



SOCIOLOGUE

आओ, बात करें

A NEWSLETTER BY THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
MAITREYI COLLEGE

From the Editors' desk

Over the past few months, ever since the release of our previous edition, much has changed (or so we'd like to believe). The Supreme Court has set up a 5 judge bench to revisit Section 377 which, as we all know, criminalises homosexuality. Given the times we're living in, every tiny speck of hope calls for a celebration. However, what amazes us is that, since Supreme Court's decision came to public knowledge, there have been agitations by various religious groups, demanding that 377 stay put and all those belonging to the LGBTQ community be deemed criminals. We have often tried to figure out how the proponents of 377 decide what "unnatural sex" or "sex against the order of nature" is. It is here that 'the hierarchical valuation of sex acts' comes to our mind.

The act of sex between a man and a woman, within the confines of marriage and for procreation, is at the top of the sex hierarchy, followed by unmarried but monogamous heterosexual relations. Most other heterosexuals fall in the third category and are followed by, what is often referred to as, 'solitary sex' (i.e. the act of masturbation), which is seen as an inferior substitute to partnered encounters. Next, are homosexuals.

In Western societies, within homosexuals, stable and long-term same-sex relationships are bordering on respectability. With regard to the Indian social setup, these notions of respect and acceptance also seem far-fetched. Not to mention, all other categories of homosexuals, (bar dykes, promiscuous gay men and, even further down,

transsexuals, prostitutes, porn models and their likes) face allegations of mental instability and, in many cases, are ostracised.

The witch-hunt and media trial of homosexuals in the '50s United States, reeks of what is happening even today, whether in Russia or in Mumbai and Delhi. Add to that the increase in 'corrective rapes' and birth of other such phenomenon.

Another factor that is worth mentioning is the emphasis placed on having sex only when there is a certain sense of love and/or monogamy. Sex for pleasure is still out of bounds.

To a certain section of the society these prohibitions and restrictions may seem inconsequential and obviously so, given that they aren't at the receiving end of all the abuse that those who do, in fact, have sex for pleasure get.

The only plausible solution we can think of, to all the problems of alternate sexualities, is to build an inclusive, respecting society where the collective conscience has little bearing on what one chooses to do in his/her bedroom. This building up isn't as easy a process as it seems, with homophobia establishing its base at a very early stage of socialisation. Lack of sex education in our schools and ignorance of a child's curiosity by the family are adding to our troubles. Discussions about sex are stifled at various points, whether it is censoring of intimate scenes in films or dodging of questions pertaining to it in the public domain.

Thus, there seems to be a deeper

connection between hushed discussions of the erotic, the inferior treatment of homosexuals and consequent criminalisation of the act. It is this interconnectedness that we wish to prod and examine in this issue, along with other aspects, such as the formation of one's identity with respect to their sexuality, the questions of promiscuity and so on.

Adding to our excitement is the fact that our newsletter is going to be released during our Annual Academic Meet, Imagine '16, which also looks at 'Sexualiti(es)'. Thus, it wouldn't be wrong to say that our examination comprises of lectures, talks, debates, movie screenings, stage performances etc. What the Department of Sociology aims to achieve with these, like with all of its other efforts, is to create awareness about the topic at hand and to provide a platform for discussion, deliberation and eventually, change.

As Rubin has said, "Categories are all imperfect, historical, temporary and arbitrary. We use them and they use us. We use them to construct meaningful lives, and they mold us into historically specific forms of personhood. Instead of fighting for immaculate classifications and impenetrable boundaries, let us strive to maintain a community that understands diversity as gift, sees anomalies as precious and treats all basic principles with a hefty dose of skepticism."

आओ, बात करें

-Nikhita Singh & Tanya Chakraborty
(Third Year)

Editor's Choice: लिहाफ

Written in 1942 by Ismat Chughtai, one of the very few female Urdu writers of that time, Lihaaf talks about the condition of women in feudal societies and presence of alternate sexualities in times when the phenomenon was unheard of.

The story courted controversy when charges of obscenity were filed against it at the Lahore Court.

जब मैं जाइँ में लिहाफ ओढ़ती हूँ तो पास की दीवार पर उसकी परछाई हाथी की तरह झूमती हुई मालूम होती है। और एकदम से मेरा दिमाग बीती हुई दुनिया के पर्दों में दौड़ने-भागने लगता है। न जाने क्या कुछ याद आने लगता है।

यह जब का जिक्र है, जब मैं छोटी-सी थी और दिन-भर भाइयों और उनके दोस्तों के साथ मार-कुटाई में गुज़ार दिया करती थी। कभी-कभी मुझे खयाल आता कि मैं कमबख्त इतनी लड़ाका क्यों थी? उस उम्र में जबकि मेरी और बहनें आशिक जमा कर रही थीं, मैं अपने-पराये हर लड़के और लड़की से जूतम-पैजार में मशगूल थी।

यही वजह थी कि अम्माँ जब आगरा जाने लगीं तो हफ्ता-भर के लिए मुझे अपनी एक मुँहबोली बहन के पास छोड़ गईं। उनके यहाँ, अम्माँ खूब जानती थी कि चूहे का बच्चा भी नहीं और मैं किसी से भी लड़-भिड़ न सकूँगी। सज़ा तो खूब थी मेरी! हाँ, तो अम्माँ मुझे बेगम जान के पास छोड़ गईं।

वही बेगम जान जिनका लिहाफ अब तक मेरे ज़हन में गर्म लोहे के दाग की तरह महफूज है। ये वो बेगम जान थीं जिनके गरीब माँ-बाप ने नवाब साहब को इसलिए दामाद बना लिया कि वह पकी उम्र के थे मगर निहायत नेक। कभी कोई रण्डी या बाज़ारू औरत उनके यहाँ नज़र न आई। खुद हाजी थे और बहुतों को हज करा चुके थे।

मगर उन्हें एक निहायत अजीबो-गरीब शौक था। लोगों को कबूतर पालने का जुनून होता है, बटेरें लड़ाते हैं, मुर्गबाज़ी करते हैं, इस किस्म के वाहियात खेलों से नवाब साहब को नफ़रत थी। उनके यहाँ तो बस तालिब इल्म रहते थे। नौजवान, गोरे-गोरे, पतली कमरों के लड़के, जिनका खर्च वे खुद बर्दाश्त करते थे।

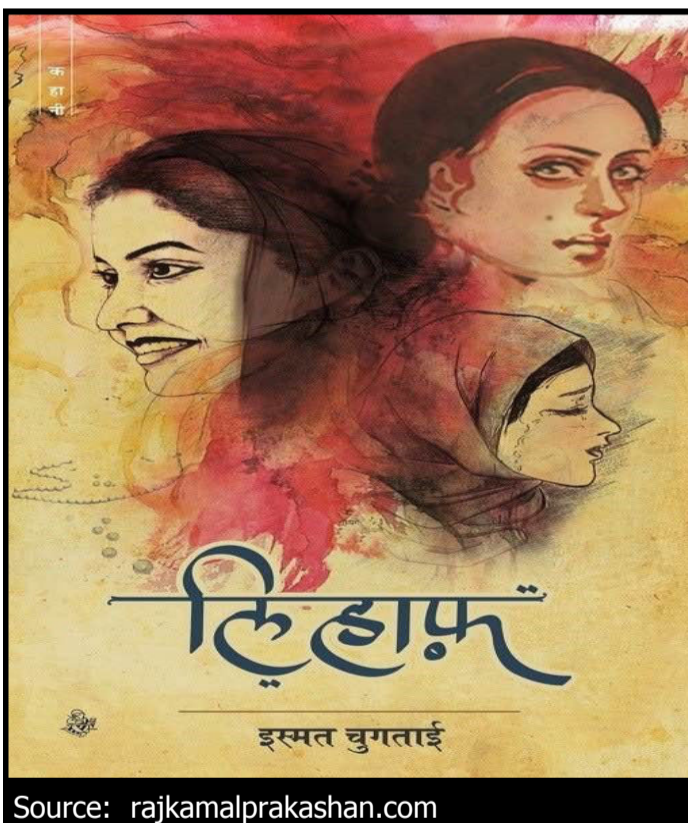
मगर बेगम जान से शादी करके तो वे उन्हें कुल साज़ो-सामान के साथ ही घर में रखकर भूल गए। और वह बेचारी दुबली-पतली नाज़ुक-सी बेगम तन्हाई के गम में घुलने लगीं। न जाने उनकी ज़िन्दगी कहाँ से शुरू होती है? वहाँ से जब वह पैदा होने की गलती कर चुकी थीं, या वहाँ से जब एक नवाब की बेगम बनकर आयीं और छपरखट पर ज़िन्दगी गुज़ारने लगीं, या जब से नवाब साहब के यहाँ लड़कों का जोर बँधा। उनके लिए मुरगगन हलवे और लज़ीज़ खाने जाने लगे और बेगम जान दीवानखाने की दरारों में से उनकी लचकती कमरोंवाले लड़कों की

चुस्त पिण्डलियाँ और मोअत्तर बारीक शबनम के कुर्ते देख-देखकर अंगारों पर लोटने लगीं।

अब न तो नवाब साहब को फुर्सत कि शबनमी कुर्तों को छोड़कर ज़रा इधर तवज्जो करें और न वे उन्हें कहीं आने-जाने देते। जब से बेगम जान ब्याहकर आई थीं, रिश्तेदार आकर महीनों रहते और चले जाते, मगर वह बेचारी कैद की कैद रहतीं।

रब्बो ने उन्हें नीचे गिरते-गिरते सँभाल लिया। झटपट देखते-देखते उनका सूखा जिस्म भरना शुरू हुआ। गाल चमक उठे और हुस्न फूट निकला। एक अजीबो-गरीब तेल की मालिश से बेगम जान में ज़िन्दगी की झलक आई। माफ़ कीजिएगा, उस तेल का नुस्खा आपको बेहतरीन-से-बेहतरीन रिसाले में भी न मिलेगा।

रब्बो से दूसरी सारी नौकरियाँ खार खाती थीं। चुड़ैल बेगम जान के साथ खाती, साथ उठती-बैठती और माशा अल्लाह! साथ ही सोती थी! रब्बो और बेगम जान आम जलसों और मजमूओं की दिलचस्प गुफ्तगू का मौजू थीं। जहाँ उन दोनों का ज़िक्र आया और कहकहे उठे। लोग न जाने क्या-क्या चुटकुले गरीब पर उड़ाते, मगर वह दुनिया में किसी से मिलती ही न थी।



मैंने कहा कि उस वक्त मैं काफी छोटी थी और बेगम जान पर फिदा। वह भी मुझे बहुत प्यार करती थीं। इत्तेफाक से अम्माँ आगरे गईं।

सवाल यह उठा कि मैं सोऊँ कहाँ? कुदरती तौर पर बेगम जान के कमरे में। लिहाज़ा मेरे लिए भी उनके छपरखट से लगाकर छोटी-सी पलंगड़ी डाल दी गई। दस-ग्यारह बजे तक तो बातें करते रहे। मैं और बेगम जान चांस खेलते रहे और फिर मैं सोने के लिए अपने पलंग पर चली गई। और जब मैं सोयी तो रब्बो वैसी ही बैठी उनकी पीठ खुजा रही थी। 'भंगन कहीं की!' मैंने सोचा। रात को मेरी एकदम से आँख खुली तो मुझे अजीब तरह का डर लगने लगा। कमरे में घुप अँधेरा। और उस अँधेरे में बेगम जान

का लिहाफ ऐसे हिल रहा था, जैसे उसमें हाथी बन्द हो!

"बेगम जान!" मैंने डरी हुई आवाज़ निकाली। हाथी हिलना बन्द हो गया। लिहाफ नीचे दब गया।

"क्या है? सो जाओ।" बेगम जान ने कहीं से आवाज़ दी।

"डर लग रहा है।" मैंने चूहे की-सी आवाज़ से कहा।

"सो जाओ। डर की क्या बात है? आयतलकुर्सी पढ़ लो।"

"अच्छा।"

मैंने जल्दी-जल्दी आयतलकुर्सी पढ़ी। मगर 'यालमू मा बीन' पर हर दफा आकर अटक गई। हालाँकि मुझे वक्त पूरी आयत याद है।

"तुम्हारे पास आ जाऊँ बेगम जान?"

"नहीं बेटा, सो रहो।" ज़रा सख्ती से कहा।

और फिर दो आदमियों के घुसुर-फुसुर करने की आवाज़ सुनायी देने लगी। हाय रे! यह दूसरा कौन? मैं और भी डरी।

"बेगम जान, चोर-वोर तो नहीं?"

"सो जाओ बेटा, कैसा चोर?"

रब्बो की आवाज़ आई। मैं जल्दी से लिहाफ में मुँह डालकर सो गई।

कुछरातोबाद बेगम जान का लिहाफ अँधेरे में फिर हाथी की तरह झूम रहा था।

"अल्लाह! आँ!" मैंने मरी हुई आवाज़ निकाली। लिहाफ में हाथी फुदका और बैठ गया। मैं भी चुप हो गई। हाथी ने फिर लोट मचाई। मेरा रोआँ-रोआँ काँपा। आज मैंने दिल में ठान लिया कि जरूर हिम्मत करके सिरहाने का लगा हुआ बल्ब जला दूँ। हाथी फिर फड़फड़ा रहा था और जैसे उकड़ूँ बैठने की कोशिश कर रहा था। चपड़-चपड़ कुछ खाने की आवाज़ें आ रही थीं, जैसे कोई मज़ेदार चटनी चख रहा हो। अब मैं समझी! यह बेगम जान ने आज कुछ नहीं खाया।

और रब्बो मुई तो है सदा की चट्टू! जरूर यह तर माल उड़ा रही है। मैंने नथुने फुलाकर सूँ-सूँ हवा को सूँघा। मगर सिवाय अतर, सन्दल और हिना की गरम-गरम खुशबू के और कुछ न महसूस हुआ। लिहाफ फिर उमँडना शुरू हुआ। मैंने बहुतेरा चाहा कि चुपकी पड़ी रहूँ, मगर उस लिहाफ ने तो ऐसी अजीब-अजीब शकलें बनानी शुरू कीं कि मैं लरज गई। मालूम होता था, गों-गों करके कोई बड़ा-सा मेंढक फूल रहा है और अब उछलकर मेरे ऊपर आया!

"आ न अम्माँ!" मैं हिम्मत करके गुनगुनायी, मगर वहाँ कुछ सुनवाई न हुई और लिहाफ मेरे दिमाग में घुसकर फूलना शुरू हुआ। मैंने डरते-डरते पलंग के दूसरी तरफ पैर उतारे और टटोलकर बिजली का बटन दबाया। हाथी ने लिहाफ के नीचे एक कलाबाज़ी लगायी और पिचक गया। कलाबाज़ी लगाने में लिहाफ का कोना फुट-भर उठा, अल्लाह! मैं गड़ाप से अपने बिछौने में!!!

Source: www.abhivyakti-hindi.org

Love in the Time of Morals

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, dating back to 1860, was introduced during the British rule of India, criminalising homosexual activities calling them 'against the order of the nature'. Throughout history there have been consistent appeals regarding legislation of homosexual intercourse. History took a turn on 18th December 2015 when Lok Sabha member, Shashi Tharoor introduced a bill to replace Section 377 and decriminalize consensual same-sex relations. The bill, though defeated in the first reading (71-24) sparked recognition of the community. Although they witness extensive opposition, some have started accepting the infinite possibilities. One can't deny the fact that, in contemporary times, homosexuals probably fall lowest in our love ranking and their love is termed abnormal. Homophobia, described as the fear or hatred towards gay and lesbianism, lead to acts of violence and expression of hostility.

The omnipresent question is, what tradition is this that stops two people to love? Some believe that these preconceived notions against homosexuality have a religious backing, while others probe into "traditional values" they were brought up with. Let us explore the fundamentals, beginning our discussion with the past, moving on to the present day scenario.

Blatantly disregarding the past, calling homosexuality a contemporary term and a new comprehension, people remain oblivious to the yesteryears. Sculptures portraying homosexuality can be found on the walls of numerous Hindu temples. The Khajuraho temples of Madhya Pradesh are very frequently used as examples of the same. Indian epics, chronicles and scriptures give references to it. Whether it was Arjun as

Brihannala or Agni, the Hindu god of fire, accepting semen from other gods, homosexuality finds multiple mentions in our ancient texts. Another important factor to keep in mind, when talking of religion being pitted against homosexuality, is that the texts often used to back such claims are no dictums of God. They are written and rewritten by people and, very often, there



Source: The Times of India

are multiple versions of the same text. Thus, using religious texts to question the mental state of those found loving an individual of the same sex, masses remain reluctant in accepting homosexuality. As a result, homosexuals are constantly stereotyped which in turn leads to many of them not coming out, ever. Not just this, these stereotypes bring about moral policing, where vigilante groups act towards enforcing a code of morality, often through acts of aggression.

One such act led to the nation-wide Kiss of Love campaign. It started off with a relatively small protest in Kochi, against moral policing, which was (not to anyone's surprise) vandalized by members of certain right-wing groups. Post this, the campaign spread all over the country. There were numerous protests which saw people kissing their partners in full public view. What was even more amazing was the turnout of same-sex couples, standing tall and locking lips.

Other events like QueerFests, Kashish International Film Festival of Mumbai, Queer Media Collective Awards, Mumbai Queer Azadi March, and the Queer Pride Parades of Chennai, Bhubaneswar, Bangalore and Delhi ignited within the community a notion of solidarity while also making straight, and often, homophobic people see beauty in diversity. The belief of entitlement towards freedom of choice of sexuality and a sense of belonging in society is, thus, fostered.

The future of gay rights in India is fuzzy. It is, thus, more necessary today than ever before that we generate in our minds, queries. Queries of why the society must judge and interrupt something that is a personal choice. Of why love has to be defined by the masses and not by the heart. Let us seek to broaden our perspective and not accept the given without interrogation. After all, we're a part of the same society we so often happen to blame.

-Bhargavi Sinha and Shivani Vashishth (Second Year and First Year)

Continued from the previous issue

John Finds...

Oh! I wish this dream comes true.

I hope he comes to class today

I love you. Please be my date for the costume party?

I always wanted you to say this to me.

I can't wait to see you in the Batman costume.

It'll be a dream come true.

COSTUME PARTY

Concept and Design: Tanisha Garg & Yaniam Chukhu ; Digitization: Bayar Jain

SEXUALITIES

All that is making news right now

Moroccan homosexual couple sentenced to 18 months in prison

Public Advocate Letitia James handing out free condoms for Valentine's Day

Salem, Oregon votes unanimously to close loophole in anti-prostitution law

Mumbai celebrates 9th annual pride parade

The Female Health Company supports UNAIDS' call for increased investments in condoms

Germany opens first asylum for gays who are targeted for persecution by Muslim refugees

US military opens its frontline combat positions to women

India to revisit decriminalization of homosexuality

Censor gives 'Aligarh' trailer A-rating. Director calls board homophobic.

Christian, Hindu and Muslim groups insist SC to not make homosexual acts legal in India

Corrective rapes used in India to 'cure' homosexuality

Ending biphobia to be a core theme at Melbourne's pride march

Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders are in favor of advancing LGBT rights further

Justin Trudeau to be first Canadian PM to march in Pride Parade

Obama praises Ellen DeGeneres for empowering gays

Department Updates

20th January – **Seminar on 'Gender And Sexuality'** was organized by Nazariya - A Queer Feminist Resource Camp for all first and second year students.

27th January – **Workshop on 'Gender and Sexuality'**, followed by an inter active session was conducted by Amalina Kohli Dave for all first year students.

5th February – The Department organized a **movie screening and reviewing of Sita Sings the Blues**. The movie provides an interesting take on issues of gender in the Ramayana.

29th February - **Annual Academic Meet of the Department of Sociology – Imagine'16** was conducted which witnessed an impressive display of academic and cultural activities. The events in the meet focused on **Sexualities**.

Upcoming Events

8th March - The Department shall screen a film on the occasion of **International Women's Day**.

Do Monuments Speak? Past in Present or Present in Past. Presentation on our field trip to Udaipur.

Intra/Inter Department **Debate around the theme of Dissent & Nationalism**.

For any queries or feedback, Contact us on imagination.edboard@gmail.com

We Recommend

MUST WATCH

1. Boys Don't Cry (1999)
2. Brokeback Mountain (2005)
3. Unfreedom (2015)
4. Carol (2015)

MUST LISTEN

1. Born This Way – Lady Gaga
2. Sissy Dat Walk – RuPaul
3. Te Amo – Rihanna
4. Take Me To Church – Hozier

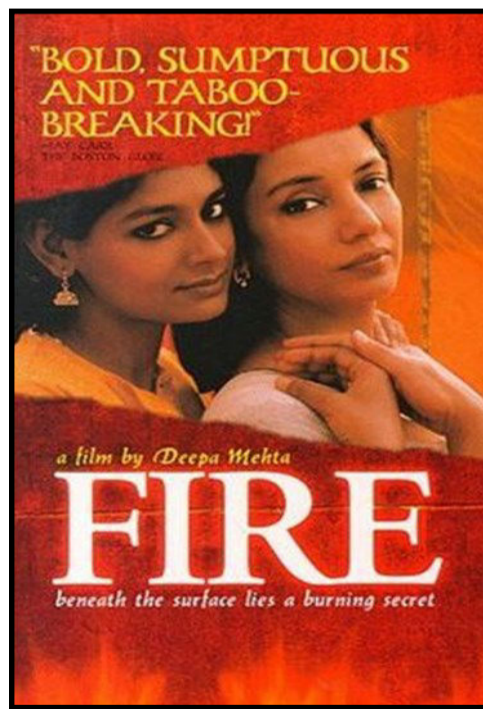
Movie Review

"There is no word in our language that can describe us; how we feel for each other", says Sita (Nandita Das) with utmost honesty and sincerity to her lover, Radha (Shabana Azmi).

Set in New Delhi in the '90s, the movie looks at a typical middle-class joint family that runs a family business selling takeout food, along with a video rental store on the side. The family consists of an aged mother- Biji (Kushal Rekhi) - who, although mute, speaks volumes through her actions. Along with her, her two sons Ashok (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) and Jatin (Jaaved Jaaferi) reside with their respective wives Radha and Sita. The movie plays out in a seemingly dichotomous fashion wherein Ashok has sworn to celibacy in order to gain religious and spiritual advancement, while Jatin satisfies his sexual desires with his Chinese mistress Julie. Both wives, unwillingly, accept their fate and embody the role of traditional Indian housewives.

However, such loveless marriages strengthen the bond between the sisters-in-law. As they start spending time together, oblivious to the rest of the household, they explore their sexual desires and experience emotions that were missing in their

marriages. Over time, they start enjoying each other's company and their love grows stronger. At the same time, they are faced with the dilemma of having to keep their love



Source: toanewdawn.blogspot.com

under the sheets.

Mehta cleverly names her lead characters Sita and Radha – mythological personifications of the ideal woman whereas here, they are portrayed as what would be considered the exact opposite.

Mehta constantly critiques our social setup, whether it is when the promiscuous Jatin emphasises on using white sheets to confirm Sita's

virginity or in terms of how on one hand the family's video rental store sells pornography, and on the other, there is an evident suppression of sexuality of the women of the household.

Another striking aspect of the film is the choice of its appellation. 'Fire', in terms of the movie, can have multiple meanings. Right from the fire of continued oppression that is burning the two women, to the fire that engulfs Radha's saree in the climax of the movie – a recreation of sorts of the mythological *Agni Pariksha* – Mehta uses it as her agent and raises a range of questions, relevant even today.

Love, in our society, is definite. A man and a woman. Mehta's movie had dared to question this, only to face the wrath of the people, in the form of vandalised movie halls and the usual effigy-burning. Are we so close-minded as a society, as to deprive individuals of the little hope that a relationship bestows upon them, only because it doesn't meet our criteria of love?

As a narration at the start of the movie says, "What you can't see, you can see. You just have to see without looking".

-Bayar Jain and Lalrinpuii (Second Year)

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