UNIT 2  QUEER MOVEMENTS

Paromita Chakravarti & Aniruddha Dutta

Structure

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Objectives

2.3 Historical and Social Overview
  2.3.1 Pre-colonial Diversity of Attitudes
  2.3.2 Postcolonial Shifts: The Consolidation of Prejudice and Resistance

2.4 Specific Strands in the Growth of Movements
  2.4.1 Urban GLBT/Queer Groups
  2.4.2 MSM/TG/Kothi Mobilizations on Sexual Health and Human Rights
  2.4.3 Hijra Mobilizations

2.5 The Indigeneity/Authenticity Debate
  2.5.1 The ‘Fire’ Controversy
  2.5.2 Globalisation, Global Queer Movements and HIV and AIDS
  2.5.3 Indigenous Categories: The Kothi-panthi Model

2.6 Identity Politics and its Discontents
  2.6.1 Class, Location and Gender Differences: Gay, MSM, Kothis and Hijras
  2.6.2 Lesbians in the Women’s Movement and the Queer Movement
  2.6.3 From Identity Politics to the Queer Coalition: Roadmap for Future Politics

2.7 Let Us Sum Up

2.8 Glossary

2.9 Unit End Questions

2.10 End Notes

2.11 References

2.12 Suggested Readings

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous unit on the social construction of sexuality sets the stage for learning more about queer movements - that is, movements by and for people and communities that have been marginalized, oppressed or stigmatized for their gender/sexuality. While such marginalization has always
existed in some form, the character of such social prejudice and marginalization has been historically changing and mobile. In fact, as discussed in the section on socio-historical background, pre-colonial attitudes to same-sex behavior and gender transgression depended on other factors like caste - cross-caste heterosexual behaviour was often more condemned by many lawmakers and commentators in ancient India than sexual acts among persons of the same gender.

In the modern (colonial and postcolonial period), there was a gradual consolidation of prejudice against all forms of same-sex behaviour, now brought under the purview of a single colonial law which outlawed all non-heterosexual penetrative sex (see section 2.3.1). Simultaneously, same-sex acts and gender-transgression gradually come to be seen as the basis of distinct kinds of persons such as the ‘homosexual’, rather than just behaviors or acts that anyone may indulge in (Foucault, 1976/1990). These developments are the prerequisite and context for modern queer movements - movements which have usually based themselves on some conception of gender/sexual identity, whether Gay, lesbian, Kothi or Hijra (see glossary at the end of the unit for an explanation of these terms). However, the growth of such identity politics has also been accompanied by a lot of controversy and contention - raising questions like, which identities are authentically ‘Indian’ and which are ‘westernised’? Can sexuality-based movements gather persons of different class/caste backgrounds under the same umbrella? How far do gay men and lesbian women share similar ground on basis of sexuality, or does gender difference create irreconcilable political differences? These are some of the questions and issues that we will deal with in this unit on queer movements in India.

Broadly, we will discuss three broad trajectories or routes that queer and GLBT (gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender) movements have taken in India - a) urban middle-class mobilizations for gay/lesbian rights which have also attempted to build social spaces for GLBT people; b) mobilizations of lower-class sections like Kothis and other MSM (males who have sex with males), often funded or supported through the HIV/AIDS programs and targeted health sector interventions, and c) Hijra mobilization through participation in electoral politics and the formation of political fronts, as well as demands for state recognition, rights and health care. Besides this we shall also look at the contribution to LGBT issues through discussions on gender and sexuality which have come from the feminist movements.
2.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you would be able to:

• Critically analyse the historical background for the queer movement;
• State the specific strands for the growth of such movements;
• List and describe the indigenous categories of queer movements; and
• Explain identity politics and its consequences.

2.3 HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL OVERVIEW

2.3.1 Pre-colonial Diversity of Attitudes

According to Ruth Vanita and Salim Kidwai, in pre-colonial times we see many diverse attitudes towards same sex desires and behaviours, as well as to gender transgression, depending on specific factors like caste, gender and community. This is manifested in the legal, religious and medical treatises in ancient and early medieval India. In her study of sexual and moral codes in the Shastras and Sutras, Vanita notes that though most of them “subordinate non-penetrative as well as non-heterosexual sex to penetrative heterosexual sex”, there is no uniform category of forbidden sex (such as ‘sodomy’) nor any single category of the offender (such as the ‘homosexual’), and thus no uniform punishment (Vanita & Kidwai, 2001, p.105). Many forms of heterosexual sex (like cross-caste sex) might invite greater disapproval than same-sex practices. There are also many instances of ‘positive’ depictions of same-sex desire in literary and visual texts (Vanita & Kidwai, 2001; Vanita, 2001).

The British administration instituted the colonial agenda of the ‘reform’ of native societies through several laws that targeted gendered or sexual practices. Among these, the most famous is of course the ban on ‘sati’ - but among less progressive examples, we can count the criminalization of ‘sodomy’ i.e. non-heterosexual or even non-peno-vaginal sex, through Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The law prohibited all carnal intercourse “against the order of nature” and will be discussed in detail in the next section. While the law was a specific formulation to address ‘unnatural’ offences, it drew its impetus from the anxieties about the supposed degeneracy of ‘native’ societies. Unlike the Sati or the Age of Consent laws, it did not seek ‘native’ opinions nor go through a public debate even among the indigenous elite. Thus, the many different perceptions and attitudes to same-sex desire/love were sought to be effaced by a single law against ‘unnatural sex’.
2.3.2 Postcolonial Shifts: The Consolidation of Prejudice and Resistance

IPC 377 never seems to have been enforced in a serious and consistent manner as a law, with convictions being comparatively rare. However, it helped to reinforce the colonial discourse about the ‘effeteness’ and ‘degeneracy’ of the natives (manifested through homosexuality and often equated with effeminacy) which made them unfit for self-governance and justified their subordination to the ‘manly British’. The indigenous educated elite internalised these anxieties into their self-perception and the nationalist project was often conceived as an attempt to revitalise the failed masculinities of the sons of Mother India (Sinha, 1995).

The existing patriarchal barriers to homoerotic desire and strictures about proper gender roles could now be consolidated and reinforced in the name of the nation. We begin to see this in pre-independence discussions of homosexuality, such as the 1920s debate around the pejorative stories by the nationalist writer ‘Ugra’ (Pandey Bechan Sharma), or Gandhi’s 1929 letter in Young India on curbing this “unnatural vice”. Even now, every time there are calls to revoke 377, ironically, this British colonial law is defended in the name of protecting Indian culture, society or the sanctity of the nation.

However, this consolidation of prejudice also serves as the prerequisite for gender/sexual identity politics and the growth of queer movements. For instance, Section 377 has been used to mobilize an oppositional movement uniting many different sections of queer people, women’s and child right’s groups (see ‘Voices against 377’ in Section B). This mostly happened in late 1980s and 1990s - a complex period in the history of independent India, marked simultaneously by socio-economic liberalization/globalization and the political rise of Hindu right nationalism (Kapur, 1999; Mazzarella, 2004). This decade was marked by increasingly visible representations of same-sex desiring and transgender subjects in the media. Dominant discourses of national identity attacked such representations as foreign to ‘Indian culture’ and even threatening to national sovereignty and security (Kapur, 1999). The most publicized instance would be the 1998-9 controversy over Fire, a film depicting a sexual relationship between two women. The Hindu right wing virulently proclaimed lesbianism as a western import, not only un-Indian but also as corrupting Indian womanhood and values. Such discourses show how patriarchal and upper caste ideologies come to constitute normative definitions of ‘Indian culture’ and national identity (John & Niranjana, 1999; Chatterjee, 1989).
In response, several GLBT activists have sought equal status within the nation by highlighting the historical presence of same-sex desire and gender transgression within ‘Indian culture/s’, thus breaking down a monolithic and conservative view of Indian identity. But they have also sometimes deployed essentialist arguments of their own - like a nostalgic idealization of a supposedly liberal Hindu antiquity or a pre-colonial indigenous tolerance of different sexualities and genders (Kapur, 1999, p.358). While undeniably important in claiming silenced or marginalized histories, scholars have noted how such claims are often articulated with reference to high or ‘classical’ culture and can become Hindu-normative, even attributing the historical rise of homophobic attitudes to Muslim invasions and thus mirroring a classic argument of Hindu-right nationalism (Kapur, 1999).

There has also been a wave of ‘positive’ media coverage in multiple languages since the 1990s, decrying conservative trends and foregrounding, even celebrating emergent gay and lesbian subjects and subcultures as signs of progress connected with economic liberalization and cultural globalization (Dutta, 2008). For instance, a 2005 article in the Kolkata newspaper The Telegraph cites a locally-held GLBT pride walk as evidence of changing social mores and states, “One doesn’t have to look too far for the reasons for this change in attitudes. The City of Joy itself is changing. Shopping malls... have mushroomed... satellite television and multiplexes have added spice to life... Call centres have engaged a brigade of young workers — (who) are making money and willing to spend it” (‘Oh Calcutta’, The Telegraph, 7 August 2005). This ‘progressive’ stance therefore may become elitist by linking queer movements with upper middle-class culture, ignoring the problems and agendas of lower-class sections like Hijras or rural same-sex desiring women (Dutta, 2008).

Thus, even though to some extent there has been a consolidation of both anti-queer prejudice as well as queer resistance in the postcolonial period, there remain enormous differences in the problems, priorities and agendas of different sections. Thus, distinct forms of mobilization or activism have grown up around different identities or marginalized groups. We turn to these in the next section.

**Check Your Progress:** Compare and contrast the pre-colonial and post-colonial paradigms for the consolidation of prejudices and resistance for the queer people.
2.4 SPECIFIC STRANDS IN THE GROWTH OF MOVEMENTS

There is no unified or centralized ‘queer’ or ‘GLBT’ movement in India, given the diverse forms of marginalization faced by different people due to their gender or sexual difference. For example, while urban men who identify as ‘gay’ may often face stigma due to their sexual orientation, the oppression faced by lesbian women is compounded due to their prior disempowerment as women within patriarchy (Shah, 2005). Again, rural transgender or Hijra sections are not just marginalized because of flouting gender norms, but are also oppressed by caste/class hierarchies, which intersect with gendered oppression to compound their disempowerment within social structures. So we have to account for the diverse forms of resistance and organization that develop in response to these different situations. Different geographical regions have also had different trajectories of queer mobilizations, split further among urban and rural locations. Yet these different strands of activism have also connected and influenced each other in coalitions like ‘Voices Against 377’ against the colonial law which criminalized ‘unnatural’ sexual activity (taken to mean any non-heterosexual or non-peno-vaginal sexual acts). While the coalition itself was Delhi-based, different groups and non-governmental organizations across the country came together during the campaign. As a result of a Public Interest Litigation backed up by this combined campaign, the law was ‘read down’ in 2009 to exclude consensual sex among same-gender adults from its purview - marking a shared triumph for diverse sections of the queer movement(s).

Although queer individuals and groups struggle and resist patriarchal power in everyday situations (such as female same-sex couples who defy social norms to marry) and these scattered acts of resistance continue to inspire activists and organizations, for our purposes we will identify some of the major strands of organized, institutionalized activism. These may be divided under the following three major heads:

a) Gay/lesbian/queer groups and activism in the metropolitan or urban areas (Joseph, 2005; Narrain & Bhan, 2005; Cohen, 2005)


c) Hijra assertion through participation in electoral politics and the formation of political fronts, as well as demands for state recognition, rights and health care (Karp, 1998; Reddy, 2003)
While the above distinctions have been made keeping in mind differences in gender/sexual identity and class/caste position (e.g. Hijra/Gay) as well as location (urban/small-town/rural), these are not strict divisions. As we shall see, there may be many overlaps between the above strands - for example, common issues like HIV-AIDS prevention may connect Kothi & Hijra mobilizations, and urban gay and MSM groups may have connected histories. Often, events like Pride walks (see Box 2.1) and film festivals also bring together many different sections and groups.

2.4.1 Urban GLBT/Queer Groups

Some of the first organized GLBT/queer groups started in big metropolitan cities like Mumbai and Delhi among self-identified gay and lesbian activists, with cities like Kolkata and Chennai soon following suit. Each metro has its distinct histories of institutionalization and group formation. In 1990, Bombay Dost, which describes itself as “India’s first registered LGBT magazine”, was launched by Ashok Row Kavi in Mumbai (www.bombaydost.co.in). In August 1993, Counsel Club, a collective of largely urban gay or homosexual-identified men was formed in Kolkata (Joseph, 2005). Following similar sporadic initiatives like Club de Messieurs (1989) and Fun Club (1990), this was the first such collective in Kolkata that sustained itself for a few years. The next year, in 1994, Humsafar Trust was established in Mumbai and attempted to create social spaces for GLBT persons, parallel to political organizing and sexual health interventions (see next section for more on Humsafar). The same year, the group Good As You started in Bangalore as “a safe space for LesBiGay (Lesbian Bisexual and Gay) people to discuss, debate, share views and information” (www.goodasyou.in).

From early on, gay rights activism became connected with HIV-AIDS prevention work. In 1991 the Delhi-based NGO, AIDS Vedbhav Virodhi Andolan (henceforth ABVA) published one of the first reports on the situation of sexual minorities in the country, titled Less Than Gay (Joseph, 2005). ABVA also conducted a pioneering public protest against arrest of supposedly homosexual men from a public park in 1992 in Delhi, and filed the first petition against Section 377 and other forms of discrimination (Joseph, 2005).

Lesbian groups often had distinct histories and concerns compared to the gay/MSM collectives. As Chayanika Shah of Stree Sangam notes, many were politicized through the larger feminist movement in the 1980s, and participated in campaigns against rape and violence against women (Shah, 2005, p.144). In the 1990s, distinct lesbian feminist groups such as Stree Sangam/LABIA, Sappho, Sangini and others emerged, having links with both
the women’s and Gay rights movements. *Stree Sangam* was set up in 1995, and changed its name to *LABIA* (Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action) in 2004 (www.labiacollective.org). The lesbian feminist group *Sappho* was established on 20th June, 1999 in Kolkata to advocate “the rights of sexually marginalized women” (*Swakanthe*, vol. 6 no. 3). Since 2004, it publishes the bilingual journal *Swakanthey* biennally (www.sapphokolkata.org). Founded in 1997, the Delhi-based *Sangini* (India) Trust works with women to “create, disseminate and redefine knowledge on women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights; and provide safe and supportive spaces to women dealing with issues around their sexuality and sexual rights” (www.sanginii.org).

Some organizations like the *Sahayatrika* project in Kerala worked outside of urban spaces with rural women of diverse religious and class backgrounds, but had to depend on foreign funding in order to be able to carry out such work (Deepa, 2005). Most of these organizations, however, shared certain common aims: creating support networks and spaces, providing counseling services, and spearheading advocacy initiatives against violence and campaigns for queer women’s rights.

### 2.4.2 MSM/TG/Kothi Mobilizations on Sexual Health and Human Rights

Even though urban groups started working with and organizing homosexual males in early 1990s, these spaces often did not extend to lower class males who had sex with males, including transvestites (cross-dressers) and male sex workers (Gupta, 2005). These marginalized sections often had cruising sites and networks of their own, even in smaller towns like Varanasi (Cohen, 2005; Gupta, 2005). However, when some NGOs began working on HIV-AIDS prevention among these groups, they became an important and vital part of the growth of the broader queer movement and contributed to the expansion of networks and institutions (Dutta, forthcoming). The NGOs *Naz Foundation (India) Trust* and the *Humsafar Trust* were established in Delhi and Mumbai respectively. These were two pioneering NGOs working with, and drawing members from, lower class MSM (males who have sex with males) and TG (transgender) sections in the cities of Delhi and Mumbai and their suburbs (www.humsafar.org; http://www.nazindia.org/about.htm).

In Chennai, the NGO *Sahodaran* was started in 1997 as “a health education outreach organization to the underclass and underserved community of male sex workers (MSWs) and wherever possible to their MSM and female customers in Chennai” (*Gay India 2006 - Part 3, Chennai/Madras*; http://globalgays.com). Surveys carried out among MSM in Chennai by *Sahodaran*
discovered the use of the Hijra term ‘Kothi’ to describe non-Hijra ‘feminine’ males, and this term (‘Kothi’) soon spread from South India to become an important all-India category describing a loosely-bonded range of people including ‘feminine’ males, transvestites (cross-dressers), etc. (Cohen, 2005). The ‘Kothi’ category, along with MSM and TG, became an important designator of ‘target groups’ (see Box 2.1 below) for HIV-AIDS prevention, as well as a category for political mobilization.

Box 2.1: GLBTQ (‘Rainbow’) Pride

In many parts of the world, ‘Pride’ walks and related events are held by GLBTQ peoples to assert and celebrate their visibility and presence, and to raise political demands for rights, dignity and inclusion. They are usually held in late June, to commemorate the Stonewall Riots in New York, 1969, when transgender and gay men protested regular police raids in a gay-friendly bar.

- The first Pride walk in India was held in Kolkata in 1999, to assert visibility and demand rights for sexual minorities. Till 2008, this was the only pride parade held on a regular basis in India.
- On 29 June 2008, four Indian cities (Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata and Puducherry) celebrated Pride parades in coordination. These were the first Pride Parades in Delhi, Bangalore and Puducherry.
- Mumbai held its first pride march on 16 August 2008, in proximity to the Indian independence day celebrations and titled “Queer Azadi [freedom] March”.
- Pride walks have been spaces where middle and lower class sections (like Gay men, Kothis and few Hijras) have, to an extent, come together under common banners.

In Kolkata, too, organizations like Counsel Club and, later, Pratay Gender Trust (http://orgs.tigweb.org/pratyay-gender-trust) and Dum Dum Swikriti Society (http://www.infosem.org/swikriti.htm) developed with members from both middle and lower class sections (Gupta, 2005; Dutta, forthcoming). In 2004, several of these organisations formed Manas Bangla, a networked Community-Based Organization (CBO) working for sexual health and human rights of MSM in West Bengal (Khanna, 2009, http://manasbangla.org/).

In Bangalore, NGOs like Sangama and Swabhava Trust played an important role to bring together diverse lower class sections into collective spaces and fronts. The Sangama website defines ‘sexual minorities’ as “includ[ing], but not limited to, Hijras, Kothis, doubledeckers, jogappas, lesbians, bisexuals,
homosexuals, gays, female-to-male/male-to-female transsexuals and other transgenders”. Thus, organisations like Sangama and Vividha have been important to creating a platform of solidarity for Kothis, transgenders and Hijras.

In the Western part of the country, the Lakshya Trust was established in Vadodara, Gujarat to work on HIV/AIDS education and prevention, especially among MSM in the region. It later expanded branches to Baroda, Rajkot and Surat. However, these networks have almost entirely excluded female-born persons - both due to the centrality of male-born gender-variant persons to Hijra and Kothi subcultures, and due to the focus on MSM (males who have sex with males) as a primary target group within national HIV-AIDS prevention initiatives.

2.4.3 Hijra Mobilizations

Hijras, often referred to as the ‘third gender’ of India, are a complex and internally varied group of mostly male-born and a few biologically intersex persons, who cross-dress and may or may not undergo voluntary castration. They have had a long history of internal organization through lineages of gurus (leaders/guides) and their chelas (followers) (see Reddy, 2003, 2005).

Stigmatized and confined to the outskirts of mainstream society much more than middle class GLBT sections, it is no wonder that mobilization among Hijras often happened parallel to but separate from the more GLBT-identified activism.

An early assertion of Hijra rights came in 1994 when the leader of a Hijra house in Delhi wrote an open letter to Hindustan Times demanding government attention for “sexually underprivileged” sections like Hijras (Reddy, 2005).

Box 2.2: Campaign against IPC Section 377

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was a colonial law that criminalized all forms of sexual contact/intercourse defined as “unnatural”: “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 term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.” While it may be interpreted as applying to any non-peno-vaginal sex even between heterosexual persons, it has been largely used to criminalize and harass homosexual/Gay/transgender males, especially lower class sections (PUCL-K, 2003).
In December 2001, A PIL (Public Interest Litigation) was filed in the Delhi High Court on behalf of Naz Foundation India demanding a reading down of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code to exclude consensual adult same-sex relations from its purview (Joseph, 2005).

In 2002, ‘Voices Against 377’ was formed as a coalition of queer rights, women’s rights and child rights groups, mobilising against Section 377 as an infringement of the fundamental rights of sexual minorities.

On July 2, 2009, a landmark judgment by the Delhi High court in response to the aforementioned PIL by Naz Foundation (India) read down IPC Section 377 to exclude sexual activity among consenting same-sex partners from its purview.

Even as some NGOs like Sangama and Vividha started working with Hijras in South India, many Hijras sought inclusion or visibility within the mainstream through political participation and contesting elections - a strategy not seen in other GLBTQ sections. In 1998, in one of the first cases of Hijra electoral success, Shobha Nehru was elected as a city council member in the city of Hissar (Karp, 1998; Reddy, 2003). In 1999, Kamla Jaan became the Mayor of Katni in Madhya Pradesh and functioned in that office from January 2000, until her office was challenged by the right-wing BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) in 2003. In 2000, Shabnam “Mausi” Bano became the first Hijra to be elected to legislative office, as a member of the Madhya Pradesh State Legislative Assembly from the Sohagpur constituency in state’s Shahdol district.

Simultaneously, some Hijra leaders established organizations for the welfare of their communities. The Dai Welfare Society (1999) and Astitva (2006) were two important organizations established in Mumbai by prominent Hijra leaders Lata Guru and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi respectively.

Concurrently in Tamil Nadu, the Thamilnadu Aravanigal Association (THAA) was formed in 1998 as a socio-political organization for Aravanis (transgenders and Hijras) and has taken part in lobbying for the community, simultaneously providing safe spaces (http://www.infosem.org/thaa.htm). In response to the efforts of this and other similar organizations, the government of Tamil Nadu established a ‘Transgender Welfare Board’ in April 2008. Similarly in Karnataka, in response to the advocacy of organizations like Sangama, the state government included transgenders and Hijras on the list of backward castes in 2010. (http://www.hindu.com/2010/11/12/stories/2010111267080400.htm).
In the meantime, some NGOs and CBOs (community-based organizations) had started to bridge and collectivize Hijras with other transgender- or transsexual-identified sections - but this was not a simple process. Ashwini Sukthankar notes in an essay on the organization Vividha that while transsexuals and Hijras have been forming alliances, there are differences between Hijras and transgender/transsexual-identified persons, ranging from class status to relevant political issues (Sukthankar, 2005). In spite of these differences, a major ‘Hijra Habba’ (meet) was organized in Bangalore in 2002 by members of Vividha and Sangama, which brought together Hijra, transgender as well as broader sexual minority communities of Bangalore. The ‘Habba’ was intended as a forum for public visibility and organization and was repeated in 2003. While it stopped following the suicide of one of the key organizers, Famila, in 2004, it was reincarnated in 2009 as the ‘Karnataka Queer Habba’ as an inclusive platform continuing the legacy of the earlier ‘Habbas’. The next year, in 2010, the Association of Transgender and Hijra in Bengal (ATHB) was established in West Bengal, and intended to unify Hijras and Transgender persons as a separate front from MSM groups. Since 2010, ATHB has organized a ‘Transgender Day’ in Kolkata on April 30th in order to raise awareness and visibility of issues such as violence that affect Hijras as well as other Transgender-identified persons. On the national level, the inclusion of a third category (‘other’) besides male and female in the 2011 census has been taken as a positive step for the recognition, enumeration and welfare of these communities (http://tcjm.org/2011/01/13/nepal-india-transgender-census-category/).

Check Your Progress: Why do you think different categories of queer people mobilized themselves in a distinctive way? Explain and analyse these differences in your own words.
2.5 THE INDIGENEITY/AUTHENTICITY DEBATE

The central debates surrounding the queer movement in India have been framed by the charge of ‘westernisation’ which has connected issues of sexual preference and sexual identity to questions of national and global identities. Homosexuality has been seen as a foreign import alien to Indian culture (see Section 2.3.2 above). However, the work of Geeti Thadani, Ruth Vanita, Saleem Kidwai and others have demonstrated how same sex love has been an integral aspect of Indian cultural traditions. Vanita has famously argued that it is not homosexuality but homophobia which has been imported from the West, through the British colonial law, IPC 377, which has criminalised “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” and led to the suppression of the long tradition of multiple and diverse non-normative sexual practices in India (Vanita & Kidwai, 2001). Despite this scholarship, questions of queer sexualities in India still remain embedded in allegations of foreignness and evoke questions of nationhood and ‘authentic Indianness’. Nivedita Menon notes how the diasporic LGBT group, SALGA (South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association) was not allowed to march in the Indian Independence Day parade in New York because they represented identities which “could not by definition be Indian”, since homosexuality did not exist in India (Menon, 2007, p. 41).

2.5.1 The ‘Fire’ Controversy

The indigeneity debate became most intense in the controversy surrounding the release of Deepa Mehta’s film ‘Fire’ in 1998 which depicted a traditional Hindu North Indian joint family headed by a Gandhian patriarch, in which the two daughters-in-law, with iconic Hindu mythological names, Radha and Sita, get involved in a homoerotic relationship and decide to leave home. Hindu Right wing parties like the Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena, attacked cinema halls and stopped screenings of the film, asserting that the depiction of lesbianism was contrary to Indian culture and would corrupt Indian viewers, particularly women. The spokesperson for the Patit Pavan Sangathan, said that the film should be banned to protect “society and our own daughters, wives and sisters” from these “western concept of lesbianism” (Kapur, 2002, p. 185). The diasporic identity of the filmmaker, Deepa Mehta helped their case. They protested against Mehta’s subversive use of Hindu myths and symbols as a backdrop to the story of lesbian love, for instance the provocative deployment of the Ramayana narrative, traditionally regarded as an ideal for a wifely devotion, or the ritual of Karva chauth in which women fast for their husband’s wellbeing in the film’s portrayal of lesbian love. The Hindu right’s conflation of Hindu and Indian made the film anti-national in their eyes.
It was also argued that although there was social acceptance of female bonding and homosociality in Indian culture, to brand these relationships in terms of sexual identities, to call them ‘lesbian’ would in fact cause outrage and backlash. But it was in fact the emergence of the word, ‘lesbian’ in public discourse, probably for the first time in India, following the ‘Fire’ controversy, which many queer activists found liberating. They came out on the streets unabashedly proclaiming their sexual identities, protesting against the attempts to sabotage ‘Fire’. They asserted that homosexuality was not alien to Indian culture, holding placards saying ‘Indian and Lesbian’. A long conspiracy of silence had been broken. Maya Sharma writes about this euphoric and momentous time: “The word ‘lesbian’ was on the front page of every newspaper I picked up in Delhi. LESBIAN. It looked odd and out of place—a word so loaded with fear and embarrassment and prejudice, a word shrouded in silence, a whisper that spoke of an identity that must be hidden from others, that frightening word that dare not cross any threshold, was on that winter morning landing at the doorsteps of millions of households in many parts of the country…My neighbour was going to read it. The Mother Dairy man was going to read it. The woman in the workshop. My sister-in-law…” (Sharma, 2006, p.12). This national ‘coming out’ of lesbianism inspired many to come out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2.3: A ‘Fiery’ Controversy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Why are such films made here? They can be made in the US or other Western countries. A theme like lesbianism does not fit in the Indian atmosphere.”—Union Minister for Home, L.K Advani, ex-president, BJP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Do we have lesbian culture in our families? Surely, this film has put all of us in a shameful light.” Shiv Sena leader Madhukar Sarpotdar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2.5.2 Globalisation, Global Queer Movements and HIV and AIDS**

The ‘Fire’ controversy should be located within the context of the cultural anxieties sparked off by the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990’s and the associated loosening up of sexual regimes. Satellite television and western advertising was importing sexually implicit images into Indian homes, which for many was an attack on the very foundations of Indianness. Partha Chatterjee and others have shown how nineteenth century Hindu revivalists had reconstituted the home as a ‘pure’ space uncontaminated by the colonial encounter, a bastion of Indian culture untouched by the forces of western modernity which had reconfigured the world outside (Chatterjee,
1989). In post-colonial India, globalisation seemed to unleash an attack on this space and many including the Hindu Right saw their role as vigilant protectors of ‘Indian’ traditions, particularly the family, against this neo-imperialist onslaught.

One of the most serious challenges to the heteronormative family was being launched by the emerging queer movement in India, supported by the growing networks of South Asian diasporic queer organisations. From the late 1980’s they helped to establish the early gay groups in India like the Counsel Club and Humsafar Trust. This ‘foreign’ support for the Indian gay communities intensified the idea of homosexuality as a ‘western’ phenomenon. It helped to counter gay demands for the removal of IPC 377 with the assertion that such a law was needed in ‘traditional societies’ like India where homosexuality was unknown.

Unfounded as this claim was, it is undeniable that increased global exchanges did expose Indian gay communities to Western sexual identity movements and categories. It also made them aware that these identities had almost no Indian vernacular equivalents. So beyond the knee-jerk labeling of LGBT movements as ‘western’ imports, more serious questions needed to be asked about the translatability of global sexual identities in an Indian context.

Although a transnational LGBT movement needs to be based on common identity categories, it is the hegemonic ‘western’ gay subject which dominates it, marginalizing non-Western, local, sexual practices and subjectivities and imposing global/ western identity categories on them. This divides local movements since only the privileged, English language speaking urban queer groups have access and exposure to the global movement. Vernacular, non-metropolitan sexualities thus remain excluded and unrepresented. However, scholars like Lawrence Cohen (2005) and Gayatri Reddy (2005) have demonstrated, that even categories like ‘gay’ are not necessarily unproblematically ‘western’ and might already be hybridized by their adoption in non-western contexts. Similarly so-called vernacular categories too may be produced through mutual interactions and mediations with transnational discourses of HIV and AIDS. The creation of the epidemiological MSM rubric with the subgroups of ‘Kothi’ and ‘panthi’ for purposes of mobilization is a case in point. (Dutta, forthcoming). This will be discussed in Section 2.5.3.

The questions of indigenous sexual practices received a different inflection and intensity with the detection of the early cases of HIV and AIDS in India, also in the late 1980’s. Because of international sex trafficking, drug trade, migrations, sex tourism, HIV and AIDS reached a global pandemic status
quickly requiring global management through international bodies like the World Health Organisation. International NGOs also set up base in India to tackle the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Since casual, unprotected sex was considered one of the most important routes of the spread of HIV and AIDS, attention was focused on the sexual behaviours of ‘high risk groups’ like gay men and commercial sex-workers. Targeted interventions among male gay communities helped to break the silence around same-sex love and the sexuality rights movement gained ground. The state was forced to recognize the need to revoke IPC 377. But the association of HIV and AIDS with homosexuality on the one hand and international agencies on the other, reconfirmed the apprehension that homosexuality was a ‘western’ import leading to ‘western’ diseases like HIV and AIDS which are combated by ‘western’ NGOs. Such agencies were suspected of being ‘anti-national’ even by sections of the government. The offices of a Naz Foundation affiliated NGO which worked on HIV and AIDS issues with MSM communities were raided by the police on the charge that the founder of Naz, Shivananda Khan, was a Pakistani spy who was running a ‘gay club’ under the cover of the NGO (Cohen, 2005).

2.5.3 Indigenous Categories: The Kothi-panthi Model

Since homosexuality was illegal, the HIV and AIDS prevention work with gay communities remained stigmatized. Besides, the identity category of ‘gay’ was felt to be inappropriate and inadequate to understand the diverse same sex practices in India. Research revealed that in India, sexuality was often less a question of identity and more a matter of practice or behaviour—it was a description of what one did rather than who one was. In many cases men who had sex with men described it as a recreation, ‘masthi’ or an aspect of male sociality rather than as a mark of their identity—sometimes they were even married to women. HIV and AIDS work thus introduced the less stigmatized category of ‘men having sex with men’ or MSM which was a description of practice rather than identity.

Indigenous sexual cultures and practices had to be understood alongside the complexities of the differences of caste, class, kinship and gender in order to make the HIV and AIDS initiatives effective in the Indian context. The imperative to go beyond global identity categories and explore ‘authentic’ local terms led to the adoption of ‘Kothi’, a word used by ‘alis’ or Hijras in Chennai to describe ‘feminine’ males who were not necessarily a part of the Hijra community. ‘Kothi’ came to refer to effeminate men who desire to be penetrated by ‘real’ men whom they call ‘panthis’. As a category which was based on gender rather than sexual norms (the basis of
‘western’ sexual identity categories of LGBT), the Kothi-panthi model was adopted widely within HIV and AIDS discourse as representing a specifically non-Western mode of marking identities. Within these terms gay men were an elite minority, distanced from local communities where AIDS interventions increasingly deployed this new terminology.

However, gay groups such as Ashok Row Kavi’s Humsafar Trust questioned the authenticity of the ‘Kothi’ category. The universalisation of the Kothi identity in HIV and AIDS discourse also created new hegemonies within the queer movement. Since NGO funding patterns and state support are linked to dominant modes of identifying MSM communities, marginal subjects desiring visibility began adopting the ‘Kothi’ identity even though they did not originally think of themselves or their practices as such. Thus the indigeneity of the Kothi model remains debatable (Cohen, 2005). Relatively, however, the Hijras have enjoyed a more widely-acknowledged and less controversial stature as an ‘Indian’ and ‘South Asian’ identity and category.

The quest for an authentic Indian sexual identity category is almost as elusive as the ideal of a heterosexual Indian nation where homosexuality is unknown. Global sexual identity movements and the HIV and AIDS discourse have no doubt marginalised and appropriated local sexual practices by imposing their categories on them. But through this they have also visibilised queer communities and incorporated them within larger international rights movements. Besides, vernacular discourses do not exist in a pure, ‘traditional’ space. They sustain dominant sexual discourse in their own interest or modify and are modified by them creating new and hybrid identities.

2.6 IDENTITY POLITICS AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Having looked at the formation of indigenous categories of queer identities in India, let us now consider the impact of factors such as class, location and gender on the status of these identities, from the perspective of gender equity.

2.6.1 Class, Location and Gender Differences: Gay, MSM, Kothis and Hijras

In the preceding section we saw how questions of authenticity and indigeneity divide the queer movement in India. It is also split along axes of class, caste, kinship and gender. The divisions between Gay and MSM or Gay and Kothi is not simply a question of western vs. indigenous identity, it also involves questions of class and location—gay identifying men being associated with urban, elite groups and Kothis with more non-metropolitan, non English
speaking communities. Gupta (2005) describes how Kothis might not gain access to middle-class or upper-class social spaces frequented by gay men, and how such class discrimination results in the splintering of activist groups along class lines. However, with the ‘Kothi’ identity being appropriated as a dominant category in HIV discourse, Kothis, too, might want to dissociate themselves from the Hijras, who are socially stigmatized because of their transvestism, gender variance, practices of ritualized begging and sexwork. So although the very term ‘Kothi’ is a Hijra coinage, Reddy describes how in a clinic set up for MSMs and Kothis, Hijras are only allowed once a week, because their presence would mean it was a ‘homosex’ clinic and thus the MSMs and Kothis frequenting it would be exposed (Reddy, 2005).

The election of Hijras to public posts has increased their visibility but perhaps not necessarily their social acceptance. Undeniably, groups like Astitva and Charchowghi in Mumbai, ATHB in Bengal and many other such organizations across the country have been formed to mobilise Hijras outside the MSM banner and also to raise other issues.

Within the queer movement the status of Hijras remains unstable. Although sometimes considered a part of the MSM/ Kothi group, they remain marginalised within the larger mainstream middle class gay men’s discourse. They also disavow these categories since some of them might see themselves as women rather than as men who have sex with men. The HIV and AIDS discourse has categorised them as sexworkers since many of them practice sexwork. This too is not an identity that they are comfortable with. Although they have been granted legal recognition by the Madras High Court as “Third Gender” or “E” category, not all Hijras accept it, since many identify as women. There are increasing attempts within LGBT collectives to incorporate Hijras as Transgenders. The recognition of a section of the Hijras through the setting up of the Board by the Tamil Nadu government, the declaration of the Transgender day (15th April) and the identification of all transgenders as backward class in Karnataka are important gains. But as Ashwini Sukthankar points out, there is a distinct class divide between those who identify as transgenders, which is a sexual identity, and Hijras, who see themselves more as a subcultural community (Sukthankar, 2005, p.165). So despite their social visibility, their political presence and their importance within the HIV discourse as a high risk group, they remain relatively marginal in the queer movement. Could this be attributed to their gender variance, their need to be identified as women who occupy peripheral social spaces? The queer movement does not always guarantee gender equity. This is most evident in the context of the near invisibilisation of lesbian identities in the LGBT movement.
2.6.2 Lesbians in the Women’s Movement and the Queer Movement

The identity struggles described above revolve around the contingencies of HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns or the movement to revoke IPC 377. Since lesbians had never been considered either a high-risk group for HIV and AIDS interventions, nor as a group criminalized by 377, they have remained marginalized within the queer movement. Describing early attempts of lesbian alliances with gays, Kothis and Hijras, Chayanika Shah, one of the founder members of LABIA (Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action), expresses a sense of alienation: “Their issues were more related to public spaces, ours were about invisibility” (Shah, 2005, p. 149). While gays, Kothis and Hijras were harassed publicly by police and others because of their sexual identities, lesbians seemed to have no existence at all, legally, socially or in the public imagination.

Shah also speaks of the difficulties lesbians had in forging a collective politics with gay communities which were exclusively male and sometimes patriarchal, even misogynistic enclaves. While lesbians could make a common cause with queer communities on the denial of sexual rights, the peculiar problems that lesbians had as women, as victims of gender discrimination remained unaddressed. As such, they felt a natural alignment with the women’s movement.

Historically, lesbian organisations have emerged out of and worked closely with the women’s movement—for instance many of the founding members of Labia were active in the Bombay based Forum Against Oppression of Women and the Kolkata-based lesbian and bisexual support group, Sappho was associated with and remains allied to the network of women’s organizations, Maitree (Akansha & Malobika, 2007, p.366). Having started their activism in the women’s movement these lesbian organizations have framed issues of sexuality rights in the context of gender oppression. However, feminist organizing in India has been around the axis of gender rather than that of sexuality of which it has remained wary.

Within the Indian women’s movement, sexuality has been discussed primarily in the context of reproductive health or sexual violence. Sexual preference has been considered a ‘private’ issue, affecting only a minority. It was seen as an agenda which could be deferred till other more pressing demands for women’s rights in other spheres had been met. In the ‘International Women’s Day’ rally of 8th March, 2000, Maya Sharma reports, that “Left organizations were uneasy with the word ‘lesbian’ being mentioned in the pamphlets, because they felt that working class women might be offended by it”
(Sharma, 2006, p.14) and that this might distract attention away from the ‘more important’ issues. This tendency of seeing sexuality as a bourgeois issue which does not concern the poor is not unusual in the Left women’s movement. Within the autonomous women's movement there have been more active attempts to discuss sexuality rights, though hesitantly. The decision to have lesbian groups like Sappho and Labia organize the seventh National Conference on Women’s Movements in Kolkata in 2006 marked a significant attempt on the part of the women’s movement to “affirm diversities” while “resisting divisiveness”.

Lesbian mobilising has enabled the women’s movement to recognize the importance of sexualities. It has also raised crucial questions about the subject of feminism by problematising the conceptualisation of woman. Are only biologically female persons women? It has alerted the women’s movement to the pluralities of genders and sexualities and their non-normative interrelationships. The questioning of gender norms and of heteronormativity has helped the women’s movement to rethink the category of woman. Lesbian activism has also focused attention on the body in new ways and has underlined the importance of desire even as it has sensitized feminists to issues of violence against women (See: Shalini Mahajan in Seminar http://www.india-seminar.com/2008/583/583_shalini_mahajan.htm). In joint campaigns by lesbian and women’s rights activists like the 16 day activism against ‘Violence Against Women’ in 2002, the issue of lesbian suicides were seen alongside rape, harassment and bride-burning as manifesting common patriarchal modes of oppression (See Box 2.4 below).

**Box 2.4 Violence Against Women: Lesbian Suicides**

*Was Suicide the only Choice for these Women?*

Violence against women means rape, sexual harassment, and bride burning. Violence also happens every time a woman is married against her will. It happens every time a woman feels guilty for wanting to be happy and every time that a woman must die because she is unacceptable to society.

Lesbian suicides are a result of society’s attempt to restrict women’s choices and control their lives.

*We Protest these Deaths as Violence against All Women....*

Leaflet on 16 days’ activism against Violence Against women in 2002, Delhi which was prepared by an alliance of women’s groups and PRISM, People for the Rights of Indian Sexual Minorities.
2.6.3 From Identity Politics to the Queer Coalition: Roadmap for Future Politics

The linking of gender and sexual oppression in these campaigns showed how intersectional frameworks could be developed across movements. It also demonstrated that lesbian issues were neither ‘private’ nor just concerned with a ‘sexual minority’, but affected all women. It indicated the need to question not just heterosexuality as a norm, but to locate lesbian and other non-normative sexualities within a larger analysis of patriarchy, and identify the challenges that these sexualities pose to a heteropatriarchal order. The manner in which sexuality is used to construct and sustain other inequalities and rights violations in the realms of gender, caste, and religion also required recognition. Within the non-normative sexualities movement there has been a growing awareness of the need to move beyond a politics which is based only on sexual identities. These restrict the movement to specific named identities, excluding many (despite the ever increasing additions to what has been called an ‘alphabet soup’—LGBTQKH…) who do not self identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual or Kothi etc. Also naming and fixing reifies and essentialises sexual identities which are in reality fluid, contingent and flexible.

The debates on sexuality as behaviour rather than identity, the discussions around how LGBT categories fail to describe indigenous practices of sexuality, the need to recognize gender as a category as important as sexual preference in the construction of indigenous sexualities and the controversies over how the global LGBT movement, the HIV and AIDS discourse and funding contingencies have impelled queer communities to self identify in particular ways have revealed the inadequacies of a movement based on sexual identities. There is also a growing awareness that differences of class, caste, gender and location within sexual minorities, the access to resources and to the English language and its identifying practices create hierarchies and enclaves, suppressing certain voices and foregrounding others (Dutta, forthcoming).

The sexual identity movement has also been criticized for reinforcing the heteronorm by seeking incorporation within it. The LGBT movement has sought inclusion and rights within the heterosexual majoritarian mainstream instead of destabilizing its hegemonic notions of ‘normalcy’, ‘naturalness’ and the need to conform to particular forms of living and loving. By so doing it has retained its own deviant or marginal status (as ‘alternative’ or ‘minority’) and has created its own hegemonic ‘alternative’ norms of desire within its own constituencies.
Queer politics, on the other hand, is located in the resistance to heteronormativity as well as to any other mode of regulating sexuality including attempts to fit people into specific sexual identity categories. Pejoratively used in the nineteenth century to designate homosexuals, the term ‘queer’ indicates that which deviates from the ‘normal’. Recuperated to celebrate difference, it has indicated the need to move beyond sexual identity movements towards a more broad-based and radical politics focused not only on the demands of counternormative sexualities, but directed towards dismantling the very structures which deny them rights. As Arvind Narrain asks, “Such indeed is the vision of a queer politics which changes the way we see ourselves and our sexual desires and our ways of relating to each other. Can our politics question the normativity of marriage, the inevitability of procreation and the necessity of monogamy? Can we create spaces for women’s expression of sexuality or for greater diversity in people’s lives? Can this movement counterpose increasing authoritarianism with greater democracy as well as struggle against the attempt to sacrifice the lives of those infected with HIV/AIDS at the altar of profits?” (Narrain, 2003).

Queer politics has thus indicated ways in which by opposing normative institutions, it is possible to build a broader platform for the movement. Rather than getting embroiled in the divisive conflicts of ever multiplying identities and differences - Gay or MSM? MSM or Hijra? Hijra or Transgender? Transgender or Lesbian? - the time has come to think about broader and more revolutionary common agendas which spread across not just sexual identity groups but to those who work for the rights of children, women, sexworkers or disabled people since normative structures are used to discriminate against all who do not conform. But this coming together cannot be an artificial joining together of several agendas or one set of marginalized people fighting on behalf of another. The basis of engagement must be through a recognition of the inherent linkages between the struggles, not just coalitions but through an intersectional approach (Akshay Khanna, 2007, p.168).

An attempt to build such a movement was demonstrated by the collective, ‘Voices Against 377’, a coalition of groups and individuals that includes, but is not limited to, those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (see Box 2.5 below). An alliance formed to protest the government’s response to the PIL filed by Naz Foundation in the Delhi High Court against IPC 377 in 2004 (see Box 2.2). It was spearheaded by the ABVA, a human rights group that pioneered work against discrimination against HIV positive people,
Lesbian and Gay communities and professional blood donors; CALERI - Campaign for Lesbian Rights, a forum of organizations that came together after the ‘Fire’ controversy and Prism, a forum which sought to create awareness about queer issues, especially amongst other progressive movements. These fora, significantly were not framed by identity alone. ABVA for example had many members who did not subscribe to the identities whose rights they worked for: “They were driven by a political understanding and vision rooted in the interconnectedness of different forms of marginalization and struggles. Their activism saw the significance of issues of same sex desire as going beyond rights of individuals to challenging structures and ideologies of power such as those related to gender, caste, class and religion.”

Box 2.5: Voices Against 377

Queer politics is one of broader social change that goes beyond the issue of individual freedoms and the interests of same-sex desiring people including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. Such a perspective breaks the culture of putting a safe distance between ‘us’ and ‘those whose rights we struggle for.

From ‘Sexuality and Fundamentalisms’; Position paper of Voices Against 377

It is such an intersectionality of interest which created the collective, the Rainbow Planet, at the ‘World Social Forum’ in Mumbai in 2004. The future of the queer movement lies in stronger alliances between movements—not just between LGBT groups and those working with MSMS on HIV prevention, but bonds must be forged with the sexworkers’ movement which remains stigmatized. Dialogue is needed with all organizations fighting for justice since sexuality is an issue which intersects other axes of discrimination—caste, class, gender, religion. So a political engagement with sexuality is needed not just by sexual minorities but by all. The queer movement must also engage more reflexively with issues of class, caste, gender, location and the internal hierarchies within the LGBT and HIV and AIDS discourse. Alliance with the women’s movement is urgently needed in the common struggle against heteropatriarchy and also because there are lessons to be learnt from its long history of politicizing the personal. Feminists must also engage more with issues of sexuality not just in terms of violence but also as desire and pleasure.
2.7 LET US SUM UP

In the various sections of this unit, we surveyed the different strands of queer mobilisations in India - activism by and for people marginalised for their gender/sexual behaviour and/or identity. We have seen how the varying class/caste location and gender of such people creates a diverse spectrum of organizations and mobilisations rather than a unified movement. However, it should also be clear that there are issues like violence, discrimination, human rights and sexual health that cut across many distinct sections. For instance, issues of social violence are relevant for lesbian women as well as for Hijras and male-born transgender women, but are applicable in different and distinct ways for each of these groups. For groups like Hijras, lower class Kothis and rural women who desire women, gender/sexual violence occurs as part of larger patterns of class- and caste-based oppression and cannot be seen in isolation from the class/caste context. This necessitates a politics of intersectionality where gender and sexuality are seen in connection with class and caste, such that broader coalitions can happen between activists working on interconnected forms of power, discrimination, marginalization and violence.

2.8 GLOSSARY

**MSM**: Men (or males) who have sex with men.

**Hijra**: A community of persons, usually born male, who cross-dress and may or may not undergo castration. Hijras live in intentional communities with distinct rites, rituals and norms. Hijras tend to be lower class, socio-economically marginalized, and practice stigmatized occupations like ritualized soliciting for money in return for blessings - ‘badhai’ or ‘chhalla’ (see Reddy, 2005).

**Kothi**: A word initially used by Hijras in some South Indian cities to designate ‘feminine’ males and male-to-female transgenders who may not be formally a part of Hijra groups. The word has spread all over India in the last two decades through a combination of Hijra networks, and NGOs working on HIV-AIDS prevention work (Cohen, 2005; Dutta, forthcoming).
**2.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

1) How does the consolidation of legal and social prejudice create the context for identity-based movements for gender/sexual rights?

2) Describe why the sexual health and human rights were important characteristics for the queer movement in India.

3) Critically analyse why the identity politics vary from class to class and location to location.

4) Can one make an easy distinction between ‘westernised’ and ‘indigenous’ identities? Why or why not?

5) Critically comment on the relation between lesbian and feminist politics in the Indian context.

6) Discuss some of the strengths and limitations of identity politics. Why does it necessitate a politics of coalition and intersectionality?

**2.10 END NOTES**


2 Vanita & Kidwai (2001). See especially the discussion of the ‘Ugra’ controversy (pp. 246-252) and the letter by Mahatma Gandhi (pp. 272).

3 For an overview of the Fire controversy, see the reports by Agence France Presse: ‘Hindu leader says Lesbian film should be about Moslem family’, (AFP 14 December 1999); ‘Deepa Mehta appeals to the Supreme Court’, (AFP 7 December 1999); ‘Activists slam attacks on lesbian film, Hindus vow to widen protests’, (AFP 3 December 1999), Also see (John & Niranjana, 1999).

4 ‘MSM’ is an acronym for males who have sex with males (or alternatively, men who have sex with men); ‘Kothi’ is a recent category encompassing ‘feminine’ males, transvestites and drag queens, and male-to-female (mtf) transgenders.

5 ‘Eunuch MP takes seat’. BBC. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/668042.stm

6 ‘India’s Eunuch’s demand rights’. BBC. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3080116.stm

2.11 REFERENCES


PUCL-K (People’s Union for Civil Liberties, Karnataka) (September 2003), Human Rights Violations against the Transgender Community. Bangalore.


2.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

