Bengal such same sex behaviour is considered by Hijras as "noon e noon (salt on salt)... we can't eat it".

Reflecting on why margins within margins

A critical factor underlying the phenomenon of stereotypes and prejudices within the LGBTQ spectrum is limited exposure to each other's lived realities as well as a lack of understanding about the ideologies and material conditions underlying these realities. These do not come as a surprise because an understanding about other sections of the LGBTQ spectrum is not something that will come naturally or spontaneously. Similar to attitudes outside of the LGBTQ spectrum, processes of learning and unlearning are essential.

There are also conflicts that are not related to limitations in understanding but to the political need to create and preserve unique identities and perceived clashes of interest which became particularly important in a context of overall marginalization and resource limitations. The point therefore is not to judge but to understand and seek to address the bases for such attitudes and behaviours.

The desire to preserve a unique identity manifests itself in different ways. For example, it was shared that Hijras do not like it when Kothis who wear men's clothes clap with friends on the street and act 'like Hijras' in public because they feel that the special privileged position based on the perception that they have super natural powers is threatened. Explaining this, the respondent said, "When I am Kothi and when I go to office I dress up as male, and with friends I dress up like female, I betray the Hijra cause by my behaviour. The Hijras are asked, 'Who are these people?' The issue becomes of who "depends for their livelihood on Hijra behaviour".

This drive to preserve a unique identity was also spoken about by another respondent who said that there is a strong tendency on the part of several transgender persons assigned male at birth to present themselves as a subset of people who are born with a congenital issue beyond their control. This becomes an important factor in the



effort to gain sympathy from the mainstream. There is a tendency to differentiate themselves from gay and lesbian people who are equated with "westernized" people who are gender normative.

These responses and efforts need to be located in the context of a highly hostile normative external environment in which it is extremely challenging to survive. It is as part of the survival context that one needs to locate such positioning however unfortunate and negative the implications for other occupants of the spectrum.

A final key cause of friction and anxiety within the LGBTQ spectrum is the existence of norms even within the normative. Identities and behaviours that trouble these norms find themselves particularly indefensible and vulnerable. For example, the sexual and gender expressions which appear to cause the most disturbance and confusion deviate from norms within the spectrum, such as trans-trans desire or hetro-cross dresser desires as previously discussed.

The current terrain: limitations and challenges

Limited geographical scope

As a result of work related to HIV and AIDS, interventions related MSM and gay men have moved beyond metros to small towns and also to an extent, to rural areas. With respect to LBT, however, the outreach is highly limited. The presence of such groups is critical in terms of being able to counter the sense that there is no one else in the world with such desires, to experience and build a sense of community and to be able to find and extend support in the face of a range of violations ranging from everyday forms of silencing to physical violence.

The few support groups for LBT that exist are concentrated in the metros and larger cities. Even in the urban context, work is far from sufficient, as highlighted by a respondent who shared that "While talking to the five characters in the documentary film that I made, it became clear that for most of them, they had no idea of the activism that was going on in the country and more specifically in Delhi. And this was the period the 2000s when there was a lot of public meetings, at least that's what I always thought. Its like Lesley, one of the protagonists in the film said that there are still those women in Lajput Nagar, in Palam Vihar (both

are lower income, less metropolitan in nature, neighbourhoods in Delhi) we haven't reached out to them because we're not doing anything the way one needs to."

Given the reality that there are currently no LBT support groups in small towns and rural areas, it becomes critical that women's groups and NGOs working with rural communities enable LBT people to have access to them. An potential opportunity could be to tap on members of women's groups and NGOs who have undergone sexuality trainings conducted by resource groups.

Reluctance to access funding

In the mapping one of the issues raised was the linkage between the need to increase outreach and the degree of funding accessed by LBT groups. One of the persons interviewed felt strongly about LBT groups becoming more open to receiving funding, or considering larger funds. The context of this struggle is one in which LBT groups are reluctant to be funded as part of their political commitment to remaining autonomous and to work in a spirit of volunteerism as an expression of their desire for social justice work, unrelated to paid work. Aside from this conscious choice of remaining un-funded, there is also the reality that some groups might not be able to conceive of the possibility of funding as they do not have the confidence and capacity to manage large amounts.

A respondent located this reluctance or inability to manage money in a context where NGO staff is increasingly associated with specific projects rather than overall management (including financial management), rendering them under-confident with funding. Donor requirements, particularly with regard to reporting, was identified as another key deterrent to accessing large funds.

Linkages between LGBTQ groups and other movements

The Women's Movement: Recognition of lesbian and bisexual desire

First, it is important to recognise that there is no singular women's movement in India, "The women's movement is very heterogeneous, so there will be groups and people and positions which fully cooperate



with what it means to be queer and then there are still sections, groups and voices for whom at best it's a civil rights issue and at worst not an issue at all." Wherever groups might sit on this range of responses, what is true is that queer feminists have been pushing the women's movements in India on the issue of same sex desire for many years now. The autonomous women's movement has been much more responsive to these efforts than the women's organizations linked to political parties. Commenting on the shifts that have taken place a respondent said, "In the 90's there were left groups that were actually saying, in our living memory, that the only thing that matters is poverty.... I mean no one will say all that now..." Respondents shared that there was growing space for sexuality within the women's movement, and personal friendships often significantly influenced such shifts.

The mapping also offered some insights into how women's groups related differently to same sex desire issues across states. In West Bengal for example, there are strong linkages between the LBT group we spoke to and the autonomous women's movement, although it was a stressful relationship to begin with. While initially there was resistance to treating cases of violence against LBTs within the domestic violence frame of women's organisations. Through a series of negotiations LBTs have come to play significant roles in women's organisations, and LBT groups play crucial roles within the broader women's movement. Part of this changing relationship also has been the growing need and desire on the part of the women's groups, most of whom work in rural and suburban areas, to understand issues of sexuality and transgender as part of their work. Recalling this shift a member of an LBT group said, "In 2005, we wanted to conduct a workshop with women's organizations but no one turned up... This time, they requested us to organize it."

In some contrast to the positive experience in West Bengal, several activists interviewed in Tamil Nadu spoke about the continuing challenges with respect to the engagement of women's groups with issues of same sex desire. Commenting on the continued fear on the part of women's groups about lesbian and bisexual desire a respondent recalled, "When we started working with sex workers, most of the activists were frightened and their families told them if you go there and to talk to sex workers you will also be named a sex worker...so like that lesbians are not much discussed here...leaders, the feminists, they don't see it as a very important and necessary issue even though

it is clearly a political issue... Many years back I mentioned about lesbians, and immediately people said, because I am single, 'oh she is a lesbian...', so that is the cultural silencing."

Respondents also offered a comparison between the manner in which women's groups have begun relating to transgender (M to F) and sex workers in Tamil Nadu, and their continued non-engagement or aversion to engaging with lesbian and bisexual women. She felt that here, women's groups' own normativity was being challenged beyond their comfort, "They see transgender people as natural...they think transgender people don't take the decision to become like that... and it is not their choice. With lesbians they think we are breaking a religious belief, a caste belief and social beliefs." Another respondent also offered a similar reflection with respect to Left parties. "Others are more comfortable and accepting of transgender than same sex desire. After seeing their struggles, left parties had some sympathy...but only with transgender people, not with lesbians and gays."

The women's movement and trans individuals: Troubling the gender binary

Despite the commonality of the theme of gender, or perhaps because of it, the relationship between transgender identities and women's groups has been a fraught one, but in different ways, depending on the nature and politics of the women's groups in question. While there are women's groups who have engaged with this discrepancy and deepened their understanding of the socially constructed nature of gender, as indicated earlier in examples of women's organisations working with transgender people in Tamil Nadu, in several cases transgender identities pose a fundamental problem to the gender binary along which the women's movement has long drawn its legitimacy.

A clear distinction could be detected during the mapping between women's groups' responses to transgender persons assigned female at birth and those assigned male at birth. What is perceived as a gender stereotypic or exaggerated style of dressing and behaving evokes a particularly sharp response in the case of transgender persons assigned male at birth because they are perceived to adopt markers of gender which many in the women's movement have fought long and hard to critique and emancipate themselves from. Reflecting on the

situation a respondent said, "Transgender people are brought up in a heteronormative system, and when they try to assert their identity they follow that... The difference between a woman and a projected woman is always there. Most transgender people will want big breasts, this gives them an identity. Because she is not exactly a woman, but is trying to be a woman, she wants to hang on to these things...which the women's movement is trying to get away from. They say...this person is actually not a woman, but a male and we should accept this as a deviant behaviour of males, rather than incorporating them within the category of 'women'."

In the case of transgender persons assigned female at birth, there are more fundamental questions such as those which erupted during the Pinky Pramanik¹⁷ case, including the question of who is a woman. Describing what the feminists went through D said, "It shook up all the existing concepts because the perpetrator is a woman. A woman identified person. So how can she rape another woman? Since a woman cannot rape another woman, this person must be a man. Now this person, the accused, she does not identify as man. She says I am a woman. The way she is treated by the State, that is also derogatory for a woman. The victim is also a woman, so they are confused." Although there has been some progress in the last few years, there is much more dialogue needed. An activist urged women's groups to understand that "there is no one particular image of a woman. Whatever a person feels that she is... is what a woman can be. There is no reason for your identity to be fixed because of a certain idea."

Transgender people have troubled the gender binary on which the women's movement was earlier premised. The challenge is a difficult one and continues to be because, as a respondent put it, it raises the fundamental question of who is the subject of feminism.

Transgender persons assigned male at birth and class/caste affinities

17. Pinky Pramanik is an Indian athlete and won many National and International Awards for India in 400 and 800 meters running. She retired after a series of injuries and was working as a coach in West Bengal. In 2012, she came into the limelight after she was accused of rape by her live-in female partner. She was immediately arrested and before the rape charges were corroborated, she was mis-treated as a male when male police officers forcefully arrested her. After that several 'gender' or rather 'sex-tests' were conducted by the State officials to confirm her gender identity. Some one in the govt. department leaked the tests videos. Several queer rights activists raised their voices against the gross human rights violations against Pinky.

As mentioned above many groups have found it easier to engage with gender identity issues rather than sexual orientation issues. One of the reasons for this is that the affinities in terms of caste and class with transgender persons assigned male at birth. This was also the analysis offered by those whom we interviewed in Tamil Nadu.

The situation there is such that there are stronger linkages between Dalit activism and the transgender male assigned at birth communities, than with others in the LGBTQ spectrum. These links also appear to be stronger in Tamil Nadu than in other parts of the country because in Tamil Nadu, caste and class are strong dimensions of political and social struggle. Dalit and feminist activists consider transgender people a part of the greater subaltern community, a register they are extensively familiar with, and one central to Tamil politics.

Class linkages have also manifested in concrete ways through avenues like, for example, the Right to Food Campaign (RTF). Transgender (male assigned at birth) groups become an active part of RTF after representatives of a transgender group participated in a RTF national convention in Rourkela in August 2010. A representative of the transgender groups is now a member of the steering committee. Further, when the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) was being drawn up by the Ministry of Rural Development, the RTF campaign also lent it's voice for the inclusion of the transgender community as a category in the SECC. This was raised in the meetings with the MoRD in both formal and informal meetings across levels, and eventually transgender community was added as a group in the SECC. A respondent opined that one of the main reasons why the RTF campaign has been more inclusive than many other campaigns is the fact that it is almost exclusively led by women who are in a majority in all decision making for a within the campaign.

Linkages with caste and class based groups and movements

The mapping pointed to the need for greater linkages between groups addressing sexual orientation and those addressing caste and class issues. While, as we saw, these associations are happening to some extent in the case of a few feminist queer LBT groups, there is minimal connection between gay and MSM groups and such campaigns and

movements.

Offering a comparative analysis about the linkages that had emerged between transgender male assigned at birth groups and the Dalit and women's groups in Tamil Nadu, a respondent reflected that in that context, lesbian, bisexual and gay groups could not afford to be elitist. With respect to language for example, which is a strong marker to caste and class, she said, "By and large, except for the ones who are transgender, except for the ones who are sex workers, they (lesbian, gay, bisexual activists) are all urban and English speaking. That is a big limitation in Tamil Nadu. If you don't consciously examine your own class and caste status while you are being active in public, chances are you are not even going to be taken seriously. That is a limitation that I see."

Queer linkages at work in Bangalore

In a context in which few groups based on sexual orientation link up with other social movements, Bangalore offers a positive scenario in which there are strong linkages between different groups, many of whom fall within the LGBTQ spectrum. These linkages reflect the queer politics of the groups involved. A respondent shared the following about Bangalore. "Linking up... that's the way we have always worked you know. And I feel historically, that's the way it's always been. Even when we began in 1997 with the Gay Rights Seminar in the Law School, it wasn't a purely LGBT people thing. We had a lot of heterosexual people involved right from the very beginning. So we always felt it is an issue that concerns a wider range of people. When we began (a legal-based organisation), there was a range of social justice issues. Even today we work with a range of issues- we work with manual labour, attacks on churches, Dalit rights...it all informs our work. We have a consciousness from a range of work and that's a part of we do- my colleagues do a different range of work, not all do sexuality based work." He also spoke about a recent initiative on the part of a queer activist..."It's incredible...He has started a political party called Praja Rajakiya Vedike and it is working with the North East constituency and the Muslim constituency. So they are working with all the marginalized groups to get them together. That is fantastic work! Who works with the North East in Karnataka?! There's no base at all. So, even in the pride for example, there was a discussion and the Dalit groups were there. They said that they've seen over the years that the protests and prides are happening, they are getting larger and larger. We recognize the fact that you're a very important constituency and they said we completely support you in your demand of Section 377 going down. So, they are completely on board... So everybody is kind of very conscious of this connection- the fact that we need to work on a range of issues. So, it's a part of people's ways of thinking. "

The need to strengthen the basis on which alliances are made

One of the issues explored during the mapping was querying the basis on which linkages and alliances were built. The assumption underlying this line of questioning was that alliances would be stronger if they are based on the recognition of commonality. In the context of the linkage between lesbian and bisexual desire and women's groups for example, there is perhaps a need to move beyond looking at the issue in a framework of rights of a minority of women within the larger category of women, towards understanding the political linkages related to patriarchy, as well as with caste and religion which seeks to control everyone's sexuality and how same sex desire challenges institutions and ideologies that uphold them.

Another example of the potential to build alliances on the basis of commonality emerging from the mapping was in the context of linkages between lesbian, gay and bisexual communities and the Dalit movement. Speaking about how they have begun articulating the linkages between caste and sexuality, a respondent said, "Inter-religious, inter-caste marriages are taken seriously by Dalit groups ...and progressive groups generally...Our argument has been that it is said that 377 goes against the order of nature. So what does order of nature mean in the Indian context? Order of nature has to mean marriage within the framework of religion and caste. So when you are against the order of nature not only are you having sex with someone of the same sex but also you're having a sexual relationship or an intimate relationship with someone beyond your boundaries of religion and caste. So this is a really powerful way of bringing these issues together."

Strengthening ties within the LGBTQ spectrum

Activists that we interviewed in Chennai spoke about the efforts to address some of the divides, tensions and gaps in understanding within the LGBTQ spectrum. Some of these are captured below:

- The need for different spaces: It is important to acknowledge that a single group cannot cater to every social demographic category.. language, geography, class, gender etc, as well as every potential interest. There is a need for the collaborative coexistence of a multitude of spaces.
- Working together proactively: A proactive approach through the



creation of spaces and events like Pride is often crucial to building alliances. Previously, all linkages were forged over reactions to particular events – the murder or arrest of an Aravani etc and a protest is organised. When organisations across the spectrum come together to organise events beyond collective responses to triggers, there are more opportunities to build a collective understanding about issues of gender and sexuality.

- Dialogue and addressing the language issue: Respondents shared that in Chennai, there is a commitment across the spectrum to work to overcome barriers of class as articulated through language. There have been serious efforts to ensure consistent translation, with telling results- Aravanis who have attended meetings for 6 months regularly started to acknowledge the very real challenges gay men face.
- Taking a stand against prejudice: Given that LGBTQ spaces are replete with internal fissures and prejudices, taking a firm stance towards inclusivity at all costs is crucial. For instance, while there used to be gay groups who organised parties with rules like ‘no drag queens allowed’ or ‘no transgender allowed’, after strong push-back from other groups and boycotts, such exclusions no longer occur.
- Building an understanding on issues: Organizing talks and discussions are also an important part of the on-going effort to counter stereotypes and prejudices. One such effort shared was about body image, and how being queer affects how we see our bodies, including “The need for transitioning, hormone therapy, fair skin, the muscle boy image, attitudes towards those judged as "fatties, baldies, uncles..." and the valorisation of other kinds of bodies. These are some of the issues discussed at a workshop on body image organized by and for LGBTQ people across the spectrum in Chennai."
- As expressed by a respondent, "The thing about working together coalitionally, is to be really, really, really conscious about one's privilege. So it could be upper class privilege, Brahminical privilege, English speaking privilege, it could be male privilege.... so many privileges... It also causes one to dwell a lot, be introspective, how one may be unconsciously wielding power and privilege."

Contradictions and Confrontations

Queer Vs. LGBT

Although the distinction between queer and LGBT is not new, it has a renewed significance given the large number of new groups in the LGBTQ spectrum entering the advocacy arena. The issue is not about labels, semantics or academic nuances, but has fundamental implications for people's lives as they relate to the movement, as we hope the discussion below shows.

Despite often being equated with LGBT, the term queer has no one fixed meaning, and that is part of the value of the term. The mapping threw up many axes which help us identify what queer might mean in the Indian context. Being queer means being more aware and wanting to address the margins within margins in the LGBTQ spectrum addressed above. Being queer is about being political. By 'political' here we mean a paradigm that seeks to understand and challenge existing power relations in different, subversive ways.

Being queer is about which issues we work on. The present diversity of groups includes queer feminist groups who work on a wide range of issues of gender, sexuality, caste and communalism as well as groups that have a narrow focus on HIV and AIDS. As pointed out by respondents, it is not as though the communities with whom HIV and AIDS related organizations work do not face a wide range of issues including those related to sex work, bar dancing, caste, water, electricity. Being queer embraces this multiplicity of issues. Being queer relates to the issue of alliances.

The queer question interrogates what precisely is our agenda for change. Commenting on the vision of groups who are not so political, respondents said, "They don't want to change the world...their whole mainstream queer agenda is we are good citizens...they are...like... now that the protest is over...we are law abiding citizens. Are we really law abiding citizens?!" The politics of queerness transcends particular gender and sexual identities and locations.

Sexuality beyond Sexual Identities

The challenges of essentialising and othering

The contemporary context is one in which there is now a tremendous interest in LGBTQ issues, particularly in the metros. While on the one hand this is positive, given especially that activists have been working hard towards breaking the silence and drawing attention to these issues, there is also the problem of 'othering' and essentializing, which often pose a dilemma as to how one should respond to this nature of interest.

According to a respondent, "Everyone seems obsessed with talking about LGBT, wanting to make films on trans-people... Now it's also considered fashionable to be able to do LGBTI stuff...although some of it is remarkable...for instance a school in Delhi is doing some remarkable stuff...All students of class 9,10,11 and12 have engaged with LGBT issues, including homophobia and bullying... I am curious to know if they would talk of heterosexuality and desires in the same way. It is so easy to 'other' a set of people... But If you start talking about sexuality, marriage, violence, lust, desires and place it within the context of your own heterosexual world, it's quite scary. Because suddenly you'll have to admit a lot of things, you can't say those people are doing it. For me that's one of the huge challenges... This interest is also a result of LGBT activists reaching out a lot but my problem with it is that if we're not careful what we're going to end up with is essentializing LGBT, talking of them as monolith. A queer activist friend of mine was facilitating a training with an international organization which works on migrant issues. This organization based in the US and had come to train UNHCR in India about enabling working with LGBT refugees... He said the experience was like... come to a gay zoo and pet me. He was so irritated because they wanted to know how does one know one is gay or someone else is gay...and he said how do you know you are straight. He went on and advised them to look at intersections of caste, class and ethnicity when looking at the issue of refugees."

Cis- Gender - political naming of privilege or othering

In the present Indian context, the term 'cis' is increasingly being used by queer activists to address people who are 'not trans identified'. One of the reasons the term is being used is that if transgender, as the non

normative, are being labelled, why should persons who are assigned female at birth and identify as women and those who are assigned male at birth and identify as men, not have a label, particularly since they enjoy the privileges of being seen as conforming to their gender with respect to their identity. In this sense the term cis gender can be understood to be an act of politically naming the norm rather than the 'other' and making visible the privileges associated with being part of the norm.

During the mapping a point of view expressed rejected the term cis gender as follows: "The moment you use the word Cis, you are producing an identity that effectively closes up this whole business of privilege and identity that feminists and queer scholars and activists opened up. The word Cis emphasises the privilege of gender identification across all dimensions. That's as good as saying 'When you are born a woman, you are a woman... assumes a match between sex and gender which I have struggled all my life to open.'" The second argument that she made against the term was that gender has to be a self identity, but Cis is an externally attributed identity. The term transgender is a term which is used to identify oneself. She says, "So if somebody very calmly says "I was born a female and I identify completely being a female and therefore I am Cis" ... fine!" She felt if one decides for someone else whether that person is cis or not, there is a serious danger in that. "When thousands of women are marching in a Namada Bachao Andolan, you have to assume they are all Cis. You don't know what each one is dealing with... So you are closing up that possibility."

Clearly there is a need for further discussion on the term cis gender with a focus on recognizing the need to name the norm and the privileges that go with it, without reinforcing problematic assumptions about the relationship between sex and gender.

Same Sex Marriage

Same sex marriage is a primary agenda of many LGBT groups in the global North. In the Indian context it is an issue which is gaining ground within the LGBT community (influenced also by the global North as pointed out by a respondent), although as of now it has not been articulated as a 'demand' by groups. Several queer activists interviewed raised concerns regarding the issue of same sex marriage.



We will frame our discussion on same sex marriage around the argument of a particular respondent, given her layered analysis of the issue. The respondent said that her view constituted 'double standards' because, while she did not support people who identified as heterosexual, especially feminists, choosing to get married, she was 'fine' with LGBT getting married because of the element of subversion. "My sense is that when queer people marry it muddies that place... that space of marriage... because in marriage there are so many clear expectations of gender roles and so on."

The respondent also argued that it was important not to expect LGBT people to pay such a high price for political gain (in a context in which from a queer perspective many would argue that resisting marriage is needed in order to challenge the institution). It was important she felt to understand that in this debate, there were after all real and highly important issues at stake about choices and implications. On the question of "pulling the plug", for example, a homosexual couple would need official recognition to be granted the choice over family, whereas with heterosexual couples there is often a default assumption of marriage and higher legitimacy. The views expressed by here thus take into account the privileges of heteronormativity, and look empathetically as well as politically as to why the demand for same sex marriage might need to be considered in a more nuanced manner.

The others who commented on same sex marriage expressed strong concerns with same sex marriage as an agenda of the LGBT movement. Respondents shared how such a move would undermine the work challenging heteronormativity and the institution of marriage, as it would serve to reinforce the respectability and legitimacy associated with conforming to particular social structures. The biggest criticism that emerged was on how social privileges and entitlements, particularly from the state, were premised on participation in the institution of marriage.

Respondents also highlighted that same sex marriage is not "everybody's issue. It is not a priority issue for most people...you cannot position it as a unanimous demand from the gay community because some of us don't want it." There was also a sense that, given the Supreme Court ruling on 377, the battle of decriminalisation was the first crucial step to anti-discrimination, and that demands for same-sex marriage were premature, in addition to fundamentally questionable.

As an alternative to marriage, respondents spoke about the possibility of legally recognized contracts between individuals, be they lovers or friends, which are sacrosanct and held primacy over choices related to inheritance, key decision making, insurance benefits, adoption etc. At present such policies only allow for relatives to be put as nominees for example. The respondent concluded that it is critical to "develop policies which will enable people to live without necessarily getting married." The contracts would need to be such that are recognized by institutions at every level from the state down. This will entail much work, including, inter alia, extensive advocacy with the State and the private sector.

Sexuality Beyond Sexual and Gender Identities

A danger that the mapping has pointed to is that of reducing sexuality to LGBT issues. This is particularly acute in a context in which there is a rapidly growing interest in LGBT issues in the metros. As identified by respondents, while queer activists themselves have been working towards ending invisibility and drawing attention to LGBT issues, the problem now is that the considerable interest is in the nature of 'othering' as previously discussed. It is so much easier to speak of the sexuality of LGBT people than to confront issues related to sexual desire in the context of heterosexuality and all the challenges that they pose. The women's movement is also guilty of failing to engage effectively with questions of sexuality beyond LGBTQ. For example, in Tamil Nadu, it appeared to be easier for women's groups and networks to include and work with sex workers and transgender people than it was for them to challenge the idea of the normative good woman and to address issues of women's sexual desires.

This issue speaks to the heart of how we frame and delimit sexuality, and whether we reduce it to particular identities, or embrace it as a wider frame or lens regulating diverse elements of our existence in much the same manner as gender. It then becomes a serious political project to claim the right, across movements and spaces beyond LGBTQ, to speak of the centrality of sexuality to all of our existences. Commenting on the need and the right of different voices to talk about sexuality, not only LGBT groups, a respondent said, "People feel it is the responsibility of identity based (LGBT) groups to talk about sexuality.



But it is important for different kinds of groups to talk about sexuality. Grassroot level groups and Muslim women's groups often don't talk about sexuality." She also felt that when such groups do talk about sexuality they have to struggle to create that legitimate space for themselves to be able to do so.

Recalling the discomfort that is caused when 'straight sexuality is put under the scanner' a respondent spoke about a conference when a resolution was proposed which spoke of rights violations as they related to section 377 and also of the need for the women's movement to learn from the subversive potential of stigmatized groups and sexualities. There was strong vociferous objections to the relevance of sexuality to the issues of women beyond sexual minorities. Though the resolution was eventually passed, the resistance to that section was telling of the reluctance of groups to acknowledge and accept sexuality as a non-trivial, central element of all realities.

The implication in concrete terms for us as trainers, funders, advocates etc. in the realm of sexuality is to be aware of this tendency to shrink the frame of sexuality to LGBTQ, propelled by tendencies of othering or fearing subversion, and keep resisting it and bringing the focus back to the omnipresence of sexuality and its inextricable link to gender. This is of course not to say that LGBT issues do not require specific and distinct spaces in the discourse, the tendency that is being addressed here is one of focusing on LGBT as an avoidance mechanism, whether conscious or often sub consciously, even on the part of those who are highly progressive.

This issue links to another issue raised later about the nature of alliances we enter into, because often even with progressive groups and movements who are not engaged with issues of sexuality (other than perhaps sexual violence), the tendency is of offering support to those who are marginalized on the basis of sexuality and gender, but from a distance. This distance is important, this support from afar is important so that those offering the support are not implicated in the larger messy realm of sexuality. The rest of this report makes a pointed deliberate effort to view sexuality as a wider framework within which all of us, irrespective of sexual or gender identities, are implicated.

Conclusion

The concluding section of this mapping seeks to draw out some of the key themes and bases for deeper conversations emerging from our sweep of discourses and work around sexuality. Given the objective of the mapping, to create a resource to help push discursive boundaries and expand framings and discussions around sexuality This final section highlights some of the potential sites at which our engagements can be deepened. Drawing from our discussions on how groups and movements discussed in the mapping interact, the conclusion aims to interrogate potential sites for greater collaboration, and a more collaborative, shared journey. While steering clear of prescriptive recommendations, the effort is instead to propose potential questions or areas for further collective exploration, thought, and learning.

Centre Vs Margins

The mapping highlights the existence of a centre and margins within the sexuality space- groups and issues that align themselves either at the core or periphery of the sexuality domain. An examination of the centre vs margin dynamic allows us an insight into the interactions of these groups and the constellations they form. There is a crucial need to better facilitate dialogue between the centre and the margins, as well as within and between various marginal groups in order to build a truly transcendent solidarity based on a holistic understanding of the sexuality lens.

Two key areas for further exploration identified during the course of the mapping, with regards to how different groups at the centre of the margin relate to one another are discussed below.

Margins impacting the centre

One of the themes emerging from the mapping is how significantly those at the margins contribute to the understanding about sexuality or gender more broadly, not only to an understanding about sexuality or gender as it relates to them. For example, a respondent commented, as an upper class, upper caste, urban, highly educated young woman, it was from sex workers that she learnt her important lessons in



sexuality. Her experience is significant in that it highlights that working for the rights of those occupying the margins not only contributes to the realisation of rights, but also crucially presents others opportunities to learn about.

On her experience working with women with disabilities, another respondent shared: "Amongst the many things that disabled women claim, the right to love and pleasure is something that they very unselfconsciously put on board." This is clearly a lesson that many of us as individuals and communities can learn from. Similarly, we have heard from feminists what an engagement with transgender communities has meant for some in the women's movement. As a respondent put it "transgender people have raised the fundamental question of who is the subject of feminism." Many of the interviewed spoke about how much more at ease women who are from a more working class background are with sexuality as compared with more upper class/caste educated women. They spoke of a certain matter of fact from which much needs to be learnt, as well as a sense of humour about sexuality which many, more fettered by respectability, might lack.

Beyond the realm of sexuality as well, respondents spoke of how other movements and groups could learn from the LGB, transgender and sex worker movements. A respondent shared that the Right to Food movement, for example, had plenty to learn from these other struggles, particularly with regard to their effective employment of social media.

One respondent captured the significance about learning from the margins-"Whenever voices grow from the margins, the discourse of the majority changes...It's always like that whether it is in feminism...any place, any movement. I feel that the more voices that push and join together, the more any movement's understanding about the issue will evolve."

Claiming spaces from the Margins

Another key learning on the dynamics between the centre and the margin was the erasure of the myth that those in the margins have to ask to be 'let in'- rather, there was a realisation that they claim space in highly effective ways, often inviting others to jointly occupy it.

A respondent quoted a Dalit feminist activist saying “we are not saying include us or don’t include us. We are saying this is what we are fighting for. If you believe in this, work with us. If where you are coming from is a powerful place, others can also join you there. Today she can say, we are Dalit feminists, these are our issues, whether you are with us or not, that’s up to you. To be able to say this, took a lot of work on their part.”

With regard to claiming spaces within larger movements, a respondent shared that, in the context of her organisation “we say we are part of the women’s movements, we are feminists. And that these are our issues. Now whether these are issues for you, that’s for you to figure out. But we are not giving up the space of feminism because some mainstream feminists or whoever they are, don’t accept these as priority issues. And in a sense there is that openness within the women’s movements. It’s not easy, it is difficult but one can make space for oneself. And I think that the more openness any movement or movements keep, that’s how much they will grow.” Acknowledging the strength of the margins in negotiating and claiming space for themselves is a significant manner in which the centre and margin can come together to forward their collective agenda.

There are several questions to be asked and conversations to be had to further unpack the interactions of the centre and margin, and arrive at strategies to integrate the two or optimise their interaction. An important starting point is an examination of who, in fact, occupies the centre and who is relegated to the margins of movements around sexuality? What are the spaces for the centre and margin to speak to and learn from one another? An examination of these and other explorations around how the centre and margin relate to one another could be a crucial first step in sharpening our thinking around movement building.

Critical Conversations with Identity Politics

Identity has come to be a crucial binding point around which we rally and rage, collectivise and mobilise, make and contest claims. The feminist movement, LGBTQ groups, Dalit uprisings all draw their support from the common identification of their base- from a united ascription to a particular construct. The sexuality movement, in particular, has come



to be one premised hugely on the political project of claiming space and legitimacy for certain categories of gender and sexual identities. While acknowledging the crucial role the politics of identity has played in launching and cementing struggles, it is necessary that we question whether identity is indeed the ideal basis for movement building, particularly within the sexuality agenda.

Sexuality beyond LGBTQ

In order to conduct this critical conversation with identity politics, we begin with establishing the crucial need to develop a common understanding of the political project of sexuality that is not defined by LGBTQ, as previously discussed. We need to recognise and address the everydayness of sexuality, its implications for all of us, and seriously consider it in a manner that does not relegate its significance to only non-normative behaviours and identities. It is important that we discard the tendency to 'other' the issue of sexuality, and embrace it as a universal profoundly affecting elements of all of our realities. Such an approach will not only stop pitting various gender and sexual identities and groups against each other, but will also help realign the arrangement of the centre vs the margins, fighting the inevitability of internal conflict, and bringing together groups on the basis of an understanding of sexuality that pervades across constructed categories of gender and orientation.

Class, Caste and Religion

The mapping has tried to understand how sexuality, caste, class and religion co-constitute one another, and attempted to engage with the dynamic conversation between these elements, with sexuality often complicating rigid caste and class hierarchies, while simultaneously various caste and class positions claim space and voice to expand and alter our own understanding of sexuality. Much like the realm of sexuality, contestations of caste, class and religion have also been framed around identity, and suffer many of the same challenges that sexuality movement has been encumbered with due to this identity-centrality.

Caste has often come to be entirely synonymous with Dalit, and class with working class through a process of othering similar to that of LGBT

individuals. There is a gap in examinations of other class and caste positions and how sexuality regulates and interacts with them, instead producing a rather limited analysis. Further, as long as identity remains at the heart of the claim-making process, there is an ugly race to the bottom, where a competition for the status of 'good victim' pits us against one another, where an inherent divisiveness prevents us from discarding performances of the worthy victim.

Through the imagination of sexuality as a frame, could a viable alternative to a continued preoccupation with identities be an intersectionality of frameworks rather than identities? Going beyond the one plus one logic of seeing identities in conjunction, to examining instead how particular lens, or ways of understanding, interact to cast light on lived realities. How can we imagine a politics beyond identity?

Breaking Binaries

A key struggle of the movements build around gender and sexuality have been centred around demolishing dichotomies and binaries around gender and sexual expressions and behaviours. While these binaries have been systematically dismantled to better reflect our own realities, other polarities remain intact.

Navigating victims and agency, pain and pleasure, respectability and promiscuity

Discussions during the mapping alerted us to the tendency to present false binaries of victim vs empowered, pleasure and danger or pain, and respectability vs promiscuity. Commenting on the disjunction between lived realities and these frameworks, a respondent said, "It is we who have set up a binary in the sexuality discourse between pleasure and danger. It only reflects our own anxieties. I don't see it as reflecting any major social shift. People's attitudes have always been far more complex. It is our simplistic reasoning, and we think it is not working. And we are getting more simplistic some times."

It is not easy to avoid the victim narrative and at initial stages of awareness building, in adverse and hostile circumstances, is arguably often necessary. However, there is also the issue of whether current



realities warrant a continued deployment of the strategic use of the victim narrative which might have been a necessary evil at an earlier stage of seeking to bring attention to violations being faced. A respondent characterised this as a continuation of a 'siege' mentality and a 'mismatch between reality and the rhetoric.'

A respondent spoke of the need for us to change how we approach and talk about sex altogether, and that it is important to see that all of us constantly make strategic decisions and negotiations with regard to sex. She had mentioned a woman she had interviewed who shared, 'I can't stand my husband, but he is good in bed'. She says, "Neither is it something that is so hush-hush that we have to worry when talking about it, nor is it something that can only be understood in terms of desire or pleasure. It is what it is. It is an act that is situated socially and most of us learn to deal with it in matter of fact ways in the course of our lives. What are the real restraining factors to talking about it, are structural. You talk about it, you stand to lose some things. We have simply not developed a language outside this framework of respectability on the one hand and promiscuity on the other. They are two polar things but is there another way of talking about it. I'm not talking about grey middle parts. And that is something we need to explore and ask questions."

The respondent added, "Most women lead their lives with so many different levels of desire, non-desire, celibacy, boredom with sex. Anything we say doesn't capture the range of that at all...I've been writing a lot of plays recently. One of the things I wrote recently was about women in the Tamil labour diaspora. They have been migrating from the 19th century to the Caribbean, South Africa, South East Asia. The choices these women make are astounding. They move in and out of a variety of situations that have to do with conjugality. They are not defined by being anyone's wife alone. They're workers. They've gone there to make a living, want to raise a son or a daughter. Sometimes they were married. Sometimes they've lied. Some places only accept married women. So many of them hitchhike with a man on the ship and both of them claim they are married. Then they would leave each other. So what the hell. Why are we getting so excited about one model of existence of respectable conjugality?"

It's important, particularly for feminists, to recognize that this in no way constitutes a denial or dilution of our struggle against sexual

violations. In fact, our ability to address with sexual violence could benefit tremendously if it were more in sync with our lived realities. A significant gap the mapping highlighted is the complete absence of an engagement with gender based violence from a positive, political sexuality perspective, establishing linkages and their potential implications for programs and interventions.

Understanding our relationship with norms

The key reason why it is not appropriate as it were to adopt a victim approach in work related to sexuality is because it is not as though everyone lives bound by sexual norms. As a respondent put it: "See what I have come to understand about sexual transgression is this. From reading, from talking to people...That much is allowed in our societies. People may not talk about it. What is completely no-no, is breaking caste boundaries, through marriage or through property transactions. As long as you don't break logic of property, progeny and caste, much is allowed. You can have a Dalit mistress, as long as you don't bring her home and make her child a claimant to the family property, or to the family temple. You can have adulterous relationships as long as you don't bring ruin on the family, or by talking about it. Older societies have this permissiveness built into their cultures because they have created structures of inequality that are very enduring. China is like that. India is like that. They build these structures of inequality, strong and enduring and durable, because they make sure that only some of us have access to property and learning and resources and so on. Now if that is not disturbed, everything else is okay."

Going beyond the binary of agency and victimhood also means recognizing that agency is exercised not only to break norms but also to comply with them in order to gain privileges. A respondent spoke about how along with resistance, "there is a level of compliance in order to get my things done. So whether it is an educated woman or any woman, it's the same kind of a story. All of us are complicit in participating in a political discourse where our sexuality is completely at the core of these discussions."

Perhaps we need to begin asking some questions around this, such as can we understand violation without understanding pleasure? Do our interventions unwittingly create and reinforce false binaries? How

can we work to establish their falsity, and use a more sophisticated approach to violations? What are the linkages between sexuality and violence? Do our complex interactions with norms help complicate or demolish these binaries?

Engaging with Marriage

A meaningful and critical engagement with the institution of marriage is essential to our taking forward a sexuality agenda. The women's movement in India has ceased to critically look at the institution of marriage per se, an examination which was a lot stronger in the eighties. As a respondent said, "We talk about marriage as violent or we say that women should be allowed to live on their own should they wish to. But I don't think there is a serious social critique of marriage as an institution." In the present context, marriage is debated mostly within the limited, albeit highly contested frame of same sex marriage as previously discussed. This however, remains a limited frame, and lacks the teeth to unpack the institution as it applies more broadly to all of us.

This mapping has shown that the debate on same sex marriage is itself a hard one to resolve, given the current realities of marriage as the sole socially sanctioned, legitimate domain for sex, marriage as a gatekeeper to not only social recognition but also material and other resources. It points to the need to recognise the broader implications of the current stature and the role marriage arrogates, and its blatant complicity in the perpetuation of the heteronormative family structure, and the morality of monogamy. It highlights the struggle of non-subscribing members, outside of such structures, in their efforts to access various state rights and benefits (e.g. seeking employment under MNREGA).

Some potential areas for exploration around the highly contested theme of marriage could be: what myths and stories around marriage are challenged through the lens of sexuality? How does marriage actually interact with questions of love and choice? What are the various ways in which marriage is subverted, both inside and outside the institution?

Tensions and possibilities between movements

The mapping reflected various struggles between and within movements, while also pointing to strong potentials for collaborations and deepened engagements across. In this previous section, we spoke about the fundamental ideological separations between the women's movement and the trans complications of the gender binary; sex worker's rights and Dalit feminists; the resistance to bi-sexual desire within LGBTQ groups etc. This concluding section asks some questions about why and how we come together or ally, and whether the basis of solidarity is rooted in a sympathy or empathy across oppressions, or a deeper political understanding of the underlying linkages.

The value of engaging individuals and groups with particular skills

Working together is not only about allying in terms of protests and advocacy, it extends to sharing skill sets that can be useful and empowering across issues and groups. For example, in Chennai theatre activists are working with transgender (M to F) people performing in plays which do not necessarily include or address trans issues. Also in Chennai, mental health experts take their skills in counselling to the LGBTQ community, participating in a wide range of activities and assimilating with the communities.

Working together towards changing each others' understanding and attitudes

The mapping also offers insights on the potential that working together presents for changing attitudes both within the spectrum of those marginalized on the basis of gender and sexuality as well as beyond. Some of these relate to processes that were designed consciously, while others were more spontaneous and organic. It is of value for us to learn even from the spontaneous processes because it alerts and encourages us to the benefits that might ensue from working together, in ways that we might not have been aware of.

From another respondent, we heard about the experience of another coalition "When one woman volunteered, men also volunteered. We



have a mixed group, men are there... bullock cart workers, brick workers, quarry workers, sex workers, men, women, transgender people, Dalit, non Dalit...attitudes are changing because we work together...For the sustainability of the movement it is important that diversities should come together, otherwise you are not doing anything. I can't only work with sex workers for example. Sex workers' attitude should be changed by the Dalit movement. Dalit women's attitude should be changed by the brick workers. Brick workers should go attend the protest demonstration by sex workers. This is what I feel... if you want real social justice. When I go to a village I don't only see a Dalit, I see a tribal, I see a sex worker,in same village I see many communities. I see Matammas there. In one part of the village you have all of them, why pocket only one set of interests? Now we have formed the women's coalition for change, so it brings all this together. Dalit women, Muslim Women, HIV positive women, transgender, tribal women, sex workers, Devdasis, Matammas and Joginis."

The need to ensure that alliances to be based on recognition of commonality of interests

We know that various groups that are marginalized on the basis of sexuality or gender have significant linkages with other progressive groups and movements. However, even where linkages are taking place between different groups and movements, most often the basis of these linkages and alliances are for the support of the rights of the 'other'. Highlighting this, a respondent said, "I think the understanding (underlying the alliances) is that of a minority (LGBTQ) whose rights are being threatened. I don't think people necessarily have a deeper appreciation of how sexuality is closely connected to their work...We have tried to make some linkages...for example with Ambedkar and inter caste marriages, sexuality...but it hasn't fully caught on. We need more discussion on these questions...commonality, whatever we choose to phrase it. Sexuality is a way of building common politics."

Turning the lens inwards: reflecting on our approach

Through the mapping, we were also made aware of the importance of introspection, and a critical reflection on our own approach to movements and activism.

Reconnecting the personal and political

Several people interviewed, particularly those who have been part of the women's movement on a sustained basis, spoke about how the way we work has changed significantly and about detriment of work, including work related to sexuality. One spoke about how, despite the feminist mantra of personal is political, we now speak of 'them', 'those women' rather than about 'me'. Another remembered the days before projects and the hours and days spent talking, laughing, and challenging each other. She says, "instead of 'salah mashwarah' we now do 'counselling'. We used to say Fareeda had come, Shama had come, Farzana had come... Now we say 'uska case paper nikalo'. We used to have 'baithaks" now we sit in the "counselling centre". In the past decade it's all about conducting trainings through which we will transmit some wisdom to them. We still interact with the people we're close to but our interactions with most people who live with grassroots realities have reduced. Lots and lots of women come to office now... but earlier we used to go and sit and talk in people's homes for three four hours at a stretch." According to the respondent, these changes are taking place partly because of the desire on the part of those like herself who have been working for many years to do something new or to work on scale but mostly she felt it is because funding has resulted in a project-ized approach.

She recalled the kind of space that they had created in their organisation to talk about their personal lives. "I remember the first programme we kept in which we stayed the night and everyone shared, a whole night we sat and talked...it is when everyone was speaking that I realized how among all other issues how important this issue also is."

Speaking about larger spaces within the women's movement the respondent shared, "There were autonomous women's conferences. Now there are no such spaces. We felt we're a part of those spaces but now there are only sponsored heavily funded heavy conferences. They invite only people who aren't autonomous/ non funded etc. – a lot of times these groups get left out."

The importance of being able to be doubtful, ignorant, questioning

An unfortunate characteristic of activist and movements spaces is that they make it very difficult for us as actors engaged in social change to be questioning and to risk expressing our doubts or ignorance. According to a respondent, one cannot be politically correct about emotional things. One has to risk danger. She says, "For example, I want to take a principled stand on caste. I'm anti-caste... There are several ways of doing it. One way to do it is to make sure you say the right thing and you are part of the right campaigns, which is not a bad thing at all. The other way is to be very troubled and ask questions and make a fool of yourself also. Making a fool of yourself also because you don't know, you don't have everyday dealings with Dalits or peasants. But you are very troubled by what is being done to people in the name of the caste order. You risk ignorance and you risk putting your idiocy on the line when you are asking these questions. I think we have to create a political culture that allows for that risk taking."

With a binary understanding of 'one who knows all' and 'one who does not know', political life becomes boring and it does not allow for exploration or risk taking. The respondent continued, "Somewhere in our politics, how do you create a culture where risk taking is acknowledged and you don't create a ghetto for that also. Politics has to be at some level, risk taking. You will venture an opinion that's not popular. But it's part of how you are trained to understand something. If you don't do that, you get stuck on one or the other axis of anything- either pleasure or victim. Agency or it's completely passive. Real lives are not like that at all. How do you capture that grain of real lives without writing thousand page novels?"

The misplaced sense of surety about their stances that those engaged in social change processes carry, and their implications, was also discussed by another respondent. He said, "There is this general impatience that comes from arrogance and self-righteousness. Critiquing is very violent. There are some things that need to be violently critiqued but when someone makes a remark and there is this immediate lashing out and you estrange somebody and no change happens there. There is no potential for making an ally or changing a person's heart by putting somebody down or insulting. But this has

become the culture of critique. I have seen how queer activists respond on face book to comments, I see that in meetings. There has to be self reflexivity about this. I don't know which project will do that..."

"There is a general activist impatience with ignorance. We are really impatient. If somebody even indicates that they don't understand or they don't know something, we feel that they should know...This puts people in a spot and they feel pressured to take a position, which they are also anxious should be a politically correct one. So without thinking they just take a position, without having enough information or data about the issue. Whether it is what is happening in Kashmir, Chhatisgarh or Kodamkulam power plant, Sri Lankan issue, operation green hunt, North East - they take the correct positions, when I say 'they' I mean 'we'. Very often I have taken a position and then gone and read up on it to see if I have taken the wrong position. I confessed it. But there is this impatience in the activist community. We should then relax that."

Annexure

List of Respondent

Sl. No	Names	Brief Profile
1	Arvind Narain	He is a founder member of Alternative Law Forum (ALF), an organization working with Law and based out of Bangalore. Arvind now works full time at ALF dividing his time between litigation on the criminal side and research and advocacy on sexuality and minority related issues.
2	Chayanika Shah	Dr. Chayanika Shah, Independent Researcher and Activist from Bombay. She is a part of contemporary women's and queer rights movements in India. She is a member of LABIA and Forum Against Oppression of Women in Bombay.
3	Shalini Mahajan	Shalini Mahajan is a writer, researcher, queer feminist activist and a creative writing teacher based in Mumbai, India. She is a member of Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action (LABIA), a queer feminist LBT collective based in Mumbai. Her present research interests are Gender, Sexuality, Feminist Studies, Queer Theory, Crime Fiction and Poetry.
4	Sunil Mohan	He is a gender queer activist and is part of the group called Lesbit which is a group for Lesbians, Bisexual women and Transmen and transgenders assigned female at birth. He lives in Bangalore. He has been working with the transgender community in Bangalore. Over the past year though, his research has given him a deeper understanding of the community, as he interviewed 25 people about their experiences, for a fellowship programme with Open Space.
5	Dr. Paromita Chakravorty	Dr. Paromita Chakravorty is an Associate Professor, Department of English and Joint-Director, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. She completed her doctoral studies in English at the University of Oxford, UK. She teaches Renaissance drama, women's writing, poetry, popular culture, queer and film studies. Her work in the School of Women's Studies has focused on education and sexuality.

Sl. No	Names	Brief Profile
6	Akansha	Akansha is one of the founder members of Sappho for Equality, which is a forum – the first of its kind in eastern India – that has emerged as a consequence of a unique effort to bridge the ever-widening gulf between the queer and the non-queer community in India.
7	Malobika	She is also one of the founder members of Sappho for Equality. Malobika has worked on issues of lesbian, bisexuals and transmen in West Bengal.
8	Rajarshi Chakraborty	He/she is a transgender person who is part of a group called Swikriti in West Bengal. He/She also teaches history in a college in Purulia. Swikriti works closely with the school system and has been able to
9	Fatima Burnad	She is a feminist from Chennai and is part of the Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu. She is part of the Tamil Nadu Women's Forum. She has worked extensively towards restoring human rights and dignity to Dalit and Adivasis across Tamil Nadu.
10	Aniruddhan Vasudevan	Aniruddhan Vasudevan is a performer, writer and queer activist from Chennai, India. He is passionate and vocal about issues around gender, sexuality, social justice, and human rights. Aniruddhan is a founder of The Shakti Resource Center, a non-profit set-up working to further the discourse on these issues.
11	Kavin Malar	She is a Dalit feminist poet, Writer and Journalist. She is currently based in Chennai.
12	L Ramakrishnan	He is a biologist, community organizer and a musician and currently working at Solidarity and Action Against HIV infection in India. He is based in Chennai.
13	Dr. S. Anandhi	She is an Associate Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Women's Studies with the special focus on Gender, Caste and Identity Politics.
14	Sheelu Francis	Sheelu is a Dalit Feminist Activist. She is part of the a group called the Women's Collective in Chennai.

Sl. No	Names	Brief Profile
15	V Geetha	A writer, translator, social historian and activist, V. Geetha is a freelance editor with a number of small research journals. A leading intellectual from Tamil Nadu, she has been active in the Indian women's movement since 1988, organising workshops and conferences. V. Geetha has written widely, both in Tamil and English, on gender, popular culture, caste, and politics of Tamil Nadu.
16	Pramada Menon	Pramada Menon is a founder member of Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) in 2000. CREA (www.creaworld.org) is currently based in New Delhi and aims to enhance the "capacities of a new generation of women leaders using a human rights approach. The organization works on issues of sexuality, reproductive health, violence against women, gender equity, economic justice and women's rights." She is a queer feminist activist and is currently working as a consultant on these issues. Pramada is a stand up comedian and is famous for her Act-Fat Feminist and Free
17	Hasina Khan	A queer-feminist activist, Hasina Khan, an Indian Muslim who overcame her family's conservative views on women in society, has formed a powerful coalition to fight the discrimination against women that is perpetuated by Muslim Personal Law. She is the founder member of Awaaz-e-Niswan, a Muslim Women's group in Bombay.
18	Deepa	She is a Feminist, women's health rights activist. Currently, she heads an organization called Sama which works on women's health and is based in Delhi
19	Maya Sharma	She is a feminist and Queer rights Activist based in Baroda. She has been part of the trade union movement in India. She is the founder member of Parma, which works with transmen and LB Women in Gujarat.

Sl. No	Names	Brief Profile
20	Biraj Pat-nayak	Biraj Patnaik is the Principal Adviser to the Commissioners of the Supreme Court. He works closely with the Commissioners in discharging their mandates i.e., communicate issues and concerns relevant to food entitlements and articulate policy demands with concerned authorities to augment the implementation of Orders relevant to the right to food case; and make state visits, conduct inquiries, and verify complaints on the compliance of said Orders.
21	Sankari T	Sankari is a Hijra Activist from Chennai. She works closely with Shakti Resource Centre and has worked extensively on building linkages between the women's movement, trans movement and the Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu
22	Akshay Khanna	Akshay khanna is a Social Anthropologist, a Lawyer, an activist, artist, theatre practitioner and a development practitioner. Akshay has been part of the Queer movement in India since 1998, and heris doctoral research on Law and Epidemiology as registers of governmentality prioritized by activists has critically contributed to the movement.
23	Nivedita Menon	Feminist theorist, author, and currently a professor teaching political thought in Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for Comparative Politics and Political Theory.
24	Renu Khanna	Renu Khanna, is a Feminist Health Activist and Founder Trustee of SAHAJ - Society for Health Alternatives. She has over 25 years experience in health care management and in training various levels of health care and social development professionals and paraprofessionals. She is well versed in participatory and action research.

Sl. No	Names	Brief Profile
25	Meena Saraswathi Seshu	Meena has more than 20 years of experience working with grassroots, rights-based organisations (particularly with people in sex work) on issues related to HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, violence against women, poverty alleviation, and gender and sexual minority rights. In addition, she has over 10 years of experience working with global movements on violence against women and sex worker rights.
26	Satish Singh	Satish is overseeing the thematic area of Men and Gender Equality in CHSJ (Centre for Health and Social Justice). He has been working on social justice issues since 23 years and on the issue of gender equality, masculinity, sexuality and gender based violence since 10 years. He is a part of SAHAYOG, HUMSAFAR, FEM and Men Engage.
27	Gowthaman	Queer lawyer working in Alternative Law forum (to be added)
28	Dr. Jaya Sharma	Dr Jaya is the, National programme officer of the adolescent education programme in UNFPA and is based in Delhi.



nirantar trust