

Gay Masculinities

A Study of Young Middle Class Gay Men in Kolkata

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DECLARATION

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

I hereby declare that the research embodied in the present dissertation entitled, '**Gay Masculinities: A Study of Young Middle Class Gay Men in Kolkata**' is carried out under the supervision of **Prof. Aparna Rayaprol**, Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, for the award of Master of Philosophy, is an original work of mine and to the best of my knowledge no part of this dissertation has been submitted for the award of any research degree or diploma at any university. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my dissertation can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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Further, the student has passed following coursework requirement for the M. Phil:

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Abbreviations & Acronyms

LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
IPC	Indian Penal Code
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
MSM	Men-who-have-Sex-with-Men
CALERI	Campaign for Lesbian Rights
ABVA	AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan
NACO	National AIDS Control Organisation
NACP	National AIDS Control Programme
LABIA	Lesbians And Bisexuals In Action
TARSHI	Talking about Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues
NALSA	National Legal Services Authority of India

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

SECTION I: INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH AGENDA

The aim of this research is to study the lives of young middle-class gay men in Kolkata. The study attempts to reveal the complex ways in which the gay lives are constructed and reflect on the ways in which these men and non-binary gender queer persons negotiate their masculinities and sexualities in institutional spaces such as family, education system, peer groups and workplaces.

Informed by the feminist perspectives on gender and masculinity, this study attempts to use the feminist interview research method to trace and understand the complex ways in which young gay men construct their masculinity and negotiate the power dynamics within the structures they inhabit. Their choices are shaped by the various constraints and opportunities that come their way allowing them to organize their complex lives. Their masculinities are a product of the day to day interactions with their homosocial and heterosocial peer groups and institutions like family and education.

SECTION II: A NOTE ON THE TERMS LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER (LGBTQ)

Nardi (2000) contends, the term 'Gay' emerged during the 1930s and 40s as a popular term to identify any man who was involved in same-sex sexual relations. Until then, multiple terms were used to denote individuals who were engaged in sexual relations with other individuals from the same sex. Labels such as 'fairies,' 'queens,' 'faggots,' and others were denoted to effeminate homosexual men before World War II. Even earlier, during the beginning of the twentieth century, the term

‘congenital invert’ was popular while referring to men who embodied feminine etiquette, dressed in gender non-conforming clothes, and/or had same-sex sexual desires and relationships (Ibid.)

The term ‘Queer’ was associated with those who engaged in same-sex relations but did not embody feminine traits or rejected femininity altogether, thereby rejecting to associate with effeminate men in sexual liaisons. The term ‘Trade’ which was popular during the pre-World War II era was associated with men who engaged in sex with both queers and fairies. However, with the popularity of the term gay as an over-encompassing label led to the disappearance of the term ‘Trade’ (Nardi, 2000).

In the present context, the terms Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) has gained popularity worldwide. The term ‘lesbian’ is associated with the category of women who engage in same-sex sexual and emotional relationships, while ‘gay’ has retained its old definition. ‘Bisexuals’ refer to those who engage in emotional and sexual relationships with individuals from both genders. ‘Transgender’ as an identity is associated with those individuals who embody the gender identity that is different from the sex s/he is denoted at birth. Transgender individuals may or may not go through the sex reassignment surgeries. ‘Queer’ has become an over-encompassing term to denote individuals whose sexualities are outside the heterosexual norm. It literally means weird, but has been reclaimed as an identity that inherently stands in protest against patriarchy.

SECTION III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is guided by the feminist perspectives on gender, masculinity and sexuality. Men’s lives, when studied through the feminist perspectives, draw on their experiences situated in patriarchal structures in relation to hegemonic masculinity and the hierarchical social differences among men (Pease, 2013). While attempting to study the lives of men from such a perspective, the

methodology designed as Critical Studies in Men and Masculinities (Hearn, 2013) suggests that research using feminist perspectives have brought to light the importance of intersectionality in understanding power relations between the researcher and the researched (Ibid.)

Feminist research and methodology began with the women's movement in various parts of the world. It was a response to the masculine nature of social science which had an overwhelming absence of research on women. Over the years, feminist theory and methodology have become a transformative force in social science in general and sociology in specific (Rayaprol, 2016). Traditional social science research, for the longest time, developed through the study of work, leisure, economic and political changes, and so on. These researches focused mainly on men's lives without attempting to challenge inherent "androcentrism and sexism as social biases" (Ibid., p. 370). Early feminist scholarship focussed mainly on the 'inclusion of women' (Rayaprol, 2016, p. 370), that is, bringing women into the fold of research. This was an empiricist project that attempted to rectify the existing 'male bias' and record the lives and experience of women, who until then remained invisible in the research agendas of social sciences (Ibid.).

This was a widely used framework until the critics like Dorothy Smith and others highlighted that the addition of women into research without accounting for the masculine nature of research itself would not be long-standing. They argued for a framework that emanated from the experiences of women as marginalised subjects within the patriarchal structures and relations of society. Therefore, the feminist standpoint theoretical framework developed from the standpoint of women producing "knowledge (that was) grounded in experience" (Rayaprol, 2016, p. 371).

The critique of this framework was brought about by intersectionality framework that was proposed and argued by scholars like Patricia Hill Collins (1998, 2012, and 2016), Kimberle Crenshaw (1989,

1991) and others. Connell¹ (1995) argues that ‘gender is a way of structuring social practice’ (p. 75) and therefore it essentially interacts with other social structures such as race, class, sexuality, and nationality and so on thereby producing heterogeneous experiences of gender beings (Ibid.). This suggests that there can be no singular standpoint of women and men. Standpoints emanate from experiences that are not one and identical, rather multiple. This understanding forms the basis for Connell’s (1995) framework on masculinities.

Connell’s (1995) study of masculinity formed a breakthrough in gender studies scholarship which until then ignored the study of men. It was also important because it foregrounded the research in feminist intersectional perspectives thereby locating men’s relationship with patriarchy and their relationship with each other within patriarchal structures and relations. Until then researches on men were based on their relationship to women. It was focussed on men’s violence on women, their actions in public spaces, men and family, and so on (Pease, 2013).

Connell’s framework allowed for the study of men in homosocial spaces, socialisation of young men (Paechter, 2008), gay men’s experiences (Nardi, 2000) and so on. This research borrows Connell’s (1995) multiple masculinities framework to understand the experiences of young gay men in institutional spaces, in relationships, among peer groups. It tries to understand how young men negotiate their masculinities in overtly heterosexual and homophobic spaces and deal with abuse within homosexual relationships.

Connell (1995) argues that gender organizes the ways in which social beings interact with each other and present themselves. It “is a way in which social practice is ordered” (Ibid., p. 71) in

¹Raewyn Connell was born as R. W. Connell and has been cited as R.W. Connell. She went through a gender transition and identifies as a transgender woman. All works of her up to 2005 are cited as R. W. Connell.

relation to the body, that is marked by historical social processes, and human reproduction. Gender, therefore, allows for a demarcation of what he calls, the “reproductive arena” (Ibid., p. 71) and constantly interacts with the body and the actions it takes up over the course of life. It is not a reductionist understanding of the body, rather is the process through which the body has come to be understood and the ways in which this understanding determines the actions of the body (Ibid.).

Gender relations are practices organised according to reproductive relations among social beings. Therefore, masculinity and femininity are also social practices. The ‘social’ is not a historically stagnated concept, it is dynamic and capable of change. Hence, masculinity and femininity have a dynamic nature and capacity to change. Masculinity and femininity are embodied by social beings who are products of the structures they inhabit and have the capacity to change the structures as active agents. This would mean that concepts masculinity and femininity undergo changes. Further, since these practices are socially embodied, it may have cultural and spatial differences, making them heterogeneous. Masculinity and femininity are therefore “gender configuring practice” (Connell, 1995, p.72) that intersect with other identities of race, class, sexuality, etc. and are present both at micro level and macro level in society (Ibid.).

Such practices are ideologically and culturally sanctioned and therefore move beyond the individual life of the social beings. Such practices are socially constructed and organise the structures of institutions on the basis of reproductive relations among gender (Ibid.).

Connell (1995) suggests that the structure of gender and position of masculinity in this structure can be understood through the relations of power, production and cathexis. The power relations that structure society depend on the ‘subordination of women and dominance of men’ (Ibid., p. 74). This structure has been understood as patriarchy and it controls the ways in which power is distributed in

society and the consequences of such distribution in terms of division of labour among genders that have a direct bearing on the accumulation processes in the economy (Ibid.).

Men's domination on women have been ideologically sanctioned in society through various practices that lead to a skewed process of wealth and power accumulation and control leading to a "social construction of masculinity" (Connell, 1995, p. 74) based on women's oppression. The gender order is further maintained through regulation of sexual desire, wherein heterosexuality is positioned as a legitimate practice, as opposed to other desires. Therefore, heterosexuality or heterosexual desire becomes a condition for men's dominance over women as well as men who practice homosexual or bisexual desire (ibid.).

This suggests that men's dominance is not just on women but also on men who fail to adhere to the socially legitimate desire and sexuality. It is not a simple hierarchy between men and women but a complex hierarchical structure where men are also hierarchically placed in accordance with their social, racial, economic positions and desires. This disturbs the notion of universal domination of women by men and places an intersectional framework to understand the unique position of men that place them in the hierarchical structure of domination and subordination.

In this context, Connell (1995) suggests that there is no single masculinity, rather multiple masculinities placed in relation to one another. He proposes a relational model to study masculinities and make meanings of men's experience as a partaker in patriarchy and as those oppressed by it. The relational model focuses on the different kinds of masculinities and their relationship within the larger patriarchal structures (Ibid.).

He writes:

A relational approach makes it easier to recognize the hard compulsions under which gender configurations are formed, the bitterness as well as the pleasure in gendered experiences (Connell, 1995 p. 76).

The relational model of masculinity is a four-fold framework that records hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalised masculinities and their relations with each other in order to describe and analyse men's experiences. Drawing from Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', Connell (1995) argues that "Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in a society as a whole" (p. 78). When certain cultural ideals of a society dominate the institutional powers through ideological and cultural sanctions, without coercion or violence, it is the establishment of hegemony (Ibid.).

'Hegemonic masculinity' is a certain configuration of gender practice that is widely accepted as an ideal which allows a legitimate condition for patriarchy and the subordination of women. While hegemonic masculinity is not a common statistical pattern, it is widely accepted and has a cultural dominance in society at a given point in time (Ibid.). However, it has a dynamic character which allows it to change when the "conditions for the defence of patriarchy change" (Connell, 1995, p. 77).

Further Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that hegemonic masculinity at any given social context, is understood as the "most honoured way of being a man" (p. 832). The changes in hegemonic masculinity can be due to the incorporation of other ideals of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity can be constructed through legitimization of locally specific cultures that are incorporated in learning through localised interactions, through national cultures and transnational cultures. In the ever globalising world, there is an interplay among the three that produces distinct versions of hegemonic masculinities, incorporating local and regional ideals. Changes in hegemonic masculinity

is also a result of the women's movement and Gay Liberation movement, that allow for the study of "the oppression of men as well as oppression by men" (Ibid., p. 831).

The establishment of hegemonic masculinity on the complete subordination of femininity and legitimization of heterosexuality puts subordinated masculinities in a precarious position wherein homosexual men are subordinated and dominated by heterosexual men (Connell, 1995). "It is not only a cultural stigmatisation of homosexuality or gay men" (Ibid., p. 78) but also has real-world effects on gay men, including violence, stigma, economic and political discrimination, and so on. It has a direct on the material conditions of homosexual men (Ibid.).

Connell (1995) argues,

Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity...hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity. (p. 78).

It is not only restricted to homosexual men, heterosexual men who do not fit into the ideals of hegemonic masculinity or challenge it through emotional attachments, bodily deviances are also positioned in subordinated masculinities and face stigma and humiliation through abusive words (Ibid.).

As stated earlier, not all men in the society embody the accepted hegemonic ideals of masculinity. However, the presence of hegemonic ideals of masculinity allows for the dominance of women which in turn allow men to significantly gain from this relation of subordination, both culturally and materially. This significant gain or 'patriarchal dividend' is realized by men without bearing hegemonic masculinity and this relationship between hegemonic masculinity and the majority of men is referred to as complicity (Ibid.).

According to Connell (1995), marginalised masculinities are constructed within the power relations between gender and other identities that intersect it and the hegemonic ideals of the dominant group in society. The intersections between gender, race, class, nationality, and disability create the specific experiences of men and form their relationship with hegemonic masculinity (Ibid.).

The framework elaborated above allows for an intersectional feminist reading of gendered experiences of young men grappling with the ways of learning about their sexuality. Intersectionality framework forms a part of feminist scholarship that “focuses upon mutually constitutive forms of social oppression” (Hopkins, 2017, p. 1) and not differences that emanate from singular form of oppression that is constituted through individual identities (Hopkins, 2017).

Intersectionality as a framework emerged as a critique of the prevalent feminist politics of white women in the West and developed directly from the experiences embodied by Black women that remained unaccounted for within the feminist movement. The erasure of black women and their experiences in academic scholarship in general and feminist scholarship in particular resulted in this framework that emerged from anti-racist politics (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) developed this framework to understand, record and analyse the interactions between gender and race that shaped the multi-dimensional experiences of black women during employment (Crenshaw, 1991).

It emanated from the consciousness that gender and race were mutually inclusive in determining the experiences of women. Further, it provided for a sincere critique on the white women led feminist politics. Bringing to the centre, the experiences of black women and the inequalities that shape their life. Therefore, it was essential to put forth a framework that would account for and lay out the multiple dimensions of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989)

It was not an effort to include black women into the existing knowledge projects but to redefine production of knowledge taking into account the existence of multi-faceted and multi-layered oppression and inequalities. It was to bring forth the knowledge directly from the experiences of black women. This restructuring led to radical changes in the way knowledge was viewed furthering legal and political changes with regard to discrimination, inequality and violence based on gender and race (Ibid.).

In an attempt to study violence against black women, Crenshaw (1991) suggests that such violence “is shaped by the other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (p. 1242). Focussing on violence on women by men, Crenshaw (1991) suggests that feminists have been successful in bringing these narratives from the private to the political domain in the rights discourse. However, it has failed to account for and articulate violence on black women that are linked to their race as well as gender (Ibid.).

Broadening the framework, Crenshaw (1991) suggests that “experiences of women of colour are frequently product of interesting patterns of racism and sexism” (p. 1243). Therefore, intersectionality project is one that is political, that which intervenes between discourses, both political and institutional, to raise alarm about issues about intersecting identities and multiple dimensions of oppression (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013). They further argue that intersectionality is “an analytic sensibility” (Ibid., p. 795), that is thinking in an intersectional way about difference and similarities based on identities and “its relation to power” (Ibid., p. 795).

Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) further argue,

This framing- conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by the

dynamics of power emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is. (p. 795)

Intersectionality works through deconstructive methods and therefore can challenge the laws and politics that form the core of the society by challenging the paradigms of difference and similarities (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013). This framework has been useful in feminist scholarship, especially to study systems of knowledge and caregiving (Collins, 2015) among black communities. It has also helped in framing and articulating rights in political struggles over the years.

Intersectionality has been particularly important in studying masculinities, especially for the study of Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and other sexual identities. Connell's (1995) relational model of masculinities and his contextualisation of oppression faced by subordinate masculinities borrows from the intersectional framework. It allows for a multi-layered understanding of oppression and violence against gay men in society.

Connell's (1995) model essentially situates gender as a dynamic and active set of practices that are situated in "historical-cultural contexts" (Demetriou, 2001, p. 340) and are performed by individuals who are located in "different race, class or generation" (Demetriou, 2001, p. 340). Therefore, this framework argues that gender is a performance and a doing word, that is, gender in Connell's analysis, is a verb. It actively interacts with other structures and is "constantly produced and reproduced in social practices" (Demetriou, 2001, p. 340).

Further, the concept of hegemonic masculinity suggests both internal and external hegemony, that is, an overall domination of women, who are outside the masculine hierarchy and domination of men who are placed lower in the masculine hierarchy. This understanding is embedded in the

feminist perspective of gender that argues that oppression, subordination and domination form the basis for gender relations (Demetriou, 2001).

Further, Connell's model of masculinity interacts with the scholarship on sexuality studies as is seen in his understanding of gender. He presents gender as an active enactment that is not just learned and acted on but that which engages with the specific social realities. It is in resonance with Butler's (1990) theory of gender that articulates gender as a doing verb or a performance. She begins with a critique of the universality of womanhood, a conception that was prevalent in the feminist discourse on gender and argues that the experience of womanhood is intricately linked to other experience that emanate from various social identities one embody. These identities are related to class, race, and sexuality and so on (Butler, 1990). This understanding is embedded in the intersectional framework. Therefore, the intersectional framework allows Butler (1990) to foreground the foundation for Queer and Sexuality Studies.

Taking a cue from this, Butler (1990) argues that just like there is no universal woman, there is no universal patriarchy. Patriarchal structures and relations are spatially and temporally heterogeneous. Therefore the notion of unity in the category of woman itself is false (Ibid.).

She further falsifies the binary notion of sex being biological and gender as culturally constructed and suggests that both are embedded in culture and takes place with the discourse of language which itself is masculine. The processes of determining sex is itself a social process wherein the medico-legal language pronounces the genitalia as either male or female and thereby beginning the process of gender. In Butler's (1990) understanding, gender and sex are both products of a discourse that benefits from this false construction of binary.

She suggests that a gender as a cultural construction does not give a clear picture. It creates a notion that individuals are passive agents learning and enacting gender. Drawing on the critique of Foucault's *Herculine*, Butler (1990) suggests that gender is a performance, a manner of being. It is actively performed while negotiating with the structures that regulate it. Further, since gender is an act or performance that is enacted within the cultural influences of specific societies, there can be no universal gender (Ibid.).

In order to understand the structures of regulation, Butler (2004) defines regulation as "the institutionalization of the process by which persons are made regular (p. 40). These are "concrete laws, rules, and policies that constitute the legal instruments through which personas are made regular" (Ibid., p. 40). However, problematizing the very concept of regulation Butler (2004) suggests that the governing norms that regulate gender "exceeds the very instances in which they are embodied" (p. 40). This means that normative ways in which gender is situated in society go beyond the individual performance of gender. (Ibid.)

The feminist scholarship on gender has focussed on the ways in which gender is regulated, incorporated, imposed and lived. However, Butler (2004) argues that gender exists because of regulations, that is, regulation is the precursor to the existence of gender itself. Critiquing the Foucauldian understanding of regulatory power that rests itself on the pre-existing subject, she argues that gender itself is an example of the ways in which regulatory power works. Furthering this critique, Butler (2004) argues that "the regulatory power that governs gender is itself gender specific" (p. 41) and "gender requires and institutes its own distinctive regulatory and disciplinary regimes" (p. 41).

She further explicates that the difference between the understanding of gender as a norm and the normative ways in which masculinity and femininity are viewed. According to Butler (2004),

Gender is not exactly what one 'is' nor is it precisely what one 'has'. Gender is the apparatus by which production of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes...to conflate the definition of gender with its normative expression is inadvertently to reconsolidate the power of the norm to constrain the definition of gender (p. 42).

It is not the normative views on gender that falsely frames the dichotomy of masculine and feminine, which Butler (2004) suggests "performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalizes hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption" (p. 43). Taking a cue from the Lacanian writings, Butler (2004) argues that gender regulation takes place in the symbolic realm of the psyche which regulates desire and differs from norms that are guided by social law (Ibid.).

Butler's understanding of gender and gender regulations place importance on the symbolic and the psychic, whereas Foucault understands gender as that which is regulated and disciplined. His notable works on discipline and on sexuality foreground the most important understanding of modern sexuality. He argues that the organisation of modern sexuality and its standardisation to legitimize the family as a space of reproduction and therefore the sanctioned institution through which sexuality can navigate is a result of the rise in the bourgeoisie in the 17th century. The modern state condemned the other sexualities, those that are not reproductive, to violence at one level and invisibility at another (Foucault, Rabinow, 1984).

According to Foucault, discipline is a type of power or technology that is used by both specialized institutions like correction homes, jails and so on, as well as institutions like family and school.

Discipline is the way in which gender identities and sexualities are ordered according to the normative standards of society. It is associated with the disciplining of bodies and desires in order to maintain the power relations in a modern society (Foucault, Rabinow, 1984).

In discussing the growth of homosexual identity, Foucault puts focus on the way in which

historical transition from a view of homosexuality as a range of acts (sodomy), which were hardly equated with a stable homosexual subjectivity, to a view of homosexuality as a specific gender identity category rooted in human nature. Such a naturalisation of homosexuality and the corresponding congealment of a set of acts into an identity category allowed making homosexuals the subject of a variety of knowledge in both the fields of hard science and social science (Croce, 2015, p. 6).

Both Butler (2004) and Foucault become useful in understanding the ways in which young boys and men are constructed as gendered subjects. While Butler's (2004) understanding allows to articulate the unthinkable, in terms of gender and sexuality, Foucault's idea of discipline engages with the ways in which subjectivities are formed within the disciplining constraints.

SECTION IV: INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD

The fieldwork of this research is conducted in Kolkata, West Bengal. The decision to choose Kolkata among the other cities in India was a conscious choice after considering the familiarity with the language and culture of the city. Since the duration of this research is short, it was an informed decision to select a field of study that was familiar and accessible. However, the most important reason is perhaps the fact that the first historic Queer Pride Walk began in Kolkata on 2nd July 1999. It was called 'The Friendship Walk' and the first of its kind to take place in India. The walk was planned and executed with the motive to inform people of the city about the discriminations faced

by the LGBT community. It was also a moment of political assertion through publicly claiming their identities. Pawan Dhall recalls that Kolkata (then Calcutta) was chosen to be the host city because of the belief that the people of the city were tolerant and that the city had a history of progressive struggles.² In the following section, I will try to draw a brief history of the city from its inception to the early 21st century with respect to its formation and political dynamics.

Further, I will draw a brief history of the Kolkata Pride and LGBTQIA activism that shaped the Queer visibility in the 21st century. The attempt is to understand the field from where the narratives of gay lives are coming forth.

A Brief History of Kolkata

Kolkata (erstwhile Calcutta) developed as a capital city of the state of West Bengal hosting business and commercial activities of the other districts of the state as well as the North-Eastern states (Bhatta, 2009). It is the second largest city in India (Sengupta, 2007) located on the eastern bank of the Hooghly River and is estimated to be older than 300 years (Bhatta, 2009).

An English trader named Job Charnock founded the city in 1690 before which the area was divided into 3 villages namely Govindpur, Sutanuti and Kalikata (Hyrapiet, 2012) in lower Bengal (Mukherjee, 2012). Until 1911, it served as the capital of British India (Bhatta, 2009). The colonial city was built into racially segregated towns namely, the White Town and the Black Town (Chattopadhyay, 2006).

These towns were further structured according to the social locations of the inhabitants. The White Town inhabited by the Europeans was markedly different from the Black Town that was inhabited by the native Bengalis with respect to the architectural layout, lifestyles and density (Ibid.). During

²Dhall, P. 2010. A Walk to Remember. *Gaylaxy*, July 15.

the 19th century, the city became a space of control and production of labour and capital leading to migration from rural to urban spaces (Sengupta, 2007).

Post-1947 India Pakistan partition and 1971 Bangladesh' Independence Struggle, Kolkata saw a high influx of migrants which led to the unplanned infrastructural growth as well as a booming informal sector (Ibid.). This was because of the lack of sufficient formal sector employment opportunities (Hyrapiet, 2012). The changes in the spatial and cultural realms of the city during the early 20th century was reflected in the growing body of Bengali Art and Literature. The growing public spaces of theatre, cinema and cafes facilitated the exchange of ideas and foregrounded the modern Bengali identity amidst the nationalist movements and claimed the city of Kolkata as a modern city (Chattopadhyay, 2006).

Since the latter half of the 19th century, there was a growing consciousness among the Bengali middle-class men and women about their “modern” identity that was facilitated by the processes of migration and social and economic structuring of the city (Ibid.). There was also an overwhelming need to imagine Bengali as a modern language which led to the beginning of printing presses, publishing houses, newspapers and such. These were all produced outside regulation the state and missionaries (Partha Chatterjee, cited in Chattopadhyay, 2006).

After the Independence, Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation was set up in 1961 to implement the Basic Development Plan according to the Western development model, with the advice and funding from the Ford Foundation (Hyrapiet, 2012). The present urban agglomeration of Kolkata ranks 8th in the world with more than 15 million people (Mukherjee, 2012) living in 1750 square kilometre of area (Bhatta, 2009). The area under the control of Kolkata Municipal Corporation is 185 square kilometres divided into electoral wards (Ibid.). The central part of the city

that forms Burrabazar and B. B. D. Bagh area remain concentrated with the administrative and economic functions (Mukherjee, 2012).

In 2014, the estimated population of Kolkata was 4.6 million with a very high population reaching 24,000 people per square kilometre. The population of the area including the suburbs rise up to 14.3 million. The majority population in Kolkata identify as Bengalis. Biharis and Marwaris are the largest linguistic minority groups in Kolkata. Small communities of Chinese, Nepalis, Oriyas, Gujaratis, Anglo-Indians, Armenians, and Parsis and so on, also exist in pockets of the city. Hindus form the religious majority, followed by Muslims, Christians and Jains.³ According to Census 2011, the average literacy rate in Kolkata city is 86.31 per cent.⁴

In the post-independent West-Bengal, the first general elections brought the Indian National Congress (INC) to power in the state. The INC continued to hold power in the state until the emergency period. The years leading up to the emergency witnessed the Bangladesh Liberation War and the peasant led Naxalbari Movement. Both these movements had large participation from West Bengal, and specifically Kolkata. The end of emergency brought to power the Left Front government which was led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (Gooptu 2007). Apart from CPI (M), the left front consisted of Communist Party of India (CPI), Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and Forward Bloc (FB) and other small organisations (Sarkar 2006). Left Front's major achievement was the rise in agricultural production due to the land reforms, transfer of land ownership and decentralisation of power in rural areas that the government initiated. During the 1980s, there was a considerable increase recorded in agricultural production (Ibid.). However, in the

³Kolkata Population 2019 (<http://www.worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/kolkata-population/>)

⁴Kolkata City Census 2011 Data (<http://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/215-kolkata.html>)

1990s the agricultural growth fell. It was a time when there was a rise in the industrial sector, although the formal industrial sector continued to reflect slow growth (Ibid.).

During the Left Front rule, the major opposition party was the Indian National Congress. It was during the mid-1990s that the local congress, All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), parted from the INC and emerged as the largest opposition. Until the early 21st century, the Bharatiya Janata Party remained inconsequential (Ibid.).

In the 2011 elections, AITC emerged as the majority party and formed the state government. The party won with the slogan “maa, maati, maanush” (mother, land, people) referring to the power of the common people of the land. Since 2011, BJP has emerged as a serious opposition in the state.

SECTION V: METHOD, THEMES, AND PROFILES

Scholarship on masculinity and specifically gay masculinities is an ever-expanding field of knowledge, especially in the West. In India, multiple works on MSM (Men-who-have-Sex-with-Men) (Chopra, Dasgupta, and, Janeja, 2000), gay men’s networks and friendships (Bandyopadhyay, 2006), gay visibility in India (Hebbbar, 2006) and so on, in the last three decades that have brought out descriptive as well as theoretical knowledge on gay men and their experiences with HIV/AIDS, violence, stigma and such. Further, research has also focussed on intimacy, desire and involvement with LGBTQ activism. Within this gamut of scholarship, this research aims to understand the experiences of men growing up with the gay identity, their experience violence, humiliation and sexual abuse. The attempt is to look at the ways in which they learn to negotiate their masculinities in spaces that exist to discipline gender and sexuality.

In this study, I have interviewed 9 young men from the age cohort of 19 to 34 years who self-identify as gay. I have also interviewed a person who used to identify as gay but presently identifies

as bisexual gender queer person. The total number of interviews are restricted to 10 due to the nature of this research course and the short-time frame allowed to conduct the research.

The interviews were scheduled during January 2019 and February 2019. Each interviewee was asked a set of semi-structured questions and the conversations took place for a minimum of 2 hours and a maximum of 3 hours. The interviews were recorded over Skype except for two interviews that were recorded face to face during mid-January 2019. 9 out of 10 interviewees participated bilingually (English and Bengali/Hindi) while one spoke only in Bengali.

The interviewees are individuals engaged in Higher Education or self-employed. One of the interviewees was unemployed during the time I interviewed them. I was informed that they were currently employed in an art gallery in Kolkata as an Assistant Gallery Manager. I reached out to the interviewees through the process of snowball sampling. I had initially approached two of my interviewees in the 2017 Kolkata Pride March that took place on December 10 2017. They introduced me to three other interviewees. I approached one of my interviewees through a common acquaintance who is a young LGBTQ rights activist in Kolkata. I also connected with two other interviewees through a blog page that they are a regular reader of. They connected me to two of their friends and acquaintances who were willing to participate in the research.

Snowball sampling is a methodological tool that has proved to be useful for accessing sample in cases where the study is on a group or community of individuals who cannot be identified or accessed through Census or other forms of government or non-government data. It is used in qualitative sociological research wherein the sample is accessed through references provided individuals who have the characteristics that the study aims to understand (Biernacki, and Waldorf, 1981).

This method is crucial in studies concerning private matters, stigmatised groups, etc. In such cases, the researcher is required to access the knowledge of insiders to locate the people whose lives s/he is interested in studying. Snowball sampling has proved to be very useful in studying various communities where individuals show deviant behaviour. For instance, both Lindesmith and Becker have used this method in gaining access to the groups of opiate addicts and marijuana smokers respectively (Ibid.).

Snowball sampling can be used as both formal and informal technique to access the target group that the researcher wants to study and has proved to be an advantageous tool in doing qualitative and descriptive sociological research through interview method. This method bases its assumption on the existing relationship between the initial interviewee and others in the population targeted to be studied and uses social networks of interviewees to provide the researcher with an increasing set of the potential sample (Atkinson, R. and Flint, J. 2001).

In the context of this research, it is difficult to use other methods to reach individuals from the gay community because there is no official data available on the gay community. There is also no census data available that could be the basis of other sampling methods. Moreover, until recently, the LGBTQ community lived under the fear of persecution due to the existence of the draconian Section 377 of the IPC that criminalized homosexuality.

In Kolkata, there are various organisations that work on LGBTQ issues. However, there is no organisation specifically working with gay men. Among my interviewees, most of them have attended Kolkata Pride at some point of time. However, not one of them is associated with any organisation. This is not to suggest that there are no gay men working in/with LGBTQ organisations. My interviewees have articulated varying relationships they have had and continue to

have with the Pride movement. It is imperative to mention here, none of my interviewees is associated with any form of organised politics and does not have any affiliation to any political party.

The interviews were structured through Feminist Interview Method that allowed for access to in-depth knowledge about the lives of the individuals that the study aims to understand. This method is an alternative to traditional social science research method that prioritizes objectivity and distance between the researchers and researched as opposed to subjective understanding and connectedness of the researchers to the researched in producing sociological knowledge (Reinharz, 1992). It has been historically used by feminist scholars of social sciences in order to understand the lives of women and other marginalized groups in their own language and words (Ibid.).

This method uses semi-structured and unstructured interviews that allows the respondents ample space for response resulting in detailed descriptions. Based on the perspectives of grounded theory, Feminist Interview Method produces non-standardized information and allows for an exhaustive report variation by allowing open-ended responses furthering the possibility of discussion. This method puts emphasis on subjecting in analysing the social experiences of those researched and requires the researcher to be open and engaged with the researched and provide self-disclosure as part of the ‘feminist ethic of commitment and egalitarianism’ (Reinharz, 1992).

According to Reinharz (1992), self-disclosure is a feminist practice that allows the researcher to initiate “a true dialogue which is not just a one-sided interrogation. In situations where the feminist researcher is engaged in studying marginalized and relatively powerless groups, the researcher may face questions from the interviewees during the time of the interview. This is when a researcher’s self-disclosure is essential (Ibid.). Hilary Graham suggests that the open-ended interview method

facilitated by Feminist Interview Research allows the interviewees to construct the knowledge about their own lives (Ibid.) and express their realities thereby co-creating meaning (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

In a semi-structured interview schedule, there is a pre-prepared list of questions that the researcher enters the interview with. However, there is room for spontaneity and therefore the researcher can choose to probe into the answers of the respondents and ask further questions to receive a clear understanding of the subject matter of research. The technique of probing is useful in accessing information that furthers the clarity of the researcher about the study and the lives of the interviewees (Ibid.).

Hesse-Biber (2007) discussing the importance of Ann Oakley's (1981) 'Participatory Model' argues that,

The idea of sharing identities and stories with one another is thought to increase reciprocity and rapport in the interview process, thus breaking down the notion of power and authority invested in the role of the researcher. (Ibid., p. 128)

Following the Feminist Interview Method, the interviews are semi-structured and the interviewees were asked to choose their own pseudonyms. This is because, the ethics of Social Science research argues that using original names of the researched, especially those vulnerable to violence and discrimination is unethical. It could affect their lives in various ways. However, feminist methodology urges the researcher to check the power relations between oneself and the respondents. Therefore, I asked my respondents to give themselves the names through which they would want to be addressed in this research.

Each interviewee was encouraged to share their experiences in their own ways and words. An attempt was made to establish a reciprocal relationship with the interviewees so as to allow counter

questions from them and consciously affect the power dynamics between the interviewer and the interviews.

The interviewees were questioned on the following broad areas:

1. Identity and Realisation
2. Experience with Body
3. Experience with Institutions
4. Relationships

During the interview, various aspects of the lives of my interviewees were put forth. A number of themes emerged during these conversations. This Chapter will elaborate on the narratives of the interviewees in a thematic form. It must be noted that many experiences and themes overlap and represent the complex subjectivities of my interviewees.

Before detailing the themes that emerged from the interviews in the later chapters, I would like to introduce the profiles of my interviewees to the reader. For the purpose of anonymity and maintaining the ethics of Social Science research, the names of all my interviewees have been changed. Each of the pseudonyms has been chosen by the respondents. Moreover, specific details of birth and residence are also not divulged here.

1. Salman Mohammed

Salman is 29 years old and currently employed in an Art Gallery in Kolkata. Salman presently self identifies as a gender queer non-binary person (since 2017) and prefers the pronouns they and them while being referred to. They have been a part of the gender-segregated co-education schooling system. During college days, they identified as a gay man. This was because Salman was unaware of the other identities. They always knew they had bisexual tendencies, but only openly announced

themselves as bisexual in 2013. Salman belongs to a practising Muslim Bengali family from Central Kolkata. However, they vehemently suggest that they do not believe in any religion and is an atheist. When I interviewed Salman during mid-January 2019, they were in search of proper employment and struggling with health issues including clinical depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and HIV Positive Virus. Their highest qualification is Master of Arts. Their father currently retired from government sector job and their mother is a home-maker. Salman also has an elder sister.

2. Nilabho Chattopadhyay

Nilabho is 34 years old and currently employed in a Bank. He identifies as a gay man and prefers the pronouns he/him. His father is a retired government school teacher and his mother is a home-maker. Nilabho studied in a vernacular medium boys' school. He keeps his gay identity private. He is married to a private school teacher and has a daughter who is 2 years old. Nilabho is the only child of his parents. His highest qualification is Master of Science from Calcutta University. He introduces himself as a practising Hindu. He is a resident of North Kolkata and his present income is Rs. 6 lakh per annum.

3. Amartya Dutta

Amartya is 19 years old pursuing Bachelor of Science. He self identifies as a gay person and prefers the pronouns he/his/him. He is a resident of Salt Lake City, Kolkata. He is born to a Hindu Bengali family and identifies as an atheist. Both his parents are employed. While his mother is a bank employee, his father is a senior engineer. His family income is approximately Rs. 10 lakh per annum. He studied in an English medium co-educational schooling system.

4. Nikhil Agarwal

Nikhil is a 25-year-old dancer. He identifies as a gay man and prefers the pronouns he/him/his. He is a resident of North Kolkata. Nikhil's family is originally from Rajasthan but he has lived in Kolkata since he can remember. He is a practising Hindu. He is a Rajasthani speaker but he spoke to me in Hindi and English. He did his schooling from a boys' convent school and then went on to do a Bachelor of Commerce degree. He dances professionally and makes between Rs. 15,000-25,000 a month depending on the shows. He also teaches at a local dance institute in South Kolkata. His father owns a business in BurraBazar area of Kolkata and his mother is a home-maker.

5. Koushik Das

Koushik is a 26-year-old self-identifying gay person. He prefers the pronouns he/his/him. He is originally from Asansol district of West Bengal. He moved to Kolkata at the age of 5 or 6 years. His father was employed in a publishing company in North Kolkata until his death in 2018. His mother is a Montessori school teacher. His highest qualification is Bachelors' degree. He did not feel comfortable disclosing his occupation and personal income during the course of the interview. He identifies as a Bengali Hindu and currently resides in East Kolkata area.

6. Rayan Mukherjee

Rayan is a 27-year-old copywriter who self-identifies as a gay person and prefers the pronouns he/his/him. He is also an independently practising Wiccan. He was born in his family home in Satoshpur, Kolkata where he lived with his joint family until a few years back when he moved out to live alone. He presently lives in Garia area of Kolkata in a rented flat with his cat named Bastet. Rayan studied in an English medium co-education schooling system. His mother is a house-wife and his father is now involved in the family business after his retirement from government service. He

does not take any financial help from his family. Rayan's highest qualification is Master of Arts. He is presently an employee of a multinational advertising agency. His family is a practising Brahmin family while he positions himself as a non-believer of organised religion.

7. Charlie Abraham

Charlie is a 25-year-old Make-up Artist who identifies as a gay man. He prefers the pronouns he/his/him. He belongs to a Catholic family and has 2 elder brothers. His parents together run a shop in Esplanade, Kolkata. He is from Patuli. He studied in a convent boys' schooling system. He completed his class 12 but dropped out of college in 2nd year. As a make-up artist, he earns around Rs. 35,000-60,000 a month, depending on wedding seasons. He has been working since he was 18 years old. Earlier he worked as a designer for an art group.

8. Kalpak Basu

Kalpak is a 21-year-old self-identifying gay person pursuing bachelors' degree in Arts. He prefers the pronouns he/his/him. He studied in an English medium co-education school. His father is an employee at the electricity department and his mother is self-employed as a home tutor. He has an elder brother who works in Bangalore. Kalpak's family income is Rs. 5 lakh per annum excluding his brothers' income. He belongs to a Bengali Hindu family and lives in East Kolkata area.

9. Vaibhav Agarwal

Vaibhav is a 20-year-old self-identifying gay person who is pursuing Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com). He is a resident of Bhawanipore area, where he lives with his parents. His father is an accountant at a private school and his mother owns a clothes shop. Vaibhav did not disclose his family income during the interview. His family is from Rajasthan but he moved to Kolkata when he was 2 years old. He comes from a practising Hindu family. During the interview, he spoke in Hindi

and English. He can speak Bengali, Hindi, English and Marwari. He studied in an English medium boys' school.

10. Abhinava Gupta

Abhinava is a 23-year-old self-identifying gay person who is pursuing Masters' in Music. He is a resident of Behala where he lives with his parents. He comes from a practising Hindu family. His father is an Electrical Engineer and his mother is an English Teacher at a private school. His family income is approximately Rs. 10 lakh per annum. He studied in an English medium co-education school.

The interviews conducted with the above-mentioned individuals led to a discussion on various issues ranging from desire, sexuality, stereotypes, sexual abuse, fear, and stigma and so on. The individuals' peer groups emerged as important spaces of contestations and identity building. Their reflection on personal and romantic relationships articulate issues of desire as well as abuse.

Accordingly, the following themes have emerged from the narratives of the interviewees that would form the main basis for this dissertation:

1. Socialising Gender
2. Experience of Humiliation
3. Exploring Desire and Sexuality

SECTION VI: OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

The second and following chapter briefly lays out the history of LGBTQ activism in India with special reference to Kolkata, West Bengal. This would allow us to contextualize the lives of the respondents, within the larger LGBTQ politics. The third chapter discusses the relevant literature on masculinities and specifically gay masculinities that have emerged within the feminist framework so

as to situate this research within the feminist scholarship. The fourth chapter is a thematic representation of the narratives that have been gathered over the period of this research. This chapter further provides a descriptive analysis of the narratives in an effort to make meaning of the lives of the respondents and their construction and negotiations with masculinities. The final chapter is an attempt to summarize the research with a self-reflexive account of doing research on gay men.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF LGBTQ ACTIVISM IN INDIA AND SPECIFICALLY KOLKATA

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality as a practice along with other sexualities, beyond the heterosexual ideal has existed in traditional societies since its inception. However, sexuality has never before been represented in identity politics. It has become an important arena of struggle in the recent years of globalisation (Kole, 2007).

Croce (2015) contends that the origin and growth of LGBTQ activism began in the West during the mid-20th century following the women's movement. It began from the leftist fold but soon laid bare the inherent sexism of the left and the censorship it maintained on the issues pertaining to marginalised sexualities. The major concern of this struggle was not to dismantle the patriarchal state but to fully integrate into it as "respectable citizens" (Ibid., p. 9). According to the gay rights activist, the demand for recognition of their identity and rights was the stepping stone to the opening of discussion on sexuality (Ibid.).

The 1969 Stonewall riots in the United States of America gained popularity across the Western nations. The police raid in a gay bar in New York and the subsequent riot which was joined by more than four hundred people from the community spread across international communities. June 28 continues to be celebrated as Gay Pride across various nations and the month of June is marked as the LGBTQ history month to celebrate and remember the struggles of the people from the LGBTQ community.⁵

⁵Levy, M. (2019, June 20). Gay Rights Movement. *Political and Social Movement*.

The LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) movement in Post-Colonial India mainly took shape in the Post-1991 era. It rooted from two major concerns. First, it was Section 377 of the Indian Penal code that criminalised homosexuality and second, it was the growth of HIV-AIDS at an alarming rate that needed immediate attention.

With the advent of Western ideals, hegemonic notions of LGBT identity have been pushed into the global south societies, including India. Sexual identity has very recently become a political identity in India in comparison to the history of homo erotica existing in India. ‘Coming out’ and identifying as a single sexual identity has become an indicator of development. Indigenous identities like Kothi, Hijras, Kinnar, Panthis and others may not identify with the imported identities (Kole, 2007).

The term ‘Queer’ encompasses all the identities as an umbrella term. Historically it has been used as a slang to refer to homosexual people in the West, however, it has been reclaimed by theorists and activists to question the inevitability of heterosexuality. It encompasses diverse desires and sexualities outside the homo/heterosexual matrix (Ibid.).

Visibility of Queer identity and performance of queerness have become manifold due to globalisation. With easier accessibility to Information Technology and the proliferation of media, queer visibility is gaining momentum in human rights discourse and political agendas. This is further letting sexual minorities to evolve into a global and universal LGBT identity category (Kole, 2007). Accessibility has become an important category of analysis in this context since globalisation has deepened the disparities in accessing the very fruits of globalisation.

The early rise of queer politics began with the writings of notable authors like Ismat Chughtai, Firaq Gorakhpuri (1896-1982) and Pandey Bechan Sharma. Also, Bengali writer Micheal Madhusudhan Dutt (1824-1873) was known for his homoerotic writings. Ismat Chughtai’s *Lihaaf* (The Quilt 1942)

and Pandey Bechan Sharma's *Chaklet* (Chocolate 1927) were based on homoerotic love stories that brought a lot of protests and lawsuits. However, the authors never claimed to be homosexuals. Later, Authors like Rajkamal Chaudhary published Hindi novels on homoerotica. Kamala Das's autobiographical account *My Story* (1976) and later Shobha De's *Strange Obsession* (1993) were also published. In the late 1980s and 90s, South Asian diaspora authors and filmmakers like Suniti Namjoshi, Pratibha Parmar, Rakesh Ratti and Shyam Selvadurai 'came out' with an account of homosexuality. The most important text perhaps was written by Shakuntala Devi in 1977, which became the first academic text on Indian Homosexuality (Kole, 2007).

This confessional tradition influenced Indian writers like Giti Thandani, Hoshang Merchant and later Saleem Kidwai and Ruth Vanita. The process of globalisation, trade liberalization and opening of the Indian economy in 1991 led to the assertion of queer identities and furthered the demand for a queer space. In the 1980s, South Asian Queer diaspora started organising groups as a response to racism in white queer groups. They started publications such as *Trikone* (San Jose), *Shakti Khabar* (London), *Shamakami* (San Francisco) and *Khush Khayal* (Toronto) (Ibid.).

SECTION II: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SECTION 377 OF THE IPC AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ITS ABOLITION

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for the first time criminalised homosexuality as an 'unnatural sex' with a serious degree of punishment. It was a British intervention that brought about this law and continues to be a part of The Indian Constitution. The Indian Penal Code was drafted by Lord Macaulay in 1837 but came into force only in 1860. It was a part of Britain's efforts to impose Victorian values on its biggest colony (Mishra, 2009). Section 377 of the IPC targeted all sexual acts which were non-procreative in nature under the ambiguous wording 'carnal intercourse'

thereby bringing both consensual as well as coercive sex within its prohibition (Narain and Gupta, 2011).

Section 377 reads as follows:

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 10 years, and shall be liable to fine.

(Section 377 of The Indian Penal Code cited in Narain and Gupta, 2011, p. xvi)

This law was progressive in Britain because it reduced the punishment for sodomy. However, in the Indian context, it was a regressive step (Vanita and Kidwai, 2008). It was the root cause of homophobia that surfaced itself (Narain and Gupta, 2011) and pushed sexuality to the private domain yet demarcated the difference by setting heterosexuality and the ideal of procreative sex as the norm. The pre-colonial socio-political geography that Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (2008) identifies as India is replete with homo erotica found in literature, mythology, and politics and so on. The ancient and medieval Indian traditions show a compatible and harmonious co-existence of heterosexual attachments and same-sex love (Vanita and Kidwai, 2008). With the advent of the British and the establishment of the Indian Penal Code, Victorian Puritanism with all its fears of deviant sexual practices, formed a profound influence on the Indian communities and this furthered the cause of compulsory heterosexuality as the ideal against which homosexuality continued to be a punishable offence in post-independent India (Vanita and Kidwai, 2008).

This law has rarely been used to implicate anyone for consensual homosexual act since its inception but it is recurrently used by police to harass and blackmail men in public places. It has also been used to create antagonism against homosexuals in the context of trials for other offences. It has also

been invoked to declare rape cases as sodomy, only because both the perpetrator and the survivor/victim are men (Ibid.). There has been only one prosecution of adults having same-sex consensual sex since 1930. In Section 375 defining the rape laws, there is an absence of mention of forceful oral and anal penetration and therefore most cases pertaining to child sexual abuse and rape get attached to Section 377. This allows for the persistence of Section 377 (Ibid.).

This law, although has seldom prosecuted any consensual same-sex act, it has had a tremendous and fearful impact on queer people. The arrest of NGO workers in Lucknow because they worked on HIV/AIDS prevention efforts with Men-who-have-Sex-with-Men (MSM), refusal of the court to take up a case of a young man who was given electric therapy to cure himself of homosexuality, are some examples of the adverse effect of this law (Bhan, 2005). This law affects queer people, especially men, who meet in public places, the law used against them mostly for blackmail. Most democracies in the West along with South Africa and Nepal abolished this law in the 1980s (Mishra, 2009). However, it continues to persist in India even after repeated efforts by non-governmental organisations and civil society.

After forty years of independence, the queer community of India showed its discontent with Section 377. It was the first rise of political consciousness among the queer community based on constitutional discrimination. It was “the beginning of an indigenous opposition against an alien law” (Narain and Gupta, 2011, p. xxii). This opposition and political consciousness resulted in the publication of various reports on the Queer community by activists. Less Than Gay Report (1991), Campaign for Lesbian Rights (CALERI Report, 1997), Humjinsi (1999) and PUCL-Karnataka Report (2001, 2003) discussing human rights violations against Trans and Queer people (Ibid.).

The first documented protest against Section 377 was called by AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA) in 1992. It was the first collective protest for gay rights in India. ABVA, since 1989 was working with AIDS-affected victims and had a major role in bringing down the draconian AIDS (Prevention) Bill (Less Than Gay Report, 1991). They called for a public demonstration against the harassment of gay people by police (Narain and Gupta, 2011). ABVA in 1991 had published the Less than Gay Report discussing the rights and discriminations of the Queer community. The report brought forth the status of AIDS-affected people and the discrimination and shame faced by gay men across the world, and particularly in India (Less Than Gay Report, 1991).

In 1999, ABVA brought out a fact-finding report investigating the joint suicide attempt of Mamta and Monalisa. This report was called 'Like People Like Us' and it focused on experiences of lesbian and bisexual women within the normative structures of gender and sexuality. It also sought to publicize Leela and Urmila's (two policewomen) declaration of marriage in 1988, who were then dismissed from service (Narain and Gupta, 2011).

Although the struggle against Section 377 has been taken up by the LGBT community in India, along with allies from civil society, the worst affected by this law are gay/bisexual men and transgender persons coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds who use public places as spaces of pleasure. These are the section of the LGBT community who cannot afford to use the right to privacy. The Government of India acknowledges that the state will turn a blind eye if homosexuality is practised between consenting adults in private (Kole, 2007).

SECTION III: ACTIVISM AGAINST HIV/AIDS

The 1990s marked the beginning of an important decade for queer activism. India was opening up its economy for foreign investments and promoting free trade and free market policies. Due to the Third World debt crisis of the 1980s, India was forced to borrow money from the IMF and accepted the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). This led to economic globalisation. India became an open market with cheap labour for big multinational companies. Along with multinational companies, NGOs like McArthur Foundation, ICRW, HIVOS and many more were set up to work with marginalised communities of the third world. This was also the time when the AIDS epidemic was emerging and India was hard hit by this epidemic. This allowed a huge flow of capital from International foundations to create awareness and help HIV/AIDS-affected communities (Kole, 2007).

The opening up of the Indian economy and the emergence of the AIDS epidemic led India to accept World Bank's loan to prevent AIDS. This further led to a fundamental change in the queer mobilisation. Indigenous sexual identities like Kothis, Hijras and others came under the common and fixed banner of LBGT identities (Ibid.)

Denise Altman (2007) suggests that globalisation led to the growth of consumerism and individualism which affected sexuality in many ways. The rapid emergence of HIV/AIDS during the globalisation era and responses to it leads Altman (2007) to call AIDS as “an epidemic of globalisation” (p. 153). He suggests that this epidemic was a result of the movement of people and breaking down of old sexual moralities as well as rampant usage of needles. However, widespread response to this epidemic had, on one hand, led to an international mobilisation and on the other

hand, led to the creation of new identities like ‘Men-who-have-Sex-with-Men’ (MSM) and so on (Ibid.).

The earliest reported case of HIV/AIDS in India was in 1986 and further cases followed since. The government started testing sex workers, drug users and initiated a repressive policy to control the virus. It was only in 1989, that the Indian government initiated a rights-based approach to prevent and control HIV/AIDS (Kole, 2007).

National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) was set by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare after the 1986 report of the first AIDS victim. It was initially funded by the World Bank. The NACO website suggests that “as the epidemic spread, the need was felt for a nationwide programme and an organization to steer the programme.”⁶ Thus, the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) Phase I (1992-1999) was launched by NACO. NACP I was initiated to control the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus in the country and to reduce mortality. It implemented awareness generation strategies and provided access to safe blood to high-risk populations. NACP Phase II was initiated with two objectives: to reduce the spread of HIV and to “build India’s capacity to respond to HIV/AIDS on a long term basis.”⁷ NACP Phase III was launched in 2007 with an aim to reverse the epidemic in India by the end of the project period.⁸

Along with the efforts of the government, many international funding agencies also poured in funds to control HIV/AIDS and create awareness among people about sexual rights. In 1994, Shivananda Khan started the Naz Project and associated with Mumbai based Humsafar Trust and organised the

⁶ NACO website: <http://naco.gov.in/about-us>

⁷ NACO website: <http://naco.gov.in/about-us>

⁸ NACO website: <http://naco.gov.in/about-us>

first national conference for gay men and MSMs in South Asia to identify the issues of sexual health. NGOs like TARSHI (Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health in India) and Samagama came up with two-year fellowship from McArthur Foundation. Other organisations like Bharosa Trust, Manas Bangla, Mirthrudu, Mitra, Udaan Trust and so on were also established across India during this time (Kole, 2007). With the coming up of these donor driven organisations, many new forms of activism became visible, including queer film festivals, gay pride parades, queer chatrooms and so on (Ibid.)

All of these efforts created an awareness among the queer community and at the same time mobilised the community towards a rights-based struggle. Such mobilisation was facilitated by the booming of media and entry of internet in India. Television and cinema started to discuss issues of homosexuality despite public anxieties. Mainstream films like *Tammana* (Desire) 1997, *Daayra* (the Square Hole) 1997 and others discussed queer identities and sexualities. The film *Fire* (1998) by Deepa Mehta, depicting same-sex love between two sisters-in-law, openly attacked the Hindu values of monogamy and heterosexuality. The release of this film was stopped by many right-wing organisations in Bombay and Delhi in the pretext of “Indian Culture”. Hoardings were destroyed, movie theatres were plundered in order to stop the screening. The violence was responded with a silent protest organised by 32 organisations and concerned citizens in front of Delhi’s Regal Cinema. (Ghosh, 2007). However the protests did not articulate the concern for lesbian rights, rather there was a complete omission of homosexuality and the concerns were moulded within the rubric of free speech. This led to the publication of CALERI (Campaign for Lesbian Rights). The central concern of this report was to bring the question of lesbian rights into the public debate around ‘Fire’, challenging the assumption that lesbian rights was a personal choice (Narain and Gupta, 2011).

Since then independent films like *BomGay* (1996), *My Brother Nikhil* (1994) and other films have surfaced a queer presence in Indian cinema, which is otherwise seen as a heterosexual space. It has at the same time brought out the discriminations and marginalisation faced by HIV/AIDS affected people (Ghosh, 2007). The protagonists of these films and the spectatorship it received were dominantly urban middle class.

SECTION IV: ROLE OF INTERNET AND ADVOCACY GROUPS

Internet became a very important agent of queer mobilisation since the 1990s although it was only accessible to the Indian middle-class communities. Online magazines like *Gaylaxy* and *Pinkpages* were mainly focussed of LGBT readership. These magazines were gateways to online dating sites, skin care, gay-friendly tourism, and so on. Gay tourism became a burgeoning market with gay-friendly hotels and resorts along beaches. Gay business and travel establishments like *Pink Vibgyor*, *Pink Escapes*, and *Out Journeys* voiced their fears since the 2013 Supreme Court Verdict re-enforcing Section 377 (Kumar, 2014)

The Internet also became a space for queer people to look for partners. Some of the first queer online dating sites were *PlanetRomeo*, *Gay Bombay*, and *Guys4men.com*. With the growth of mobile phone services and internet-enabled phones, further websites and Apps have been created to facilitate queer dating spaces online. *Grinder*, *Only Lads*, *Mate4all.com*, *Mingle2.com*, *Her*, *LGBTQutie*, are a few to name. These avenues furthered queer visibility, especially gay visibility on the internet. It also helped in establishing transnational queer solidarity.

Alongside there was a growth of independent advocacy groups, mainly working outside the purview of donor-driven agendas. These groups were mainly focused on rights-based advocacy and extended themselves as resource centres and helplines. Groups like *Voices against 377*, *LABIA*, *Sakhi*,

PRISM, Sappho for Equality, Sangini, were formed in many cities across in India advocating for the abolition of 377, against discrimination of sexual minorities and HIV/AIDS affected people.

LABIA⁹ (Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action) is a voluntary non-funded Bombay-based collective, formerly known as Stree Sangam. It was established in 1995 to bring forth the invisible queer lives. Stree Sangam was established as a response to the ignorance of the women's movement towards queer women's struggle for rights and at the same time the patriarchal notions of the gay community (Shah, 2005). LABIA is a part of the autonomous women's movement and queer rights movements. They provide legal aid and take campaigns for queer rights. They believe in the concept of intersectionality and therefore stand as an ally to other struggles for rights¹⁰.

Sappho for Equality (founded as Sappho) was formed in October 2003 by the core members of the group Sappho (founded on 20th June 1999) to work for sexual rights of Women and Trans men within the Human rights framework. The aim of this group is to eradicate discrimination of sexual minorities and provide rights to them. "It uniquely works to create bridges between the so-called normative and non-normative populations"¹¹ in society. Their efforts are to challenge the binary of mainstream/margin and their politics is "to go beyond identity-based politics to a politics of standpoint" questioning homophobia and heterosexism.¹²

CREA is a New Delhi based feminist collective founded in 2000. It works for women's rights and sexual and reproductive freedoms.¹³ It provides training to feminists in India, East Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. It also provides advocacy on issues of sexuality and works closely with

⁹ <https://sites.google.com/site/labiacollective/home>

¹⁰ <https://sites.google.com/site/labiacollective/home>

¹¹ <http://www.sapphokolkata.in/sappho-for-equality/>

¹² <http://www.sapphokolkata.in/sappho-for-equality/>

¹³ <http://www.creaworld.org/who-we-are/about-us>

activists, policy-makers and others. It also provides knowledge resources in English and Hindi and publishes Reproductive Health Matters-Hindi to reach a wider readership. It is also engaged in conducting public events like discussions, debates, online and offline campaign and so on.¹⁴

TARSHI (Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health) is a New Delhi based NGO was founded in 1996. Its aim is to

Work towards expanding sexual and reproductive choices in people's lives in an effort to enable them to enjoy freedom from fear, infection and reproductive and sexual health problems. TARSHI's work on sexuality is from an affirmative and rights-based perspective, a fresh change from perspectives that often restrict sexuality within a disease prevention, violence against women, or sexual minorities framework.¹⁵

TARSHI is engaged in training programs, publications, and awareness and education initiatives. It also runs an infoline and provides advocacy initiatives.¹⁶

Apart from the above-mentioned groups and NGOs, many other such organisations have come up in semi-urban and small towns in India. Many city-based organisations have also located the importance of bridging the urban-rural gap. Organisations like Sappho initiate campaigns in many districts, towns and cities of West Bengal, including Kolkata. Helplines and Advocacy centres across the country have facilitated rights based articulation against sexuality-based discrimination.

SECTION V: DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

In 2001, after a long silence over the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by ABVA in 1994 for repealing Section 377, The Naz Foundation India Trust along with Lawyers' Collective (Bangalore)

¹⁴ <http://www.creaworld.org/who-we-are/about-us>

¹⁵ <http://www.tarshi.net/>

¹⁶ <http://www.tarshi.net/>

filed a petition in Delhi High Court, not to repeal the entire Section 377 but to omit consensual and private sex between same-sex adults. Section 377 violated the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution, namely, right to equality before the law (Article 14), right to be free from sex-based discrimination (Article 15), right to fundamental liberties (Article 19) and finally right to life and privacy (Article 21) (Misra, 2009)

This PIL was a result of the attack on outreach workers of Bharosa Trust and Naz Foundation International. On July 2 2001, the offices of Bharosa Trust and Naz Foundation in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh was raided by police and 4 workers along with Project Manager of Bharosa Trust and Director of Naz Foundation International were arrested and multiple charges were levied including Section 377, Section 292 and Section 120b of the IPC. The ignorance of the police and the silence of NACO and Uttar Pradesh State AIDS Control Society led the workers to remain in custody for 47 days (Kole, 2007).

In 2003, the government was asked to respond to the PIL to which the Home Ministry replied with an affidavit stating that Section 377 was in place not to criminalising consenting adults indulging in the act of sex but to criminalise child and minor sexual assaults. It was also brought to the fore that law was not above public morality and the public morality of the citizens of the Indian state was against the decriminalisation of homosexuality (Ibid.).

Further, the Delhi High Court on September 2004, dismissed the case stating that the party to the case was not personally aggrieved by Section 377. The Supreme Court was approached to review this dismissal in February 2006 which then declared that the Delhi High Court dismissal was invalid and further ordered Delhi High Court to hear the case (Kole, 2007; Misra, 2009).

Meanwhile, On July 2, 1999, the first Gay Pride walk took place in Kolkata, India, under the banner of 'Friendship Walk.' It was funded by Owais Khan and had round fifteen people.¹⁷ However, since 2003 Calcutta Gay Pride Parade (now known as Kolkata Rainbow Pride Walk/Festival) has become a regular affair every year. It is now accompanied by film screenings, workshops, and seminars and so on (Kole, 2007).

In 2006, an affidavit was filed against Section 377 pointing to the adverse effect it could create for HIV/AIDS patients from sexual minorities communities. In the same year, BJP Rajya Sabha MP, B. P Singhal filed a petition against Naz Foundation on the grounds that homosexuality is against the culture of India. A coalition of women's rights, child rights and queer rights groups including CREA, TARSHI, Nigah Media Collective and PRISM was formed in 2006 named Voices Against 377 (Narain and Eldridge, 2009; Misra, 2009). This coalition supported the Naz Foundation's petition and reinstated that Section 377 violated the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution (Narain and Eldridge, 2009, p. 6). Voices Against 377 proved to be the most instrumental force in changing the articulation of the petition filed in 2001 from a health risk concern to a human rights discourse in 2009. It was also the first sustained coalition of its kind including organisations from all human rights struggles. It initiated large scale education campaigns, public awareness programmes, demonstrations, press conferences and a signature campaign. Signatures were collected from those who opposed the law as well as those who were directly affected by it. Finally, in 2006 Voices Against 377 filed a petition in the Delhi High Court supporting the Public Interest Litigation filed by Naz Foundation in 2001(Misra, 2009).

¹⁷ Khan, O. (2010, July 15). "The Friendship Walk." *Gaylaxy*.

On July 2 2009, the Delhi High Court judges, Chief Justice A. P Shah and Justice Dr. S. Muralidhar delivered a concluding judgement ‘decriminalising’ homosexuality and affirming that judiciary was the sole medium of securing fundamental rights of the citizens against discrimination. The bench stated that the judgement was a product of Jawaharlal Nehru’s ‘Objective Resolution’ moved on 13th December 1946. Using a varied range of sources including affidavits, FIRs, academic literature, medical literature, Constituent Assembly Debates, Declaration of Human Rights, Declaration of Human rights, Yogyakarta Principles of 2007 and so on, the judgement for abolishing Section 377 arrived. It marked a historical moment in the LGBT movement in India. Although the judgment was historical, it was only applicable within the jurisdiction of the Delhi High court. It could be ruled out by any regional high court to the Supreme Court of India (Narain and Eldridge, 2009).

In 2013, the Supreme Court of India overruled the Delhi High Court judgment of 2009 during Suresh Kumar Koushal judgement and criminalised homosexuality and declared Section 377 as a part of the Indian Constitution. ‘The Supreme Court reasoned that LGBTQ individuals constituted a “minuscule fraction” of the population and that Section 377 is not used frequently as there have been less than 200 reported judgments in 150 years of the law’s existence.’¹⁸ This judgment was a result of petitions filed by various religious groups and individuals against the decriminalisation of homosexuality and it upheld the public morality clause.

In September of 2012, a writ petition was filed with the Supreme Court of India demanding protection and equal rights of citizenship for the transgender persons. It was filed by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) demanding for the “inclusion of a third category in recording one’s sex/gender in identity documents like the election card, passport, driving license and ration

¹⁸Akila, R. S. (2016, May 19). Section 377: The Way Forward. *The Hindu*.

card” and access to health and educational institutions. The Lawyers’ Collective, on behalf of the transgender and hijra rights activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, filed an intervention “seeking recognition of self-identified gender of persons, either as male/female/third gender, based on their choice” (Lawyers Collective, 2014).¹⁹

The NALSA versus Union of India petition was heard by the division bench consisting of Justice K. S. Radhakrishnan and Justice A. K. Sikri (Sheikh, 2014).²⁰ The bench declared a historic judgment recognising the transgender persons as the third gender and broadening the scope and definition of sex from biological to the psychological expression of gender. Further, the judgement also extended the Fundamental Rights of Indian Constitution to the transgender persons and concluded that no person can be discriminated against for the choice of appearance and sexual orientation. The court also clarified that it recognised both Third gender as a category for transgender persons as well as the category of male and female within the binary genders as categories that could be used by transgender persons for identification (Ibid. 2014).

The NALSA vs. Union of India judgement is based on the tenets of freedom, self-determination and dignity and borrows its intellectual capacity from the International Human Rights Laws and Indian Constitution. According to Justice Radhakrishnan,

¹⁹Lawyers’ Collective Website

²⁰Sheikh, Danish. (2014, April 16). National Legal Services Authority versus Union of India- Preliminary Reactions. *Law and Other things*.

Each person's self-defined sexual orientation and gender identity is integral to their personality and is one of the most basic aspects of self-determination, dignity and freedom.²¹

The bench produced a judgement in favour of the petitioners and included Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution to outlaw any form of discrimination against the transgender community based on their gender and sexual orientation. This was the first time that the transgender community was recognised as full citizens of India legally enjoying all freedoms as any other Indian citizens. It was also decided during the proceedings that sex reassignment surgery was not a necessity to self-identify as a transgender person. Further, it was noted that the transgender community is a historically backward class with little education and lack of formal employment. Therefore the judgement granted them reservation in workforce and education (Ibid. 2014).

The judgment has not been implemented until this day due to already existing stigma in society and bureaucratic loopholes. Another Bill was introduced in 2014 dealing with the rights and recognition of the transgender persons. The Rights of Transgender Bill 2014 was introduced as a private bill by Mr. Tiruchi Siva, Member of Parliament from Tamil Nadu. This bill was unanimously voted for in the Rajya Sabha. However, the bill is waiting to be passed in the Lok Sabha and produced for President's assent.²²

The bill includes both trans-men and women, non-binary gender queer individuals, and other identities like Aravanis, Kinnars, Shivshaktis and Jogtas and so on. The bill constitutes provisions for health, education, employment and social security for the transgender community. The bill

²¹Bhatia, Gautam. (2014, April 15). NALSA v. UoI: The Supreme Court on Transsexuals and the Future of Koushal v. Naz. *Indian Constitutional Law and Philosophy*.

²²2015. Rights of Transgender Persons Bill 2014. Orinam.net

provides two per cent reservation for transgender persons in educational and employment areas in the public sector. It also provides incentives to private employers who employ transgender persons in their workforce (Sheikh, 2015).²³

Since 2014, various developments have taken shape in states like West Bengal and Kerala. In West Bengal, the state government announced the recruitment of transgender persons as civic Police Volunteer Force in October 2015.²⁴ It was also in 2015, that the West Bengal Transgender Development Board was established.²⁵ The Kerala government also declared separate prison cells for transgender prisoners owing to the discrimination and violence they face inside the prisons.²⁶

In 2015, the government drafted the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill 2015 using the framework of the Bill introduced by Mr. Tiruchi Siva, however, the major remedial measures were absent.²⁷ The bill ensures measures against discrimination of any and all forms against transgender persons. It emphasises on the equal right to employment, education and healthcare without any unfair practices towards transgender persons (The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, Bill No. 210 of 2016).²⁸ However, the Bill was not well accepted by the Transgender community. A number of protests broke out nation-wide against the bill stating that it was anti-transgender and exclusionary. According to the transgender activists, the bill drafted fails to protect the transgender

²³Sheikh, Danish. (2015, May 5). A Primer on Transgender Persons Bill 2014. *Our Voices- The Orinam Blog*.

²⁴Ghoshal, Aniruddha. (2015, October 1). West Bengal govt. plans to enrol transgenders in civic police volunteer force. *The Indian Express*.

²⁵Press Trust of India. (2015, March 18). West Bengal announces constitution of Transgender Development Board. *DNA*.

²⁶Prakash, Nidhi. (2015, October 13). This Indian prison is taking a serious step towards protecting transgender inmates. *Fusion*.

²⁷Abraham, Rohan. (2017, November 30). All you need to know about the Transgender Persons Bill, 2016. *The Hindu*.

²⁸The Transgender Person Protection of Rights Bill, 2016. Bill No. 210 of 2016.

community. Activists have also argued that the bill does not suggest adequate measures to combat violence perpetrated against the transgender persons.²⁹

In chapter III of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, (2016), point 6 (2) suggests a screening procedure for the Transgender Persons that will be conducted by a District Screening committee including the Chief Medical Officer, District Social Welfare Officer, a Psychologist or Psychoanalyst, and a government nominated officer as members. This screening committee will then issue certificates accordingly (Ibid. 2016). This is an absolute reverse of the NALSA v. Union of India judgement. This clause delegitimises transgender persons' right to self-determination and self-identified gender. Another disagreement with the law that the transgender persons' articulated during the protests was against Chapter V, point 13 (1) and (2) that criminalises transgenders who refuse to stay with their families. It further directs that in the absence of parents or immediate guardians a transgender person of any age should be taken to rehabilitation. The law further criminalises begging as a mode of work that is historically associated with the hijra tradition (Ibid., 2016). In 2018, the Lok Sabha passed the bill amidst protests from the Transgender community. It was passed with 27 amendments.³⁰

On September 6 2018, the Supreme Court of India reinstated the landmark judgement reading down Section 377 of the IPC as constitutionally immoral and discriminatory. The five-judge bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dipak Mishra,³¹ A. M. Khanwilkar, R. F. Nariman, D. Y. Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra heard the Navtej Singh Johar and Others versus Union of India

²⁹Anasuya, I. Shreya. (2018, December 19). Why the Transgender Community is Angry over a Bill Meant to Protect Their Rights. *The Wire*.

³⁰Press Trust of India. (2018, December 17). Lok Sanha Passes Transgender Rights Bill. *India Today*.

³¹ET Online. (2018, September 7). Section 377: Here is everything you need to know. *Economic Times*, September 7.

along with writ petitions from various activists against the constitutional validity of Section 377. The judgment recognised the historical injustices meted out to the LGBTQIA community and stated that the law will cease to affect consensual same-sex relations. It also identified the discrimination and fear faced by the LGBTQ community in the presence of the law and stated that it formed a hindrance to the fulfilment of an individual's complete personhood. Further, recognised that this law was a canonical barrier to the access to fundamental rights, including access to health infrastructure, and right to organise, and so on.³²

The verdict was a moment of a historic victory for the LGBTQIA community who rejoiced with rainbow flags. However, organisations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind expressed discontent over the judgement suggesting it was against the Indian culture and religious beliefs respectively. All India Muslim Personal Law also stated this was immorality and it was against the Indian cultural ethos.³³

The next section is dedicated to the Introduction of the field, Kolkata with a descriptive focus on LGBTQ activism.

SECTION V: LGBTQ ACTIVISM IN KOLKATA

Kolkata's first Rainbow Pride Walk took place on July 2 1999. It was called The Friendship Walk which witnessed the participation of 15 people from various parts of India. The participants split themselves and walked at the North and South direction respectively. This marked India's first Pride walk. The organisers chose Kolkata as the city to conduct this walk because of its history of political

³²Section 377: Verdict (<https://www.sci.gov.in/supremecourt>)

³³The Hindu Net Desk. (2018, September 6). Reactions to Section 377 Verdict: Jamaat-e-Islami Hind expresses dismay. *The Hindu*.

struggle and modern values. In 2003, the Pride walk witnessed a participation of 50 people which increased to 200 by 2004.³⁴

Kole (2007) notes that 2003 marks the beginning of Kolkata Rainbow Pride as an annually organised event. The 2003 Pride witnessed a gathering of many activists from across India and abroad. A week-long schedule of film screenings, workshops and conferences preceded the Walk which was the culminating event (Ibid.).

In an effort to host the Pride Walk in 3 cities together, in 2008, the organisers hosted the walk on 29th June 2008 along with organisers from Delhi, Bangalore and Puducherry (erstwhile Pondicherry).³⁵ In 2012, the walk witnessed more than 1500 hundred participants with 25 per cent women's participation recording a considerable increase in the number.³⁶ The same year, Kolkata Rainbow Pride Festivals (KRPF) hosted a series of events including exhibitions featuring work on gender and sexuality. Photographs, paintings and pamphlets were put on the display based on the theme "Broadening the canvas: Celebrating Blemishes".³⁷

2013 marked 10 consecutive years of the Walk and it was organised on July 7th following a fundraiser and workshop in June. The workshop featured a short film called 'I am Onir' and a discussion by the director of the film. The film treaded the story of the director's journey of discovering his sexuality.³⁸ Apart from the Pride walks that have witnessed increasing participation, various other spaces have developed for LGBTQ support. One such space is the *Amra Odbhut Café* (meaning 'We are Queer' Cafe). It is a café cum community centre by LGBTQ people of Kolkata

³⁴Dhall, P. (2010, July 15). A Walk to Remember. *Gaylaxy*.

³⁵Wax, E. and Sen, R. (2008, June 30). Hundreds March in India for Gay Rights. *The Washington Post*.

³⁶Das, M. (2012, July 16). Pride Parade Breaks Record. *The Telegraph*.

³⁷Broom. (2012, June 09). Broadening the Canvas: Celebrating Blemishes. *Gaysi*.

³⁸Staff Reporter. (2013, June 29). LGBTs to Walk for their Pride. *Times of India*.

for the community. It acts as a resource and rehabilitation centre for LGBTQ people in need of safe space at the same time it is also a space for a creative expression of queer people without the fear of violence, discrimination and stigma. It is not a regular café but opens itself for events and programmes. The collective was started by four people who recognize the gap between elite and non-elite members of the community. Their vision is to facilitate the space to bridge these gaps.³⁹ According to one of the founders, it “is a queer and transgender individuals’ led space which is intersectional, feminist and gives the LGBTQ community of the city a space to call their own.”⁴⁰

³⁹Chatterjee, S. (2017). Amra Odbhut Café: A community Space Realizing Kolkata’s Queer Utopia. *Feminism in India*.

(<https://feminisiminindia.com/2017/11/10/amra-odbhut-cafe-community/>)

⁴⁰<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/amra-odbhut-a-queer-feminist-cafe-in-india#/>

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON MASCULINITY

The study of men and masculinities within the feminist frameworks has provided a large gamut of research. Feminist perspectives have informed studies ranging from men's violence on women, men's relations with war, sports masculinities, socialisation and manhood, gay men's experience, and men's role in the feminist movement and so on. It has also provided insight into men's work, homosocial bonding, violence against men, violent masculinities, to mention a few. This chapter attempts to provide a review of the literature on masculinities and gay masculinities from the feminist perspectives.

In *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* (1987), Harry Brod focuses on the ways in which one can think about masculinities. This edited volume contributes to the understanding of how various disciplines have engaged with feminist perspectives to study the lives of men in relation to women and other men. Brod (1987) argues that the study of masculinity or what is now called men's studies emerged from the influences of knowledge production within women's studies scholarship along with the profeminist women's movement. It was also the changes in the role of men that was advanced through feminist struggles, that influenced the growth of men and masculinity studies. Situating this work on social-constructionist perspectives, he suggests that it locates masculinities and men's experiences in the context of power that masculine gender holds in a society that is structured through patriarchy. This work essentially locates men's lives within specific socio-historical and cultural contexts and thereby makes a case for multiple masculinities (Ibid.)

The book put forth essays from various disciplinary approaches and brings in a new understanding of masculinities. In the first part of the book, Brod (1987) builds an argument for the study of masculinity suggesting that men need to be studied as men whose experiences cannot be universalised as the only experience. Rather they need to be understood as a male experience. In the first chapter of the book, Pleck (1987) traces the ways in which the identity of the man came about in the discourse of knowledge as rational, true knowledge. He further makes a case for new frameworks to explicate the male sex role in order to understand the influences that the women's movement had on men (Ibid.)

The discipline of psychology has played an important role in framing the early understandings of masculinities. Connell (1994) argues that psychoanalysis has maintained a paradoxical relationship wherein it has at one level engaged with various theoretical frameworks to produce knowledge and at another level has been a tool of surveillance to check and maintain conformity. She draws on Freud's oedipal complex and argues that both masculinity and femininity are a part of man's identity, it is through the process of suppression of the feminine that the masculine self is enhanced. However, as Freud noted, the construction of the masculine psyche is not necessarily the only outcome. Noting the presence of homosexual desires, Freud understood that masculinity and femininity did not exist as pure identities (Ibid.).

Drawing on Adler's critique of Freud, Connell (1994) says that culture plays an important role in determining a child's strive for an identity. The culturally sanctioned devaluation of femininity affects the psyche of a male child, who may want to reject femininity (Ibid.). The psychoanalytic framework proposed by Freud's (1905) *Three essays on Sexuality* has been used by feminist scholars.

Nancy Chodorow (1994) expands the Freudian framework in understanding the ways in which masculinities and femininities are constructed in the psyche. She critiques Freud's failure to develop an understanding of what one calls "normal heterosexuality" and suggests the Freudian framework has been useful in accounting for homosexual development. Her major argument comes from the understanding of love that she suggests is gendered. She points to masculine love and feminine love to suggest that they are different in nature because they are shaped by the consciousness that is gendered through cultural processes (Ibid.).

She further argues that there is no single feminine or masculine love, rather they are as many as there are men and women. Putting forth Freud's argument, she suggests that the heterogeneous nature of love is due to the ways in which individuals grow up within the structures of family and the resultant psychological development (Ibid.)

Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978) showed that the construction of masculinity in adult males took place within complex dynamics of emotions that were reproduced generationally through the gendered division of labour in family structures. This division of labour situated the woman's role as a primary caregiver. Boys, while growing up, distanced themselves from the mothering subject and identified with the father who was an absent figure in the capitalist system that separated the production location from the home (Ibid.). Freud's framework has been critiqued by feminists for its understanding of the "lack" that women embody due to the absence of a penis, that he argues leads to the subordinated nature of women. However, feminist work on psychoanalysis has provided important insights into the scholarship on gender and sexuality.

A multitude of work masculinities has been influenced by the theories of socialisation. Paechter's *Being Boys, Being Girls: Learning Masculinities and Femininities* (2007) and Parker's *Lifelong Learning to Labour: Apprenticeship, Masculinity and Communities of Practice* (2006) show how gender is learnt through communities of practice. Paechter (2007) argues that young boys learn to be boys through gender practices that are learned through apprenticeship, that is learning masculinity as a young boy from the elders. While in homosocial communities, boys learn by imitating and carefully practising, it allows them to differentiate themselves from girls and women. The goal of communities of masculine practices is to train boys to become men. This learning of masculinity is based on the socio-cultural context within which these communities are located. Such practices may change due to changes in the social realities (Ibid.).

Parker (2006) uses the framework of apprenticeship and community of practices to show how young men learn to embody certain masculinities while engaging in organised sport. Situated in the context of working-class men's engagement with organised sports, this study reveals how men associate with other men in a sporting arena, the ways in which they learn to establish their masculinities among peers in homosocial spaces. He further establishes the connections between sports, masculinity and the rejection of femininity. While negotiating verbal abuse, these young men learn to be masculine through competitiveness, compulsory heterosexuality, alcoholism, gendered abuses, sexualizing the women related to their peers and emasculating those men who fail to embody such masculine traits and perform such masculinities and othering those who (Ibid.).

The major criticism of this understanding is that it does not question the very structure within which such practices are learnt and the ways in which these practices are related to maintaining the power in society. Parker's (2006) research, however, point out that the apprentice young men are not

passive recipients of such practices, they also reject such practices and often respond to verbal abuse through active dissent.

Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1987) argue that within the discipline of Sociology, scholars have focused on masculinity and femininity as constituted through social relations that institute the order of gender. While the scholarship on gender was initially restricted to sex-role theory, it did not problematise the concept of gender roles rather pinned them to the socio-biological nature of humans. Roles were framed within the Parsonian framework and formed the basic component on social sciences. Within this framework, homosexuality was articulated as a downfall of masculinity. However, the feminist critique of role theory suggested that roles were not natural rather they were internalized. This argument also faced criticism from the empirical departure of men from the ideal masculinity (Ibid.).

The sociological studies that emerged after the women's rights movement and gay rights movement, put importance on the study of masculinity within the paradigm of power. It also situated masculinity as a constitutive element of "political structure of sexuality" (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, 1987, p. 83). However, Seidler's (2005) critical studies on masculinities have challenged the ways in which power has been understood with respect to men's experience.

Seidler's *Transforming Masculinities: Men, Cultures, Bodies, Power, Sex and Love* (2005) lays the ground for his post-modernist approach. In this seminal text, he situates masculinity in a multi-disciplinary framework and explicates theoretical issues in studying men, especially in the context of cultural differences that are marked in various masculinities. Situating the research in a comparative framework, he uses a critical lens to understand men's experiences with power in multiple contexts of patriarchy shaped by cultural, spatial and social differences (Ibid.).

He argues that the notion of power and patriarchy cannot be understood as universal and homogeneous, or take for granted the mutually beneficial nature of men and power. Such a notion remains in the realm of Eurocentrism. He covers a wide array of masculine experience including the intersection of fatherhood, race and class and goes on to discuss men's narratives of fear, violence, and so on (Seidler, 2005).

Victor J. Seidler in his succeeding book *Young Men and Masculinities: Global Cultures and Intimate Lives* (2006) puts forth an understanding of masculinity through tracing a history of masculinity, yet carefully putting that the history of masculinity is not uniform: they are constructed through specific socio-political and geographical experience. His work is an attempt to draw R.W. Connell's work and argues that hegemonic masculinity is not sufficient in locating the postmodern practices through which multiple hegemonic masculinities co-exist and shape the lives of young men (Ibid.).

His book consists of fifteen chapters exploring diverse themes affecting young men and the way they imagine masculinities and negotiate with the masculine authority of the older generation. It is also an extensive account of understanding the ways in which globalization has affected the cultures of both North and South. Such global cultures informed by the history of civil rights movements, women's movements and gay/lesbian movement have created a new appeal for the young men in reshaping their masculinities, not necessarily challenging the older forms but opening themselves to experience their bodies, sexualities and identities in such a way that was not possible for older generations (Ibid.).

The concepts of love, desires, and fatherhood have a redefined meaning for the younger generation, which Seidler (2006) suggests, has been due to the postmodern ways in which lives are getting

organized. He distinctly articulates that departure from modernity is the moment of globalization wherein young men are no longer bound by the traditions and beliefs of their own community and culture, they are more connected to the young people across the globe through the virtual spaces which shape their identities in distinct ways (Siedler, 2006).

He also discusses the ways in which different cultures, religions and histories have shaped masculinity and puts forth the instances of the migrant experience in the global north. He gives examples of how second generation Indians and their parents share different experience, and the ways in which partition is viewed by the first generation Indian migrants is not relatable to the next generation who are learning and growing up in an American or European curriculum. It also creates a space of conflict and contestations because young men often find a gap between their culture and the traditional forms of authority and the liberal universal education that they receive (Ibid.).

His methodology endorses a critique of R.W. Connell's hegemonic masculinity, and he claims that Connell's (1995) theory remains largely within the terms of modernity framed by dominant white European modernity. His arguments are mainly substantiated and articulated by the extensive review of literature on the discourse of masculinity along with interviews and conversations with Asian, Latin American diaspora and respondents in Santiago Chile. He also brings back and forth his own experiences with his migrant parents and the conflicting cultures at home and outside.

Seidler's work becomes essential as it tries to locate the gap between traditional masculinities and younger masculinities and emphasizes on the need to create a dialogue between the two (Seidler, 2006).

The review of literature that Seidler (2006) engages in provides the main substance for this book. His work is an analysis of multiple research projects initiated by sociologists, gender studies

scholars. He tries to draw a critique of dominant theories of masculinity by looking at works on war, violence and conflict, which forms the final chapter of this book. He brings out the importance of intersectional axes in understanding the lived experiences of masculinity among young men residing in multiple geographical locations, growing up within multiple traditions and cultures (Ibid.).

In the edited volume *Gay Masculinities*, Nardi (2000) organises a series of essays on gay men and masculinities focusing on three areas of research. In the first, he situates the construction of gay masculinities within homosexual relationships and tries to locate in the relational framework of masculinities. Being heavily influenced by Connell's (1992, 1995) framework, this book shows diverse ways in which the relational model of masculinities allow a variety of ethnographies on gay men's experience. The second part of this book is organised on the everyday experiences of gay men, situating their lives in the everyday context within the heterosexual arena. Finally, in the third part, the essays show how intersections of race and class contribute to the construction and negotiation of gay masculinities among working-class gay men and Asian men in the United States of America (USA).

Introducing the volume, Nardi (2000) discusses the ways in which masculinities and femininities are stereotyped within the understanding of sexuality, that is, the over-represented image of gay men as feminine. This, he suggests, is the way in which femininities and masculinities are framed within the relational framework. However, he contends that gay men perform various kinds of masculinities, that is, the ways of doing masculinity is not one and therefore it is best suited to understand it in multiple (Ibid.)

Drawing from Connell (1992), Nardi (2000) further discusses the ways in which gay men's desires and actions are situated in the gender order that constrains their own identity. He contends,

In the very act of engaging in sex with other men, gay men challenge the dominant definitions of patriarchal masculinity. The hegemony of heterosexual masculinity is subverted, yet at the same time, gay men enact other forms and styles of masculinity, ones that often involve reciprocity rather than hierarchy. How some gay men engage in the pursuit of sex while simultaneously exhibiting an emotional commitment to sharing feelings with their friends is one example of the complex ways hegemonic and gay masculinities intersect (Nardi, 1999 cited in Nardi, 2000).

In the first essay of this volume, Mutchler (2000) uses the concept of sexual scripts to understand the ways in which tensions in masculinity become a site of contesting the heteronormative “masculine models for sex” (p. 35). The very experience of sexual desire among gay men forms a challenge to the traditional gender roles and scripts. He argues that sexual scripts are those associated with “romantic love, erotic adventure, safer sex, and sexual coercion” (Mutchler, 2000, p. 13). Sexual scripts could be articulated as a discourse on sexuality that is used as an analytical tool to read on sexual behaviours. Using this concept, he tries to understand the ways in which young gay men negotiate the sexual scripts in a multitude of sites. Within the cultural domain, they negotiate their sexual conducts that are located within specific narratives of culture. Existing at a collective level, scripts within the cultural domain help navigate the interpersonal scripts and thereby construct the acceptable sexual conduct (Ibid.).

His work is located in the realms of culture, interaction and psyche. While cultural scripts guide the larger patterns of behaviour, interpersonal scripts situate themselves in the individual interactions and psychic scripts remain in the realm of the psyche wherein the fantasy of the sexual conduct is formed (Mutchler, 2000). This framework becomes useful in understanding the construction of

masculinity as an interactive process between the cultural, interpersonal and psychic discourses on sexuality.

Fee (2000) brings to the table an important work on how gay men forge friendships with straight men within the existing gender order that categorizes men through the difference in sexuality. He shows how within homosocial friendships between gay and straight men, erotic elements and desires emerge, yet they are silenced due to the existing nature of gendered relationships. Due to the strict compartmentalisation of sexuality and identities, the straight and the gay never interact sexually (Ibid.) This essay essentially lays out the heterosexual domination with gender constructions and their negotiations within gay-straight friendships.

Cruz's (2000) work essentially situates the ways in which gay men do masculinity within the space of romantic relationship. In the context of domestic violence in gay relationships, he argues that men form their masculinities in relation to heterosexual order. It is argued that gay men are socialised as masculine subjects within the heterosexual order of society, therefore they often tend to reproduce the same masculine ideals that heterosexual men do, thereby complicating the gay subjectivity within the discourse of homosexual subversion. Discussing violence in homosexual relationships, he suggests that there is reproduction of heterosexual norms of relationship within these gay romantic relations (Ibid.).

Cruz (2000) ethnography on gay men in relationships bring out narratives of verbal abuse and violence as a part of domesticity. His record of narratives shows how control of power, domination, and sexual violence structure the relationships between gay men. He further argues, that because homosexuality is seen as a feminized sexual position, and homosexual men are seen as feminine subjects devoid of masculinity, these dominant narratives are internalized even by gay men who

often do not label themselves as gay due to prevalent stigma. Further, gay men often rejected effeminacy or feminine traits and do not indulge in homosocial relations. Performance of aggressive masculinities often become a way to deal with such fear of loss of masculinity among gay men (Cruz, 2000).

Linneman's (2000) essay tries to understand the concept of risk in the lives of gay men. While much has been discussed about gay men and the risk of sexual health issues, Linneman's essay directs the reader to the fear of gay men in disclosing their sexual identities. Such fear emerges from the daily interaction with homophobia, emasculation, and such. However, his fieldwork shows that such fears are often subverted in the context of homophobic slurs, when gay men try to embody their sexuality in the public spaces in order to dismantle heterosexual imagination (Ibid.).

Linneman (2000) contends that,

Some gay men are propelled into action by anti-gay epithets. They respond to these epithets by either embracing gay identity or combatively threatening negative sanctions against the sources of the epithet. Some gay men when recounting their stories of everyday activism and risk-taking appear more masculine than their usual demeanour. In hostile environments, some gay men alter their behaviour to conceal their gay identity, appearing less feminine in their comportment than they usually might (p. 98).

Halkitis (2000) explains the ways of doing and presenting masculinity in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. He examines how gay men embody their gender in the face of stigma against HIV/AIDS. These men call themselves *poz*, which is urban slang for people with HIV. He contends that men with HIV often use popular masculine ideals of "maleness, masculinity, sexual aggressiveness and virility" (Halkitis, 2000, p. 130) to attribute themselves. This, he suggests, forms

the basis of his identity. It is a way in which these gay men take control of their bodies. In the context of this disease, they make efforts to improve their bodily conditions in order to remain “healthy and alive” (Ibid., p. 131).

Drawing on Connell’s (1995) work, he (Halkitis, 2000) contends that the importance of physical masculinity for gay men is situated in the heterosexual discourse on the construction of masculinity. He argues that childhood socialisation of gay men in heterosexual family structures lay out the clear ways of being men or constructing their masculinities. Since these masculinities constructed in heterosexual structures, they face a dilemma in masculinity. The erasure of sexuality in the construction of gender identity situates gay men outside masculine order. Therefore, for gay men with issues of HIV, reordering their masculinity in terms of their bodies become essential to identify as men (Ibid.).

Ward (2000) argues that the assumption that all gay men are feminists or all gay men empathize with women’s oppression and fight for the radical transformation of the heterosexist gender order is false. Gay men are situated in the heterosexual order that benefits men in general. Therefore, they often fall into the trap of binary gender divisions and push for the complete rejection of femininity. Sexism within the gay community is very common and verbal abuse is often used to ridicule effeminate men (Ward, 2000).

Barrett (2000) in his exploration of white working-class gay men’s experience of masculinity, discusses how the dominant cultures stereotype gay men from the working class and sexually objectify them. It is in this setting of intersections of class, Barrett (2000) tries to identify how masculinity is negotiated by gay men embodying working-class masculinities. He further articulates

their relationship based on “social integration, sexual integration and self-acceptance” (Barret, 2000, p. 202).

He consciously categorizes his respondents into assertive, easy going, and withdrawn men. He suggests that assertive men present themselves as confident and dominant men, who are “in control of their current lives” (Ibid., p. 184). Easy-going men, he suggests, embody less assertiveness, yet have confidence and control. Lastly, he explains that withdrawn men are those who have a lesser capacity to assert themselves and have let go of their fate (Barrett, 2000).

Barrett (2000) tries to look at the comfort level of gay men in terms of their sexuality, interactions, “social images of gay men” (p. 198) and their gayness. In all these accepts, assertive men and easy-going men, he suggests, answered favourably, while withdrawn men were “least comfortable with being gay” (Ibid., p. 199). It is further argued that the withdrawn men were the ones who had the closest resemblance to traditional masculinity that looks at its own construction as a rejection of homosexual tendencies. Assertive men also embodied traditional masculine behaviours but had much more emotional connection than the men who were withdrawn (Ibid.).

In *Entre Hombres/ Between Men: Latino Masculinities and Homosexualities*, Cantú (2000) works on Latino men, framing the essay through intersections of gender, race and sexuality. She argues that the stereotypes about Latino men show their embodiment of masculinity through a monolithic frame. This invisibilizes the power structures that construct such a single axis cultural narrative of the Latino masculinities (Ibid.).

Critiquing the existing literature on Latino men and their masculinities, she argues that this available literature exoticizes the experiences of Latino men. She further argues that Latino masculinities are shaped within the cultural and material discourses specific to the sociopolitical space and therefore a

singular stereotype cannot sufficiently explain the complexities of their experiences with masculinity and sexuality. The time has come to move beyond the “macho” stereotype that the Western scholarship has constructed (Cantú, 2000).

Her ethnography suggests a multiplicity of experiences that Latino men articulate in terms of their identity and culture. There are marked differences between immigrant Latino men and those born in the USA and these differences also play a part in their experiences. Cantú’s (2000) major argument lies in the understanding of “homophobia, sexism, racism, and poverty” (p. 235) in the context of the structures within which “Latino culture” thrives (Ibid.). Her argument is predominantly one that is intersectional and therefore adequately explains the way in which Latino men actively take charge of constructing their discourse. Her work is a call for a new formulation of identity that adequately understands “the multiple sites of power” (Cantú, 2000, p. 242). Such a framework on identity, she argues, is a framework on the “political economy of identity” (Ibid., p. 242).

While the scholarship on masculinities and specifically gay masculinities in the West have emerged with multiple theoretical and ethnographic work and has informed works on men in the South Asian context, it is imperative to look through the major scholarship on masculinity that emerged in India and the context within which it thrived.

The scholarship on masculinity in India emerged from the feminist perspectives informed by the women’s movement in the 1970s and the discourse on HIV/AIDS prevention that politicised the LGBTQ identities in India. Feminist scholars like Radhika Chopra, Chaitali Dasgupta, and Mandeep. K. Janeja (2000) have argued that the feminist perspectives on gender, the rising concern for men’s sexual health on the face of STDs, especially HIV/AIDS and the identification of homosexual men as sexually marginalised identities led to the intervention on the studies of

masculinities. The AIDS epidemic brought into question the assumption that heterosexuality was the only “coherent orientation that defined and fixed male sexuality” (Chopra, et al., 2000, p. 1607). It also marked an intervention into the “pathological understanding of masculinity” (Ibid., p. 1607).

Various scholars studied men and masculinities in various contexts of caste, class, region and sexuality to bridge the knowledge gap that existed in the study of masculinities in India. This work lays out the ways in which research brought to light the indigenous identities of men who identified outside the heterosexual norm. Further, it discusses the shift in the researches of homosexuality from the AIDS discourse to that of sexual pleasure and same-sex desire (Chopra, et al., 2000).

In the context of learning to be masculine, Chopra, et al., (2000) argue that in Punjab young boys learn to be men or receive a masculine training from their fathers by learning to labour in farms. They argue that the father asserts his masculinity by training his son which “is an idiom in the hierarchical mode of 'producing' maleness” (Ibid., p. 1608), the son’s masculinity rests in learning the hard work and asserting his masculine self in the streets (Ibid.).

Chopra et al. (2000) argue that

Learning masculinity is not a linear process and goes through mutations that are cross-cut by elements of age, caste, gender and work relations through processes where masculinity is constantly learned, constructed and confirmed (p. 1608).

In furthering the understanding of the construction of masculinity, Chopra et al. (2000) focus on the research that shows how the masculine image is constructed and transformed in Hindi cinema and documentary works. Masculinity in cinema is a way of engaging with the social world from the point of view of the hero or the protagonist. The masculine construction in cinema is a trope through which various everyday elements are put together to frame the ‘heroic’ masculinity of the

protagonist (Ibid.). Furthering this argument one can suggest that the trope of masculinity in cinema is a way to situate the gender roles with respect to femininity, which is often portrayed essentialist framework.

Chopra's *Reframing Masculinities: Narrating the Supportive Practices of Men* (2006) is an important work in the context of India. It draws from the social reform movement and suggests how the earlier reforms by Raja Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar on Sati and women's education are important examples of the supportive practices that men have taken up (Ibid.). This edited volume hosts a variety of essays on men and men's groups that have helped in trying to disrupt the existing gender order. Men's activism against human trafficking (Panjabi, 2006) and their efforts to empower sex workers (Hebbbar, 2006) have been noted.

Further, the book also historically traces men's involvement with the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) which began as a human rights support group for parents and half-widows whose children or husbands or family members have been forcefully disappeared in Kashmir (Bhat, 2006). Bandhyopadhyay (2006) shows how networks of men became important in the activism against HIV/AIDS in the 1990s. Networks like Prajaak, Sanjog and Pratyay initiated this activism. This book was a collaborative work on creating profiles of men who were part of activism that formed an important role in anti-patriarchy movements.

Sanjay Srivastava's (2004) edited volume *Sexual sites, seminal attitudes: Sexualities, masculinities, and culture in South Asia* incorporate two essays on sexuality among others. One that is by Gayatri Reddy (2004) historically traces the ways in which gay identity was formed in India with respect to urban spaces. Mehrotra (2006) argues that Reddy's work is a critique of the global gay and furthers this argument by stating,

She underlines the nature of the so-called 'traditional' and 'modern' categories of same-sex sexuality in a city. She contests the notion of coherent, 'universal global gay identity' by invoking the complex intersection of 'East' and 'West' local particularity and global politico-economic forces (p. 335).

Another essay by Balachandran (2004) tried to focus on the ways in which new gay cultures were emerging in metropolitan cities like Bangalore, which had an influx of migrants due to booming. His focus was mainly on the upper class and caste gay men (Ibid.).

The literature presented in this chapter highlights the studies that have become important in the study of masculinity. While writings on masculinity in India is still an emerging area, the existing work points to a sharp shift from the earlier writings on gender where the study of men was limited to their relationship with domestic violence, sexual abuse and so on. Further, the writings on homosexuality, especially homosexual men in India is different from the writings that have emerged in the West. The writings on gay men are intricately intertwined with the HIV/AIDS discourse. This literature allows me to locate my research in various aspects of masculinities and experiences of men and positions my research within this expanding and challenging scholarship.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVES FROM THE FIELD

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the attempt is to thematically put forth the narratives of the individuals in order to understand the ways in which the complex lives of these young men are constructed. Their experiences of being gay in institutional spaces, their experiences with their own bodies, their personal and romantic relationships, and their experience of violence all factor in the construction of their masculinity. It is therefore important to locate these themes individually through the experiences of the interviewees.

SECTION II: THEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF NARRATIVES

Narratives on Learning to be Boys

During the fieldwork, the narratives of the individuals confirmed that socialising the identity of a boy was of utmost importance in order to navigate spaces such as schools, families and peer groups. Salman says, *“Initially, my parents were okay with me dressing up, mostly because I was young. They thought it would pass with age. But, for me, these ideas only strengthened as I grew older. I used to be a very pretty kid, so they loved dressing me up. But then, I don’t know how, probably because I was feminine since childhood, I faced some troubles. I would put on nail polish and go to school and my school friends would notice. Also, one time I was putting lipstick and the doorbell rang, I opened the door with the lipstick on. I saw my friends and ran back to rub it off. That was quite an embarrassing day. I was the joke for a long time among my peers. So it was also very early on that what I was becoming was not acceptable in society.”*

They later also go on to say, “My parents tried and forced me to be active in sports like cricket and football. If you are a Bengali boy from a middle-class family, the pressure to be good in studies and sports is immense... In school and everywhere else, I had to hide my feminine side while growing up. I did not want to be ashamed of it, but couldn’t help feeling humiliated and eventually repressed my feminine side. Growing up, I did not have a masculine body (all that beard you see, is quite recent)... I hid it well throughout high school. I started dating a girl from my school. But she was always talking behind me. She would joke about my feminine nature to her friends and that added to my humiliation. My peers would always joke about how gay I am. I would always defend myself saying that I wasn’t. I had to maintain this strong guy image.”

He says, “I grew up in a very Hindu family. My father is a practising Brahmin who takes a lot of pride in being ‘shuddho’ (pure). He has brought me up accordingly. I had my ‘poitey’ (thread ceremony) when I was 11. I used to sit with him every Saturday to perform the rituals of worship... The reason I am talking about my father at the beginning of discussing my experiences of being gay is that he is the pivotal figure in shaping the person I am. Today, I might feel suffocated with it, but I cannot deny it.”

He further says, “I idolized my father to the extent that I have taken his side during brutal arguments between my parents. I always told my mother that she should adjust. I feel angry at myself now. I grew up with a vision to look, dress, walk and talk like my father. Even as a young boy, I used to wear khadi kurtas that were cheap and plain because my father wore them. He was the epitome of simplicity and dignity for me.”

Nilabho further states, “I was a very masculine child, always enjoying sports. I used to play cricket and football. I was also a part of the “star students’ gang” who ended up doing well in studies and

sports. To be honest, I was also one of those guys who would taunt men who were not 'beta chhele' (manly) enough. I feel quite ashamed about my attitude, but back then we were young. It was important to be like that. In school you had to be the smart boy among your friends.

Nilabho also shares a memory from the school where he was a participant in harassing a fellow classmate who was perceived to be feminine. He recollects, "I feel quite ashamed about my attitude, but back then we were young. It was important to be like that. In school, you had to be the smart boy among your friends. In class 9, a few of us harassed one of our classmates very badly and it was wrong. He was very meyeli (feminine) and we used to taunt him generally by name calling, such as chhakka and champakoli. But that day, we overdid it. We found Bengali gay porn literature in his bag and made him strip naked in the toilet until he cried and shivered. I feel extremely guilty about it. I have apologized to him. I don't know if he was gay or not, but because of his feminine nature, we assumed him to be gay. We ridiculed him throughout the school for being gay."

Amartya begins the interview by stating his confusion with the word "man". He asks, "Tell me if you were not a sociology student or an ally if you were just another person who makes fun... would you have called me a man?" (Makes hand gestures towards himself, shows his body with an up and down hand gesture) He further says, "I have flair while walking, my hand moves like women," don't judge me, I don't believe that but others do. I walked like that when I was in school as well. If you knew my school, you would know what boys are like there. There were boys who would blow condoms in classes and stare at women teachers' breasts and write poems on it."

While talking about his nose piercing, he says, "In my college, and especially in the Science Department, everybody is very conservative. They already talk about my piercing and how unmanly I am. People (also) assume that I am gay and comment about it in passing."

Nikhil's narrates, *"I used to be a popular boy in school. I used to be a dancer for a long time. I used to represent my school in various competitions and win prizes. I used to be popular among girls too you know... so till class 10, I used to have girlfriends, you know like uss time pe hota tha na (how it used to be that time)... nothing serious. But talking on the phone, meeting in tuition classes and all that. All my friends had girlfriends from your school and CGHS, QMS, etc. So I also had girlfriends."*

According to Abhinava, *"Being a boy in school meant two things for us, either you have to be a bully or a nerd. You can't be anything else. Either you are the boy who is good at sports and beating others or you are the studies good student who will take up science and do well in life, or both. But that was a rarity. I was none. I was good at music which was anyway a feminine vocation for my classmates. So I was laughed at sometimes."*

Koushik recollects his childhood and says, *"Being a boy is not enough. You have to be an upper-caste boy to not be taunted or insulted. In school, I heard insults that were garbed as jokes for being scheduled caste. At home, it was essential for me to be like my father and work hard. I would always hear my mother talk about all the sacrifices and hard work my father has endured."*

Rayan says, *"(In school), I had seen feminine guys being called gay, chhakka, faggots and what not. I was also feminine in school, hated sports and liked craft, music and poetry. But I never had to face the brunt of the masculine bullies so much because I was a good student who was liked by teachers and won a lot of awards for school. So my academic achievement sort of shielded me from those taunts."*

Charlie says, *"I was the youngest and she was always very protective of me. I have photos of myself dressed in lehenga when I was 3. My mother had all sons and she wanted one daughter, so when I*

was a child, she would dress me up. And to be honest for a long time, till I was 6 or 7 years old, I enjoyed dressing up. And to be honest, I have never heard anyone say anything about it at home.

But as I started to realize that I was a boy, I stopped doing it myself. Growing up, I became very defensive about my manliness. Probably because I had two elder brothers who were always fighting, jumping, playing. I wanted to be like them. So I tried to play cricket and football but because of how lanky I was I did not do so well there. Also, I had a fear of getting hit. What my brothers would say was, “You are not so daredevil like us, and you are truly ma’s daughter.”

Kalpak’s narrative is similar to Charlies in many ways. He says, *“As a child, I grew up looking up to my elder brother. He was my guide to being the boy I was when I was growing up. He taught me how to play and not get intimidated by older boys. When we were a little younger and growing up, my mother go to visit her sister, my aunt, who lived close by. She would take my brother and me. My aunt had 2 daughters who were both older to us. We would spend a lot of afternoon playing Ghor-ghor (games relating to domestic work at home). In the game, my brother was always the guy who would do all the groceries and build the house, while I would be dressed in my sister’s oversized clothes and it would always be a scene where an imaginary family would come to meet me and get their son married to me. I enjoyed the game but hated being dressed up like a doll and act all shy. They played all the parts while I was just sitting idle.”*

Vaibhav says, *“From the time I remember, I have been told that “main ghor pe behet ke dulhan le aayunga” (I will sit on a horse and get a bride). My mother would dress me up in kurtas, put tika and always sing this song about how I will get her a daughter-in-law. I did not think there was a choice. I thought that is what boys do. Grow up and marry girls. But even then, I hated the fact that I would be in a white will my bride will be all dressed up looking nice. I used to ask my mother to*

dress me up like that too. She would only laugh and say “waisa nahi hota hain” (it doesn’t happen like that.).”

Narratives on Humiliation

During the interviews conducted among the 10 respondents, various incidents were brought to light that indicated the experience of humiliation for most of my respondents. While many faced humiliating comments, behaviours and physical abuse from their peers for their sexuality, others recollected stories of humiliation associated with their bodies, gestures and actions. Respondents who did not directly face humiliation also accounted for humiliations that others witnessed for similar conditions that they were a participant in or bystanders. Acts of humiliation were faced by most of my respondents in schools. Two of them faced humiliation at home and one of them also faced physical abuse at home.

Salman recounts the humiliating years of his school and says, *“In school and everywhere else, I had to hide my feminine side while growing up. I did not want to be ashamed of it, but couldn’t help feeling humiliated and eventually repressed my feminine side. Growing up, I did not have a masculine body (all that beard you see, is quite recent). As a teen, I had growing breasts. Later I learned that I had a medical condition commonly called gynecomastia. Growing up, my breast started developing and that was a disturbing experience. My friends in school would fondle my breasts. If I was wearing my school uniform, they would undress me and touch me inappropriately. That was super uncomfortable. Because there was this constant clash between what I wanted and what I didn’t.”*

He further says, *“When I say school was bad, believe me. Since I was not good at sports, I was never interested also. I couldn’t hold a cricket bat right. My classmates would hit, slap me and what not.*

They would ask me to open my pants and show them if I was really a boy or a girl. They would call me 'Chhakka', 'hijra', and often call me 'meyeli' (girlish)."

He also recounts a humiliating experience with a faculty in his University and says, *"We used hangout near a water body inside the campus, mainly during evenings. We were harassed for sitting and talking many times by a particular faculty who threatened to suspend us if we continued sitting there. We complained about him but nothing happened."*

Similar accounts of humiliation by peer groups form a common thread in most of the narratives.

Amartya says, *"People assume I am gay and they often make comments on that in passing. Like, in a department social gathering, we had to dance in couples, and I was not interested. One of my seniors came and asked, Why are you not dancing?" and then answered it himself saying, "oh! No guy wants to dance with you. Just kidding.*

He recollects an incident from his school days and says, *"You know I have been beaten by seniors in school many times for being feminine. I have been beaten in the football field, hit with a football and what not. Once, when I was in class 7, a senior from class 9 or 10 had stood on me in the football field. "A few of my otherwise asshole classmates came to the rescue." But they were no less. From peeping in the washrooms to writing "homo" in my pencil box with whiteners to calling me "chhakka" openly, I have seen it all. But my seniors were more physically intimidating, so my classmates, knowing that I was lanky they always tried to stop the seniors from beating me. Maybe they thought I couldn't protect myself. They always considered me a woman. They thought I needed protection just like they thought their girlfriends needed."*

Charlie's experience of humiliation in school follows a similar thread. He says. *"Maybe because I was always the youngest at home, I was a shy child who was into his own world of drawings. I was*

quite bullied. I never had a chance to talk about my sexuality in school because I already faced a lot of bullying. Because I was shy, if somebody shouted at me or something, I would cry a lot. Our maths teacher used to humiliate me a lot for not being able to do calculations and that led students to also make fun of me... by the time, I realised I like guys I also realised that being open about it would bring more bullying. By the way, I knew that gay meant a slang because a lot of my classmates would call a junior gay. Guess why? Because he used to sit crossed legged. Can you believe it? So I for some time thought gay was a slang. So I didn't want to identify with the term."

Vaibhav also recollects the humiliating treatment he was faced with in school and says, "My classmates would call me 'sissy', 'behenji', 'softy' and what not. Softy ended up becoming my name throughout the school. This was only because I was bad at sports and action. I didn't even like action films, therefore that added to the list of insults. Some would call me 'emo', or 'rotlu'."

In the preceding sub-section, Nilabho recollects being a part of boys in school who would insult other boys for not being "beta chhele (manly) enough. Similar narratives have been confirmed by other respondents as well. He says. "I was a very masculine child, always enjoying sports. I was also a part of the 'star students' gang' who ended up doing well in sports and studies. To be honest, I was also one of those guys who would taunt other boys who were not beta chhele (manly) enough."

Nikhil says, "To be honest, I have not faced so much discrimination for being gay because I only came out much later and only to my close circles. Even in my dance troupe, only a few know about my sexuality. Others may have guessed or heard from here and there but I have told only a few. Also, I have no physical marker for being gay. Like, I am not feminine or anything. I don't dress up like women either. So I can pass off as a straight man. I have seen feminine men face a lot of

harassment in public places and even within peer groups. But the fact that you have to hide who you are is the biggest form of oppression for me.”

Abhinava recounts a humiliating experience in school and remarks, “Until and unless I spoke about the issue, there was no problem. I was like any other boy in school and at home. But on the day that I told that boy about my feelings for him. Things completely changed. My classmates got to know about it. I was in a co-ed school and this guy went and announced it to everybody during the lunch break. I distinctly remember that day. It was the most humiliating moment of my life and as an innocent 12 years old who went up to confide his love, it shattered me. He walked up to the teacher’s table and said loudly “I have an announcement to make. Today, Abhinava proposed to me and said he loves me. He is gay.” That is when I have first heard the term gay. I don’t know if I was very innocent or my classmates more informed (ill-informed) but they knew the terms like gay and faggot. Since that day, I was called a faggot and a chhakka at all times. They would joke about me and link me to every guy in class. It became difficult for me to even talk to a guy casually or become friends with them. They would keep taunting me and badmouthing.

But this was not enough, the guy I had proposed informed his parents about it. Both his father and mother came to school and informed the principal. My parents were called and humiliated. It was such a painful incident. It made me averse to school. My parents got me back home that day and explained to me that what I said or did was a mistake and that I should never repeat it. And to be honest, at that time I was just a boy who had a crush on another boy. But the way everybody reacted made me realise one thing that I can never talk about this to people. I didn’t care about what was right or wrong. I was just clear that this should never happen and I should never talk about this. Everybody turned against me. The guy I thought was my friend, the people I thought were my

friends all disappeared. They became a bunch of bullies. Even the girls in my class would taunt me and call me names. I was called 'champa' by a few of them."

Rayan says, *"I had seen feminine guys being called gay, chhakka, faggots and what not. I was also feminine in school, hated sports and liked craft, music and poetry. But I never had to face the brunt of the masculine bullies so much because I was a good student who was liked by teachers and won a lot of awards for the school. So my academic achievement sort of shielded me from those taunts."*

He further says, *"I had to face in college from the progressive political students for putting kajol, "walking like a girl" and wearing jewellery to college. Those were terrible days. But I must say that as much as I have faced discrimination in University, I haven't faced in school."*

Recollecting the experience of living in a boys' hostel he says, *"I faced a lot of gendered slurs normalised as a process of induction into hostel life. I was also attacked in my room for practising Wicca. People thought I was a "dayni" (witch)."*

Kalpak says, *"Back in school, I was never really bullied for being gay because not many knew and also I think bullying happens if you let people bully you. If you are a cry-baby kind of boy, people will bully you. I was in a co-ed school and if you show weakness there not only boys, girls will also taunt you. I knew of students who were bullied for being shy and quiet, not being good at sports or in studies. I saw how girls called names to these guys as much as boys. One of my classmates was embarrassed all his school life because he had big breasts. He was called 'boobie chhele' (boy with breasts). One of my juniors, who was gay I think, faced a lot of harassments. I often found him alone and depressed. I say he was gay, because people used to call him gay. I don't know why... apparently, he was caught watching gay porn."*

He says, *“I know a lot of people who have had to feel humiliation as young boys for being different, not only gay or girlish or fat, it could be for anything. I think it may be a lot of humiliation together... I (myself) was humiliated in school for a lot of reasons. I came from a lower middle-class family where Bangla was the only spoken language, I went to a convent school which was quite different. English was something everybody spoke. For most of the years, I did not have friends because I couldn’t speak English properly. They made fun of me for being obese since I can remember. My classmates laughed at me for bad pronunciations. It was so humiliating from the start that I sometimes can’t distinguish them.”*

He further says, *“No one talked to me because I was considered a bad student. Sometimes in class, even when I knew something I would not raise my hand to answer for I didn’t know how to say it right. Growing up my major causes of humiliation was because of being fat and “gneyo” (a derogatory term referred to people from the village, not modern). I am a Das (referring to his surname), so I would be asked by classmates, “Tui kaar Das?” (Whose slave are you?) It was extremely humiliating from the start.”*

Narratives on Desire, Sexuality and Abuse

The interviews were conducted among the ten respondents bringing forth their experience with desire and coming to terms with their sexuality. It reflects on their fears of learning about their sexuality, their relationships and the abuse they have experienced from peers and intimate partner violence. Many of my respondents have acknowledged their early confusion about their sexual desires towards men. They have also discussed the violence they have faced in relationships which is both physical and mental. For many, the experience of desire and sexuality are intertwined with experience of abuse and trauma.

Salman says, “I realised very early on, probably in class 5 or 6, that I was attracted to men. It started with this realisation one day when a (boy) classmate of mine was wearing this see-through shirt and I was really attracted to that and so I started, unconsciously, caressing his body and then I realised what I was doing, it made me a little angry at myself. That is also when I realised I like men... I used to dress up as a princess and I would imagine that I was trapped in a tower and I would imagine that there is a prince out there. After realising that I am attracted to men, I started falling for the men in my family. I felt very attracted to them. Men as in cousins, uncles. I would then feel guilty about it yet fantasize a lot about them. My initiation with porn was not great. I mostly learnt it from friends and picked up the wrong things. So in my head, there was always this oppressive fantasy about having sex with these men who ordered me to undress, and do things. I would feel tremendously guilty because these were my family members. Yet I was attracted to my several of maternal uncles.”

Further, they state, “I came across queer literature for the first time through a Bengali magazine called Unish-Kuri, which was a magazine for young adults. The magazine published an article on shama-kaami (homosexual) people, that is when I realised that this thing has a name. This is also the time when I would visit a lot of cyber cafés and try and find gay literature. I was in high school then. I also discovered gay porn literature. This is when I first came across the term gay and immediately associated myself to that identity. I did not learn the term bisexual until much later. I thought I was definitely gay. I used to have a secret stash of photos of male models, hidden in my room cupboard. I would fantasize about them. In class 7, I started this sexual relationship with one of my classmates. My classmate and I would touch each other and enjoy it. After a point, I started getting a lot of satisfaction for getting men to suck my nipples. I would do that with my friend.

Consequently, I also got involved with another guy from my class. It was like an exchange, I would do things he liked and he would do the same.”

Recollecting their first experience of sexual abuse at an adolescent age, Salman says, “When I was in class 9, I started taking mathematics tuition from a person in my locality. One day, I stopped going to his classes because I did not like his advances. He called my parents and said that I was skipping a lot of his classes. My parents forced me to go back there, even when I told them how he made nasty advances. They did not want to believe me. I went back there and then he molested me and tried to force penetration. I was only a boy. I ran home and spent days thinking about it, feeling unclean and dirty. I told my mother that the teacher was a homosexual man and also tried to force me to do sexual things. They did not believe me, my parents. My parents had this stance that I am trying to tarnish my teacher’s reputation. My mother said that homosexuality was a very big taboo and I was just trying to tarnish his name because I did not like his tuitions. I wanted to go to the police but they wouldn’t take me. I did not want to go alone because I did not know the consequences of reporting the incident.”

Further, Salman recollects, “In 2011, I met this guy called Santanu on the train on my way to Delhi. He was this very confident gay guy who knew about how things function in the community. He knew all the top/bottom distinctions. He told me about them. He told me that I had to choose between one of the two... actually three: top/bottom/versatile. I had to choose one of the three and then proceed with that. He introduced me to this website called Planet Romeo. At that time, I wanted to have sex with men but because of my age and the effeminate body, no one would take me seriously. I wanted to penetrate basically but no one would let me because I was younger and softer. This was when I got raped by 3 different guys. So, you must be aware of these dating websites for gay men, no one

gives their real photo or age or even name. I became friends with this guy who was presenting himself as 18 or 19 years, but when I went to meet him I realised he was way in his 40s. But I had this thing that I would let people down if I back out. So I went out with him anyway. He took me to his place and tied me up and without my consent he penetrated me. That was my first experience and it was basically rape. He played gay porn in the background. He thought it would distract me but it didn't. It hurt like crazy. So this was my first intercourse and it was so violent. There was this another guy called Allen. Allen was two times my age. I again had this thing about not offending people. So I went ahead with the date. He also raped me. There was also another guy in his late 20s, he would always meet me at Park Circus Maidan and whenever he would meet me he would take to a corner and try to have sex with me. It would hurt a lot and I would still give in. I didn't realize until a few years back those encounters were rape. Violence and nothing else. Then I got involved with another gay for a short while until I met Kaushik. I fell in love for the first time, with him. He was bisexual and he told me all about bisexuality. That is when I started learning about bisexuality. Before I met Kaushik, I thought to be gay was all about having sexual relationships, I didn't think there could be anything romantic possible. I did not think it was possible for a man to fall in love with another man before I met him. It was not a relationship per se, but we were together for more than 2 years. But Kaushik was also abusive, extremely abusive emotionally and physically. He would beat me up or throw things when he would get angry. But he started seeing another person and stopped being responsive. That is the time I met Allen (not the one I already talked about). Allen was also very abusive in a relationship. He believed in BDSM and I did not. Whenever we would have sex, he would beat me up for pleasure, as part of the foreplay. I never used to enjoy that but I could never tell him. I was with him for a year before I ended it."

According to Amartya, “I knew I was gay from the time I could remember things about myself. Obviously, I didn’t know the term “gay”. But I knew I liked boys. It was in school that I had my first sexual encounter. I was in class 7 when I was going through this whole phase. I saw all my guy friends talking about girls. The girls, they like. The girls they wanted to propose. They would also talk about porn a lot. What they saw, what they liked and so on. I also tried to be a part of it. Because you know fitting in was important. Especially with my body and gestures, the only way to have guy friends was to talk about girls. But I realised, I did not enjoy straight porn neither did I end up having a crush on a girl. It was actually a guy friend of mine, who first told me that I am trying too hard to fit in. He told me about gay porn and asked me to check it out. And trust me Di, that changed my life. I realised what I was. Before that, I have often liked guys in movies and all. I have also fantasized about men. But this was like a friend coming up to me and confirming. It was embarrassing as hell. I tried to deny it to others for a long time. I used to watch a lot of gay porn at that time. And fantasized about a few of my classmates who were evidently straight (laughs). It was a frustrating time. But in class 11, when I took up humanities and my classmates were different, I actually found peace. I met people who gave me a safe space to come out about my sexuality. It was also then I started dating my first boyfriend. He was in the commerce section. We went to the same English coaching and a common friend introduced us. He was our cupid. That was my first relationship and so was his. We both knew everything from the internet... top bottom, etc. But you know even when you know it, but it’s different in a practical sense. My first ever sexual encounter was with him. We dated for 2 years until we started college. During the beginning of college, he started treating me badly, “why are you not calling me? Where are you?” He started thinking that I am cheating on him and we had some violent fights. Our relationship and my sexuality were both

kept hidden from my parents till that time. But when I decided to leave him, he started threatening me that he will tell my parents. It was an abusive phase where I was living with fear again. However, after that first relationship ended, I have been sceptical in investing myself in a relationship anymore. I don't see a lot of good reviews about dating apps either. A few of my friends have had bad experiences through Grinder. So I am sceptical of using them. But I do hook up once in a while. There are house parties that happen for queer people. That is also a good meeting space."

He further says, "I identify as the bottom. So I am often treated as weak and feminine. I think this stereotype works within the gay community as much as it does outside. Recently, I was in an encounter with a guy I met through a common friend. He did not even ask my preference, he assumed me to be bottom just because I am feminine. But I will tell you this that it is not so clear cut. Feminine people may not always be bottom. I also know of gay men, who would want to have sex with feminine men but will not openly date them. It is plain hypocrisy. This has happened to me also, I met this guy in a party and after a few pegs he was so sloshed, all he wanted to do was have sex. But then, even while trying to talk me into it, he started saying things like "you are not like others, you are different. I have come across men who want to be like women and call themselves gay. I hate them. Chhakkas..." Imagine how drunk he was to have said those things to me. I wanted to give him a tight slap. But he was so drunk, I just left him there."

Recounting his experience with his own desire and sexuality, Nikhil says, "If I have to narrate my first understanding of my sexuality and that others were different from me on that account, I don't know which one to tell first. It was after class 10 got over, we had a few weeks of holiday before class 11 started, so I used to go for practice at this seniors place. That is where I met Anay. He was

my senior's friend and 3 years older to me. He was also a dancer and was working with an events' crew. I don't think I was initially attracted to him, but I loved his dancing. You know how it is when you are young and you see someone doing something you want to do and they are doing it so perfectly that you are in awe of them. That's what happened to me. I was "mesmerized" you can say. I started practising with them often. During this time Anay started messaging me about rehearsal times and normal chit chats. One day he offered to pick me from my place to the rehearsal because my house was on his route. I met up with him and reached the venue. We were a little earlier than scheduled because Anay said his previous engagement was over early and he didn't have anything to do to kill time. That day is like an image for me. It's like a film actually, I will never forget. After reaching, I went to the attached dressing room to change into dance gear by the time I could dress fully, Anay came from behind and tried to penetrate me from behind. Yes, I know it was harassment. It was plain abuse and at that moment it hurt a lot. A lot. You won't be able to imagine. But you know what, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed being penetrated. Of course, what he did was rape. I know it now, I knew it then. But I just realised that I enjoyed it. By that time, I did not ever try straight sex, so I couldn't have judged. But then again, it's not about comparison right. If I enjoy it, I do. I shouted at him so badly and cried so hard. But I didn't tell anyone in the group because I didn't know what to say and how to say it. But I told Anay never to touch me or talk to me again. He showed no remorse or guilt over his behaviour as if it was his right. That disgusted me a lot. I also felt disgusted with myself, my body. But underneath all that, there was a pleasure. That left me very conflicted. Until then, liking men was never something that occurred to me. Even after that, I didn't think I really liked men. I thought I just liked the act of sex with men or man because it just one guy and it was forceful. It was also difficult to explain what I was feeling. That incident played over and

over inside my head at all times. I was constantly asking myself why I enjoyed it. I was also constantly denying any possibilities of me being gay. It is very hard to come out as a gay person in an all-boys school especially when you are unsure about it yourself. It was one difficult year. I was also not interest in love, girlfriends and things like that because I was not in a shape to think straight about anything but what I was going through. I used to go to a close by cyber café and search for information on these things. This was while searching that I found a guy on Facebook who had shared pictures of the LGBT Pride in his profile. After going through those, I realised there was a whole community of people out there. However, I was still scared of telling people what happened to me. They would laugh at me and my weakness. Also, if you are famous among the students of other schools, news like this would spread like fire. I was too scared to tell anybody this.”

He further says, “This was also the time, I started consuming a lot of pornography, experimenting with all the types. But I realised that I liked watching Gay porn and BDSM porn. A person as jovial like me stopped having friends. I stopped going for dancing also. It felt like an addiction. I started fantasizing about actors, classmates and in general men I knew. I used to fantasize a lot about Upen Patel, Arjun Rampal and a few porn stars at that time. Do you remember the axe advertisement that came out during Durga Puja? It had a very raunchy scene between a girl and a boy. I would fantasize myself in the girl’s place and masturbate. It was a very sexual phase of my life. But in college, I found someone who guided me through my mess. I met a guy in college, he was my senior and openly gay. He was a brilliant photographer and often did nude portraits of his models. He spotted me during the freshers’ talent event. I danced on a few songs. Once I was done and I returned backstage, this senior walked up to me and showed me a few photographs he had clicked

during the dance. We exchanged numbers and asked him to give me the photos. After a few days, he walked up to me in the canteen and offered me a smoke and congratulated me for the dance. Then he asked me casually if I was interested in modelling for him in dance costumes or in general. I was just out of school, and in that horrible sexual phase, I thought it would be a good change. I would do something productive. So, I went ahead with it and said yes. During one of these shoots, he told me that he was gay. I already knew because everyone else did. But he said that he liked me. He was not sure if I was straight, so he wanted to ask me. There was something in the way he approached me, I kind of found someone to talk to. I initially told him I was not gay. But then, one day I called him up and asked him to meet me. I was not sure about telling him everything, but he made me feel very comfortable and safe. It was the first time I narrated all that happened to me and the consequences of it. He was extremely sorry for what I had to go through. He also told me that it was okay to be confused. That there is no rule that you have to know it all at once. He helps counsel me for a while. In the process, I started enjoying his company quite romantically. Eventually, I proposed to him. We are still together, 7 years and going strong. We have had a lot of breakups and hookups in between, but we have always gotten back to each other. I kept the relationship hidden for a while and he was okay with it. That was the best thing about him. He did not want to rush it or push me into accepting myself in front of others. He gave me time. . I was sexually very attracted to him from day one. He was this muscular guy. I like big muscular men with facial hair, all of which you will find in my boyfriend, I am so lucky that way (laughs). But I started growing serious feeling for him after a few weeks of non-stop chatting. It was this butterfly-in-my-stomach phase. But we have had huge fights and breakups. He may look very muscular and manly but he is a very gentle person in life. I broke up with him initially because I was not sexually satisfied and I didn't know

how to tell him. I didn't want to be demanding. I am into BDSM and he is not. I like being tortured in bed and he can't come to terms with it. I have tried to explain to him but he won't get it. I have walked out of the relationship many times in this 7 years but I keep going back. I have never cheated on him, but I have been with other men during our breakups. I have hooked up with people on the internet and all. There are some websites where you can find people interested in BDSM. I have accessed those sites and been with men from there. But I have always told him everything and he has accepted me with all that."

Abhinava narrates his experience and says, "When I was 11 or 12 years old, I realised that I liked men. This realisation happened after I came face to face with my feeling for my classmate in school. I used to like a boy from my class and all I could think about was kissing him. I didn't even know how kisses happened. I only saw it in English films, that too very few English movies. I don't want to name him because he never responded to my feelings. I proposed to him, not propose really but told him how I felt about him. I think my first nightfall was also on the night when I had a dream about him. I don't remember the exact dream. But it was that time that I realised I was gay but I didn't know the word gay or Shamakami. When I initially realised this, I was super scared because I didn't think it was possible. The fact that guys can like other guys was not a part of my experience, I had never seen two men kissing or holding hands or cuddling as straight couples do. So I thought something was wrong with me. It was 2007 or 2008, I am not very sure. But it was during that time. I was really attracted to my classmate and I couldn't figure out why. Because I was not sure if it was real. Real for me was things I saw around. And I didn't see this."

In recounting his experience of humiliation, mentioned in the preceding sub-section, Abhinava discusses the ways in which he was treated by his peers and principal in school after confessing his

attraction towards his classmate. This led him to deteriorate in his studies and get involved with drug abuse. He also used music as a means to cope with his distress and divert himself from his feelings. However, it did not change his desires. He says, *“I started liking guys, I developed crushes on fellow pupils in my music class. I started masturbating to gay porn. But I learned my lesson: Never tell anyone.”*

Abhinava narrates the experience of his first relationship and says, *“He was a part of this group through common friends. On one of the weekends, during class 10, we had decided to play football at Maidan. So I reached there and I saw Soham was also there. Others hadn’t arrived yet. Soham asked me about the incident at school (referring to the humiliation he faced in school for confessing his attraction to his friend). I was shocked. He was not from my school. So how did he know? He explained that one of our common friends had told him. He also said that “if you are gay. If you like boys, it’s okay.” I was surprised. Since that incident, I had never spoken about all this to anyone. He also said that he liked boys too. He said he liked me. He said it could be our secret until it was okay to tell others. After football, we went around Maidan and kissed. We actually made out. It was long. I liked it. Until then, I had only watched porn. This was real. It was different than porn. Clumsy and scary because we were two guys kissing in a public place. By the end of class 11 our relationship, our secret ended. Something happened to him. He would often force me to do drugs with him and drink local liquor. I started hating it. He also started hiding things from me and lying about small things. One day, I did something I shouldn’t have probably done. I checked his phone to see if he was cheating on me. I had no choice, he was telling me things and mostly lying about things. I went through his message and saw long conversations with a few guys. Some of these conversations were pretty intense and sexual in nature. I felt hurt and disgusted. When I confronted*

him, his reply made me cringe you know. He said that I only make out with him but do not let him have sex with me. So he was finding other options. That kind of ended our relationship and for good. It was during my first year when I was still a closeted gay person, I started dating one of my batch mates from the dance department. He was a visibly feminine guy and had confided in me about his stories of harassment and discrimination during his school days. I told him about what happened to me and we both found company. With him my relationship was different, we were both more mature about the relationship. I think I fell in love with him. We became each other's strength. He helped me tell my parents that I was gay. They were shocked initially. I reminded them about that incident in school and told them that I liked boys then, I like boys even now. With Saikat, I think the physical relationship was also very organic. He was not one of those guys who are strictly top or bottom. He was versatile and he always encouraged me to experiment. He also got me into the habit of doing regular tests for STD even though I was only with one partner (that is him). Saikat was more aware as a gay person. We broke up last year. After graduation, he went to Delhi and long distance became really difficult. So we mutually decided to end it. Since then I haven't been with anyone seriously. It's really hard to find nice guys you know. Guys who are not "assholes". I have been on a few dates since my break up but have had a bad experience all but one time. Most of the times these online dates end up being really old married men who are looking for hookups, mostly rough and abusive sex. They just want to take you somewhere and strip. It's disgusting. But I won't say it's all like that. I have met a very nice guy online, but I am not looking for anything serious."

Koushik describes his experience with desire and sexuality and says, "I realised I liked boys when I was 12 or 13. Before that, I had a hint but not that sexual thing. See, growing up, I always liked the company of men. Since I was young. Company of men, in the sense, I liked being around them not in

a manly way but just you know emotionally connect to them. I remember this incident very vividly, when I was 6 or 7, I don't know from where I learned this, but I went and kissed my cousin in his lips, he was older to me, maybe 11 or so. He started hitting me and then told my parents. They scolded me so much and told me that these things are not right. I should never do them. I continued having crushes on actors, musicians, models and what not. I used to have a huge thing for Akshay Kumar. I had photos of him bare-chested. But I really understood this when I started watching porn. In class 7, I had only two close friends I used to hang out with. One of them had a computer. We used to get porn CDs then. He got one of those CDs and we watched it. My friends went crazy. But I did not. I actually didn't enjoy the porn so much as watching their reaction to the porn. This happened a couple of times until I started fantasizing one of my friends. I had a few nightfalls that way. I was also confused. One day, a friend of mine had called us to his place for collective porn watching (laughs) another day and I was the only one who turned up (because I was into him and didn't understand why or how). We watched porn that day and then he said let's kiss and practice, just to know how to do it when we have to do it to girls. And that was the craziest thing that I did at that age and I loved it. I enjoyed it so much, I don't know was it because I was gay or because it was a new thing. But it was so different. I am not saying that was the best kiss of my life, we were young and stupid, but it was something new and something I enjoyed. But the problem was I was getting obsessive with this guy and for him, it was just a one-time fun. He did not even like guys. But I was stupid enough to tell him that I thought I liked him, he started laughing at me and said, "Shit you are gay!" He told that to everybody in the class except the part that he kissed me, so again, life went back to the cycle of humiliation. Now it was fat, 'gneyo' and gay. Like another feather to the cup. I was so bullied since then. Not just name-calling, but physical intimidation from my own classmates

and batch mates. If I would go to the washroom they would follow me and ask me to give them a blowjob or let them touch me. A senior once forced me to give him a blowjob when I was in class 9. I never complained, but it was so humiliating. I couldn't complain because he would tell the principal that I was gay. That was enough fear to force me to do things like that. Do you know what is worse than being gay? Being gay and forcefully out when you are in middle school and you have at least five years in that place."

He further says, "To sum up, I was horny, misunderstood, ill-informed and humiliated. But then things changed a little. When I was 17, I became very body conscious. I hated my weight and fat. I started running and exercising. I also started eating less, which did not do that well. But I don't know why I wanted to look good and handsome. I wanted to get attention. I had a classmate who was also gay. I learnt a lot of things from him. I also got to know about the distinctions but also realised it didn't matter. I was always flexible, what they call versatile. It was a good few months but then he started body shaming me once in a while and also in front of classmates. That is why I became very body conscious and started running and exercising. I liked him so much that I didn't care how he was shaming me. I have been body shamed before also, but when he did it, I really wanted to do something. I feared he would leave me for my body fat. Our relationship did not survive. I should have known. He became quite secretive and abusive. He started checking my phone and sometimes forcing me to get sexually involved with him. During college, I started watching a lot of gay porn. Through an internet search I found a couple of online sources to understand my identity and read about issues. I got aware of Section 377, until then it was about the humiliation of being gay. But knowing about 377 made me realise that I am a criminal in the eyes of law. That scared me a lot. I didn't know the gravity of the law until I read about it. I met a guy during that

time, he was my age and quite vocal about gay rights. We met in these protests and then exchanged numbers. We used to talk a lot, as friends initially. I told him about my relationships and my issues with body image. He seemed to understand, or maybe pretended to. You know what people call 'woke' nowadays. But he was an "asshole" and nothing else. He was very abusive, both mentally and physically. He would manufacture my consent to do things with him that I would not want to. All under the pretext of 'free-love' and 'monogamy is oppressive' ideas. Also, he was a compulsive cheater. But all in the name of free love. After 7 or 8 months, I called it off. Since then I have never been in any serious relationship. I fear to invest on other people due to my past experiences. I don't have casual hookups either. I am not a grinder person. I have to know people face to face to be interested in them. I have heard about grinder and another dating website, but I don't want to use them. The reasons are simple, it is impersonal, out there and also can go massively wrong. There are so many fake profiles in those apps. But I know people in the gay circuit who have met nice people too. Some of them are going strong for 2-3 years also. But I think I am not ready for that sort of thing, at least not yet. I have met someone recently, and I don't want to talk so much about it and jinx it. But I really like him. We both do actually. We get each other. But it's very new and I don't know how it will end up. With him, it's not just physical but also a connection that is very real, emotional. We hardly meet but we talk regularly and discuss our daily lives. It is maturing and hopefully will not end up in abuse."

Rayan's experience of coming to terms with his sexuality has not been easy, according to him. He says, "Since class 11, I have been living with myself as a gay man and consciously 'flamboyant,' it was not easy. I think I started liking men and women since early teenage. I had a few girlfriends initially. It was in class 11, that I started dating one of my juniors from school. She was very

“paaka” (originally means: ripe, here: overtly knowledgeable, used in the joking sense here) and she taught me the art of sex (laughs). We dated for a few months and one day, I realised that I was having sexual feelings for a guy friend of mine. I tried to get over those, but it was growing. I also didn’t know why suddenly I started feeling that way. I immediately told my girlfriend, as we were very close friends. She was very hurt, I could see that. But she was very understanding. She was the one who introduced me to all the information about same-sex relationships, legal discrimination against same-sex couples, and other LGBTQ terms and issues. This was the last two years of my school and very deciding years when I realised that I was gay, like really. Until then, I thought it was all platonic. But this phase made me panicked and scared because I was aware of the ways in which people treated gay guys. My own realisation took me a little off the track and I started blaming myself for being gay. That is when she helped me with whatever she could. Books, articles, websites, everything to make me realise that it was okay to be gay. I never ended up telling the guy that I liked him. I did not come out to anyone but her during the school days. It was only in college that I gained a lot more perspective on the LGBT issues and figured out my own position in that. When I joined the University. I also met with other queer students on campus and started discussing the day to day issues we face. But things changed for the worse after a news bite came out in the local newspaper with my photo on it. It said: “A gay student from so-and-so university says:..” My father read that in the morning news and asked me for a thousand clarifications. Because I lived in a joint family, the pressure was higher. All my uncles, aunts and cousins had read the news. They literally held a family meeting to discuss my sexuality. I was overwhelmed and not in a nice. That was the first time I left home without telling anyone. After a few days my parents called me back home and said that as long as I do my studies and end up getting a job, they would not interfere in

my personal life. That, I thought was a good start. But it didn't end up so well. Because, after a year or so of this discussion. After a night of gathering at my house, when my friend's left in the morning, my cousin (uncle's son) came to my room all violent and beat me up saying that I was a whore, a disgrace to the family getting my anus fucked by, men. He beat me up to pulp actually, I managed to inform a few of my friends via message who then came with LGBT organisations to my house and admitted me to the hospital. Since then I have never gone back to my family home."

He further says, "Since college, I have been quite openly gay around people and carry myself the way I want to against how some people find me to the sore of their eyes. It has led to certain situations with me too. I have been often rejected by gay men I have liked for that fact that I dress up and wear kajal and walk like girls. There have been situations where my style has led people to believe that I should be beaten up on the road to set an example. I was beaten up while going back to my apartment, two years back from wearing kajal (kohl) and walking like what they think is a woman. No one stopped on the road to help me until a few students from the corner saw me getting beaten up and came to the rescue. We went to the police to register complaints but they did not file it because the people who beat me up were local TMC goons."

Describing his relationships, Rayan says, "I have failed at having successful relationships because according to my partners I am too emotional for a man, too vulnerable. Also, my gestures, clothing and everything has made people force themselves upon me as if it is their right. I could not go to the police because being gay then was a crime legally. I am often not asked about my sexual preference and generalised to be bottom because I have a flaunting feminine self. All these misconceptions make my life difficult. I am not one of those men who judge men according to their masculinity. It is true that I am very attracted to men with facial hair, a lot beard, I also like people for who they are.

I don't sleep with people because of how they look but because of the mental and emotional connection that I perceive. However, I am not interested in long term relationships anymore, they are emotionally taxing. Too much of hard work. Also, most of my experiences both online and offline has been with horribly toxic gay men who are no better than straight homophobic men."

He further adds, "Now when I look back at my relationships, I will say that I have had a mixed experience. I wouldn't say all of them were great. But I don't think anybody can say that they have had great experiences with all their relationships, straight or not. I have come to believe that just because some men are gay, they are not inherently feminist, many of them continue to believe in abusive ways of dealing with their partners. But not everybody. I have been with a few amazing people. But things didn't work out, but I won't say they were abusive. The problem is that we, like straight people, can't be open about who we are with, mostly the secrecy and the way society looks at us, it affects our relationships also. Some always try to pass off as straight and some try to fight back in whatever ways. But we do not find so much stability. I don't know about others, but this is what I feel."

Charlie says, "By the time I was thirteen or so, I realised that I liked art. I started taking painting very seriously. It was through art that I explored my sexuality in one way, you can say. I don't know how it will sound, maybe gross. I used to be aroused by looking at male drawing figures that we had to practice. I was also very attracted to my art teacher who was a middle-aged man. But to my defence, he was very handsome. But I also thought to myself that how was that possible when all my friends were talking about girls, my brother's had girlfriends who used to come home. I was not sure if I liking boys and most importantly not liking girls like others was wrong or not. It did not feel right. I did not know how to figure that out. I was 13 I think. It was a lot to grasp. I used to have

crushes on boys and I would replay movie scenes with them in my head. It was quite exciting yet stressful because I was feeling different and didn't have anyone to tell this. For me, it was not normal then. So I suppressed it. Throughout most of my school life. At the end of the last year in school, I had started liking a guy, who was also gay. I went through denial for some time. So when I finally started liking this guy in school, I had told him that. Apart from him, I had told my seatmate in school that I liked boys, that too on the day of farewell. I drank after school and then did that blunder. But he was nice enough to not out me to everybody. But that guy I liked rejected me. After school, I was in a serious relationship. I did a stupid thing too. I got my nose pierced, though I like it. I did it then because I thought it would be easier to divert their attention before I come out to them. But it didn't turn out so well. My parents didn't bother about my piercing at all. And they didn't believe that being gay was even possible. So they remained in denial. Denial was actually worse than not knowing. But my relationship did not survive, he moved to another city with a job and it ended. But joining the make-up artist's job was a great beginning for me. I met a lot of queer people in this profession, who were unabashedly and loudly queer. I got my love for fashion back and it was place where I could be me. I started learning to make up by trying it on myself. And while doing that, I realised I actually enjoy it. Now, I can walk out of my house with eyeshadow and mascara on my face. In this industry, I also found love. Love as I understand and know is Saket, my boyfriend. He is also an artist. He is an amazing human being. He understands me. He is not always a loud gay guy. But he never cares about how I am or what I wear. I know of a lot of guys I have previously been on dates who hate gay men who dress up or enjoy being out of the binary. They call people like us "sissy", "launda" and what not. Saket makes me believe in love and commitment. I met him 2 years back and we have been together since then. Before him, I was casually seeing a few

people. But since I met him, I have been really in love. Last year, we moved in together but as bachelor flatmates. Our owners don't know we are a gay couple. They know we are both bachelor guys working in the same place. That is the cost of being gay. You still have to hide it from others, even after 377 is read down. It is still not easy. My parents are still in denial and do not want to know about my life."

Kalpak recollects his experiences and says, "When I started growing up, specifically in my early teens, I would have a lot of fantasies about boys and men I knew. I used to think to fantasize about a teacher from my school, I had a crush on him. But I never really spoke about any of this to any of my friends. I didn't know the word gay until I was in class when one of my classmates brought a cutting of a photo with two guys kissing and told me "those boys who kiss other boys are gay. They are buttfuckers." By then, I already had a hint about my liking towards boys. I also knew that all the boys I knew liked girls. When I heard this from him, I realised that I can't tell him that I have such fantasies about some boys. Also, as I grew up, I realised through my circle of friends that gay is not acceptable. They would always joke about homosexuality. They would use the word 'homo' to derogatively refer to someone. Some of them also had a misconception and often mistook gay for hijras. So I spent most of my school life hiding my sexuality. However, during the school years, I did have three physical relationships with my batch mates. They were just physical. We all wanted to explore and learn. One of them had approached me saying that he had a crush on me and then we ended up... where we ended up. But with the others, I had a hint they were gay. One of them was clearly gay, like the way he talked, walked, emoted, it was quite gay. (What do you mean?) Jemon meyeli shawbhab, khub emotional. (Feminine behaviour, very emotional.) A lot of gay men, you know are gay by just looking at them. Anyway, I approached him. But it was a secret. The third was

my classmate and we got together after school ended. It was very sudden. He stayed over for a night before class 12 results declaration and we made out that night. He told me he was gay and that he never thought I would be. I also had a lot of crushes on my brother's friends when I was growing up. He had a lot of friends in school, but I never had the guts to tell any of them. I was scared if he gets to know or someone else in school does. But I used to like a few of his football mates, I used to play with them too. One of the reasons I started playing with my brother's friends was because I was madly in love with his friend Sounak. Sounak da was this very handsome guy, lean, curly hair, goatee and his hands showed all the nerves. I was in awe of him and madly in love. Only thing is, I never told him that. I used to go to play mostly to stare at him and then fantasize about him. But that was just a childhood crush. I also grew up having a lot of crushes on footballers and actors. My fantasy king was Hrithik Roshan. He was so handsome. I used to have posters of him and would wish to someday tell him how much I love him. I liked him because of the way he danced and his body, such as fitness. I was gaga over him."

He further says, "My parents, once got a hint that I might be gay, but they suppressed that thought deep. My mother walked into my room while I was jerking off to gay porn, this happened when I was 17. She was embarrassed and more shocked because she did notice what I was watching. She didn't talk to me for a while, out of shame I think. She didn't even look into my face. But then, my brother managed it. That is when I came out to my brother. He was in college and he had a classmate who was gay and out. In my last year of school, I met a gay guy online and we started texting and talking, we met actually for the first time after 2 months of talking. He was in first-year college. He told me all about the hang out spots, where we will not be hunted, he also told me that Kolkata Pride happens every December, a lot of people come for the rally. Talking to him made me very

comfortable with myself. I don't know when but we started dating each other. He also made me very comfortable with holding hands in public. Things that I would never think of doing with a guy in a public place. But we broke up in a few months. He was openly gay. His parents were aware of his sexuality and okay with it. While I had not even told my parents. He didn't want to be with someone who is "still in the closet", in his own words. When I joined college, a lot of things changed. I used to bunk college and go out on dates with guys I would find on Facebook. I started using grinder much later. My first year was all about dates. I don't remember all the guys even. We would meet at someplace and go to their places and make out or have sex. Once, I was actually with a guy in his house when he invited two of his friends. I was new to this so he thought he could pull that off with me. But I got very angry and hit them and got out of there running. That was a really bad experience. The worst part was that, he was not gay. What he wanted to do was rape me because I was gay. He lied about being gay. His friends were straight people who just wanted to teach a gay guy some lesson. I didn't report it. I didn't think the police would believe me. I couldn't tell my brother either because he would get mad at me for meeting unknown people. I spoke about it for the first time at a survivors' meeting that happened a few months back. For straight people law is there to bring you justice if you have faced sexual assault. But for us, we will be implicated in the process. Many I know have also never registered to complain against the harassment they face both from gay men and also from straight men as part of hate crime."

While describing his ideal partner he says, "To be honest, if I have to tell you about what I look for in a partner, it will be difficult to say just a few things. I obviously want a person who understands me, matching a wavelength. Looks are not so important for me, but also I can't be with someone who is very flamboyant, meaning you know making a statement all the time. However, I am not in

any serious relationship at this moment and not looking for one either, therefore, I am using the internet to meet people for casual hookups.”

Vaibhav recollects, “It was only when I was 11 or 12 that I realised that I like boys. I didn’t know it straight away. But from the age that you like people, differently, more romantically, I started liking boys. It was first restricted to television. I used to always look at boys in the TV, never even look at girls. I used to like Hindi actors who did romantic roles. I was a huge Shahrukh and Shahid fan. They were those chocolate boy romantics on screen. I used to feel what girls feel for them. That fanaticism, putting photos in the room, thinking about an encounter, what I would tell him. All these thoughts used to be there. My mother knew about it but she didn’t think it was anything. But as I got into my teens I think a lot of hormones just got pumped into me. I used to like a lot of guys in my school including a few seniors. I actually had a crush on one of the guys who called me “rotlu”. But I could never really tell him out of fear. When I eventually did, it turned out to be really bad. He was my classmate in class11. We were both in Commerce and we used to go to the same tuition for accountancy. I had told him I liked him, one evening while we were walking back from tuition. He stopped and asked me, “tu Chhakka hain kya?” (You are a transgender, or what?) And he started laughing loudly. He then slapped my cheeks and said, “tere jaise bando ka, sorry tu na banda hain na bandi, tere jaise chakko ko toh bawhot marna chahiye. Tu school aa, tereko maza dikhayenge.” (Guys like you, sorry, you are neither guy nor girl, you transgenders should be beaten to death. Come to school, I show you the fun.) I never thought he would react like this. He used to make fun of me but he was a friend. I got really scared and didn’t end up going to school and tuitions for a while. That threat led to fever and I was bedridden. Finally, when I went back to school, everybody in the class and other classes was talking about me being gay. They would look at me weirdly if I

would cross the corridor. Boys would come out of the washroom if I entered it. This behaviour went for a while. But there was also a senior in school who was gay. But he was not open about it. He got a hold of me once during break time and shouted at me. He told me, "It's okay to be gay. But why did you have to tell people? Don't you know how people are?" I told him everything that happened and the threat I got. He said that no one in school knew that he was gay. If I told anyone he will come and beat me. But he also asked me what I knew about the word gay. I told him that nothing except that they are not like hijras. But people often abuse us as hijras. He then told me to go and check out the internet and read about it. It is not as simple as it sounds. But two days later, my classmates gathered around me in the 4th-floor toilet after school and started hitting me. I was made to apologize for being gay. I did. I did not know what else to do. The next day when I told him what happened, he got very angry but we both knew we could not complain. So we remained quiet. Since that incident, I spent most of my free time in school with the senior. I also started liking him because he was a very caring and calm person. Eventually, I told him about my feelings. Initially, he was not ready for it. But then, he called after a few weeks and said that he likes me too. We started a relationship together. I used to go to his house a lot. I would tell my parents that I am going there to study or get notes. Because he was a senior from commerce, they didn't care too much. We were together for a little more than 2 years. But he broke up with me a few months back. He said he met somebody else through Facebook and wants to give it a shot. I was devastated."

He further says, "I have lived with myself, accepting my identity and desire for the last 8-9 years. In these few years, I have realised no matter what laws come and go. Our lives will never be easy. We will always be discriminated against, looked down upon. Our identities have to be kept hidden for most people around us. That is the way it is. People don't want to acknowledge the difference. For

them, it is a threat to their normal life. And the LGBT community continues to pay for it. It is so depressing to keep a part of yourself hidden like it doesn't exist. But it does."

Discussing his present relationship, Vaibhav says, "I met someone in the last pride walk when a few of us went drinking after it ended. He is 2 years older to me. He is also a Bengali. We have been talking and meeting a few times. We are taking it slow. He is aware of my previous relationship and he suggested that we take things slow and see how it works out. Also, he is not in an exclusive relationship with me. He made it clear. All these things are too much to handle in one go. But I said I am okay with it because I can't change who he is. Also, why should I ask him for exclusivity when I am not sure if I want to be with him. This could be a phase."

SECTION III: TABLE OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEES

Table 4.1

Name and Residence	Age	Sex	Religion	Mother Tongue	Sexuality	PARENTS' OCCUPATION	Highest Qualification	Schooling	Employment Status	Income	Additional Information
Salman Mohammed Wellington Street.	29 years	Male (SAB) GenderQueer (SIG)	Non-Practicing Muslim	Bengali	Bisexual	Father: Service Mother: Homemaker	Masters in Arts.	Co-education schooling Gender segregated classrooms English Medium Private school.	Presently unemployed . Worked as Freelance Model, Assistant Director of Photography.	7 lakh p.a (approx.) Family Income	Realised he liked men At the age of 11 or 12. Came out as a gay man to friends at 19 years. Came out to parents as a gay man at 20 years. Faced Hostility. Identified as a bisexual gender queer person Since 2015 at 25 years. Was diagnosed with HIV positive virus in 2016.

Table 4.2

Name and Residence	Age	Sex	Religion	Mother Tongue	Sexuality	PARENTS' OCCUPATION	Highest Qualification	Schooling	Employment Status	Income	Additional Information
Nilabho Chattopadhyay Thanthaniya Stop.	34 years	Male (SAB) Man (SIG)	Practicing Hindu	Bengali	Gay (Married)	Father: Govt. School Teacher (retired) Mother: Homemaker	Master of Sciences	Boys' schooling Bengali Medium Govt. School	Bank Employee	6 lakh p.a (approx.)	He went through Conflict with his Sexuality for many years. He realised or "believed" He was gay when he was 28 years old. Came out to his sister a few years back. He has a 2 year old daughter and wife.
Amartya Dutta Salt Lake	19 years	Male (SAB) Man (SIG)	Non-believer. Hindu.	Bengali	Gay	Father: Senior Engineer Mother: Bank Employee	Pursuing Bachelor of Science.	Co-education schooling Private English Medium.	Not Applicable.	10 lakh per annum Family Income.	He realised he was gay At the age of 13. Came out to a few School Friends in Class 11. He came out to his Parents in 2018. However they seemed to Already know.

Table 4.3

Name and Residence	Age	Sex	Religion	Mother Tongue	Sexuality	PARENTS' OCCUPATION	Highest Qualification	Schooling	Employment Status	Income	Additional Information
Nikhil Agarwal Girish Park	25 years	Male (SAB) Man (SIG)	Practicing Hindu	Rajasthani	Gay	Father: Business Mother: Homemaker	Bachelor of Commerce (Honours)	Boys' School English Medium Convent Education	Dancer/ Dance Tutor	1,80,000 to 3,00,000 p.a. (approx.)	He realised he liked men When was 17 or so. The realisation was born Out of an unconsented same sex sexual Encounter. Came out to his friends At the end of 1 st year or Beginning of 2 nd year in College. Came out to parents on 6 th September 2018, the Day section 377 was Read down.

Table 4.4

Name and Residence	Age	Sex	Religion	Mother Tongue	Sexuality	PARENTS' OCCUPATION	Highest Qualification	Schooling	Employment Status	Income	Additional Information
Abhinava Gupta Behala	23 years	Male (SAB) Man (SIG)	Practicing Hindu	Bengali	Gay	Father: Electrical Engineer Mother: English Teacher at Private School.	Pursuing Masters in Music.	Co-education schooling English Medium Private School	Not Applicable	10 lakh p.a. (approx.)	At 11 or 12, he realised He liked men. Forcefully outed in class By a classmate he liked When he was in class 7 Or 8. He was forcefully outed In front of his parents And school principal By the classmate's Parents soon after. Parents did not believe It was possible. Finally came out to Parents in 2017.

Name and Residence	Age	Sex	Religion	Mother Tongue	Sexuality	PARENTS' OCCUPATION	Highest Qualification	Schooling	Employment Status	Income	Additional Information
Koushik Das East Kolkata	26 years	Male (SAB) Man (SIG)	Practicing Hindu	Bengali	Gay	Father: Publishing company Mother: Montessori Teacher	Bachelors' Degree	Boys' Schooling Convent school. English Medium.	Not Disclosed	Not Disclosed	He realised he liked boys When he was 12 or 13. He was forcefully outed To his friend by another Friend who he had Confided in. He came out to his Parents at 21. His father Asked him to take Psychiatric help and his Mother cried for a few Days.
Rayan Mukherjee Garia/ Santoshpur	27 years	Male (SAB) Man (SIG)	Non-believer Hindu	Bengali	Gay	Father: Retired government servant. Part of family business Mother: Homemaker	Master of Arts	Co-education schooling Private School English Medium	Copy Writer	5 lakh p.a (approx.)	He identified as a gay Person from class 11. His family came to know About his identity Through a newspaper Clipping where he was Quoted as a gay person. He faced physical assault From a family member For being gay.

Table 4.5

Name and Residence	Age	Sex	Religion	Mother Tongue	Sexuality	PARENTS' OCCUPATION	Highest Qualification	Schooling	Employment Status	Income	Additional Information
Charlie Abraham Patuli	25 years	Male (SAB) Man (SIG)	Practicing Christian	Bengali/ English	Gay	Father: Small business Mother: Same as father.	Class 12.	Boys' Schooling Convent School English Medium	Make-up Artist	35,000-60,000 per month. Depending on wedding season.	He realised he liked guys At the age of 13. Came out to his brothers During 2013-2014. Parents are in denial of His identity.
Kalpaka Basu Ultadanga	21 years	Male (SAB) Male (SIG)	Practicing Hindu	Bengali	Gay	Father: CESC Employee Mother: Home Tutor	Pursuing Bachelor of Arts	Co-education schooling English Medium Private School	Not Applicable	5 lakh p.a. (approx.)	He realised he liked boys During his early teens. He learned the word gay From a magazine cutting. He informed his brother About his identity at 17. He has not yet told his Parents about his identity

Table 4.6

Name and Residence	Age	Sex	Religion	Mother Tongue	Sexuality	PARENTS' OCCUPATION	Highest Qualification	Schooling	Employment Status	Income	Additional Information
Vaibhav Agarwal Bhawaniipore	20 years	Male (SAB) Man (SIG)	Practicing Hindu	Marwari	Gay	Father: Accountant Mother: Owns cloth business	Pursuing Bachelor of Commerce	Boys' Schooling English Medium.	Not Applicable	Not Disclosed	He realised he was gay When he was 11 or 12 Years old. He was outed to his School friends by a Classmate he liked. The classmate also Verbally abused him and Threatened him physical Abuse. He has not come out to His parents or friends Out of fear of rejection.

ACRONYMS:

SAB indicates Sex Assigned at Birth.

SIG indicates Self-Identified Gender.

Table 4.7

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

This chapter attempts to analyse the narratives of the young gay men about their experiences of boyhood, humiliation, desire, sexuality and, abuse and the ways in which these experiences overlap thereby shaping their masculinities. The narratives bring forth the ways in which notions of masculinity is constructed and situated in the heterosexual framework and young gay men's negotiations with such masculinity institutional spaces like family and school. It also analyses the ways in which gay men understand their sexuality and desire and articulate the experiences of abuse.

SECTION I: LEARNING TO BE BOYS

The narratives on learning to be boys in the previous chapter shows the influence of family and school in the construction of masculinities among young men. While Salman's first experience was the moment when his affinity to women's accessories became a reason for his humiliation among his peers, he also suggests that it was his parents pressure to actively engage in sports that led him to realize that being "a Bengali boy from a middle class family" meant one had to do well academically in school and be active in sports. This becomes a common narrative for Abhinava who suggests that boys in his schools existed within the binary of bullies and nerds. He says that "either you are a boy who is good at sports and beating others or you a good student."

Unlike Salman, whose narrative clearly points out to the ways in which one is made to conform to a particular identity through various mechanisms, including learning through imitation, fear and intimidation, force, and public humiliation; Nilabho's account of socialising into boyhood shows a

different light. His narrative suggests that family is an important space for socialisation of gender. His learning to be a boy and a man is accredited to his father's presence in his life. The presence of this masculine figure shapes his own masculinity at the initial years of growing up. His narrative also points to the ways in which his masculinity is intertwined with his caste position and the rituals attached to it.

Both narratives point out the doing well in studies and sports were key components of being a boy. In both cases, they relate these two components with Bengali middle class culture. Nilabho also makes similar remark about the pressure of being good in studies and playing sports that one bears in a Bengali middle class family.

Nikhil's statement about having girlfriends point out the heterosexual nature of gender performance that is expected of individuals in society. The understanding that to be a boy or man one needs to be engaged in heterosexual relations or have sexual attraction towards opposite sex is imbibed through socialisation of gender. There is an imitation at play in Nikhil's context wherein he imitates his friends who are engaged in heterosexual relationships.

Abhinava's narrative suggests that the meaning of boyhood in institutional spaces like schools were divided into binaries suggesting there are only two acceptable and respectable masculinities. One that foregrounds itself of physical power and action such as sports and other that is associated with intellect or intelligence. He also points out that artistic capacities like musical vocation in men often lead to emasculation among peer groups in spaces like schools.

Rayan's narrative supports Abhinava's, as he suggests that he was protected from the bullies as he was good in studies. His statement reiterates the binaries within which the performance of masculinities are acceptable.

Charlie's narrative brings out the essence of gender socialisation. He points out to his insecurities while dressing up in clothes socially associated with femininity as a child. Further he points out the ways in which his understanding of gender and masculinity, at the early years, were influenced by his brothers'. There is also a clear indication of how insults were used to humiliate Charlie's incapacity to sports with an intent to emasculate him.

Both Charlie and Kalpak experienced a sense of humiliation from siblings for their age disparity that allowed their elder siblings to use insults and feminize their bodies in a playful settings. While in Charlie's narrative, there is no sense of humiliation associated with cross clothing in childhood, he did stop doing it when he realised he was a "boy," suggesting that boys don't dress in feminine clothes as it can disrupt their sense of masculine self. Kalpak, on the other hand, recollects distress over cross dressing that was forced upon him by his siblings as part of play. He clearly indicates that "dressing up" and "acting all shy" was not his choice.

Koushik's narrative breaks away from the other narratives. He brings about the question of caste, class and gender socialisation. His lower-middle class background and caste status became a reason for discrimination among his peers in school while at home his father's image was idealised for him to follow and imitate to be a 'good' boy or man.

Vaibhav's narrative shows how heterosexuality is inculcated as an inevitable condition with no alternative and children from a young age are taught that heterosexual desires are the only "correct" form of desire. His mother's reply to his demand for dressing up like a bride clearly indicates that the normative gender structure is maintained and reiterated by family structures.

SECTION II: NARRATIVES ON HUMILIATION

The narratives on the experiences of humiliation among my respondents emerge from the discourse of effeminate bodies, caste and class identities, and gay identities. Salman's medical condition of gynaecomastia caused him immense humiliation, physical and sexual violence in school. Further his incapacity and disinterest in sports led his classmates to physically attack him and sexually violate his body. Further it led to body shaming and derogatory remarks against them. These remarks included homophobic and transphobic name-calling like "chhakka," and "hijra." Similar narratives of violence are reflected in Amartya's narrative as well.

Charlie's shy attitude was a departure from the dominant ideals of masculinity and therefore he faced routinized bullying in school and at home by his brothers who emasculated him due to his lack of sporting capabilities. Similarly Vaibhav encountered derogatory remarks like "behenji," and "softy" essentially because he did not enjoy sports of violence. These narratives bring out the ways in which disciplining takes place at a young age. Young boys experience humiliation in terms of taunts, abuses and insults that are prejudiced on the ways they perform their gender identity. Effeminacy or feminine behaviour is not expected of young boys who are at a stage of learning to be men. Therefore, when they do not adhere to the ways of being masculine, which includes participation in sports, physical action and academic brilliance, they are faced with slangs and abuses. Gestures associated with the feminine gender, like sitting cross-legged are also reasons for which young boys face humiliation from their peers.

Both Nilabho and Nikhil's narrative suggests that they did not face humiliation or harassment from peers because of their masculine personality. There is a common notion among young boys that effeminacy is a marker for homosexuality. Homosexual men are considered lowest in the hierarchy

of masculinity and therefore a parallel is drawn between them and femininity. However, the lack of humiliation in their cases also suggests that this common notion is a mistaken one as it does not apply to these men who “can pass of as a straight man.”

In case of Abhinava, public knowledge about his sexuality led to his humiliation and name calling not only by the boys in his school but also girls. His peers became his bullies and led him to believe that his sexuality was unacceptable and therefore needed to be kept hidden. His experience also suggests that schools as institutions do not provide security or safety to the LGBTQ students and there is a lack of informed discussion about sexuality. His parents’ reaction to the incident also shows that homosexuality is understood as a mistake or “wrong” that should not be repeated. It remains outside the order of society.

Rayan’s narrative of facing humiliation himself and witnessing humiliation of others reinstates the acceptable binary of gender digressing from which would lead to inevitable humiliation. His experience of hostel where he faced gendered abuses shows how these spaces are gendered and a certain form of masculinity is celebrated while others are “corrected” through routine insults and humiliation.

Kalpak’s narrative suggests that acceptable and celebrated masculinities are devoid of emotionality. Showing emotions could lead to embarrassment and bullying. Physical markers of being a boy is also essential. Like Salman, Kalpak’s narrative suggests that young boys with developing breasts face humiliation and abuse as they are markers of being feminine. It essentially puts forth the understanding that markers of femininity are looked down upon in young boys and their masculine selves develop as a rejection of it.

Koushik's narrative shows a different experience of humiliation. His narrative brings out the experience of humiliation based on caste, class and prowess over English language. His caste position being a Dalit boy in school, along with his lack of English speaking skills and financial condition led to his humiliation among his peers. His surname was a clear declaration of his caste which led his peers to call him slave indicating his surname Das which in the Bengali language means slave.

SECTION III: NARRATIVES ON DESIRE, SEXUALITY, AND ABUSE

Salman's narrative shows how sexual desires are manifested in young gay men who try to make meaning of these desires and identities within the patriarchal gender order. Their negotiation with masculinity and suppression of the feminine self becomes clear in this narrative. Their account traces the ways in which they explored their homosexual desires and the ways in which they negotiated sexual abuse by gay men and the silence around it. The fear of emasculation and criminalisation were articulated as reasons for the silence around their sexuality. Further, they discuss their fantasies, love and intimate partner violence that construct their masculinities in complex ways.

Amartya's narrative shows how discovering his identity left him confused and how hard he was trying to fit in among his friends. He further narrates his engagement with gay pornography, dating experience, and online dating apps. His accounts also shows how preference of sexual position as bottom often is stereotyped as passive and the men who identify as bottom are often emasculated. This, he says, is a misconception. He concludes his narrative by pointing out that many gay men who engage in sex with effeminate men, are not open about it. He calls it hypocrisy.

Nikhil's account contrasts with others in many ways. His first experience of same-sex sexual encounter was through rape. But he says, knowing that it was a violation of his body, he still enjoyed it. This made him realise that he liked same-sex sexual relationship. This was also a point when he found out that he enjoyed BDSM (Bondage, Domination and Sado-Masochism). His narrative also points to his denial about his sexuality in the initial years. He never thought it was possible to fall in love with another man, but only engage in sex. Further he discusses his first experience of love and the various negotiation within the relationship. Consumption of pornography forms a common thread for most of my respondents, including Nikhil. He concludes his narrative by articulating long term commitment and negotiating sexual desires.

Abhinava's narrative shows how he realised he liked boys, when he started to develop sexual feelings for one of his classmates. This was a new knowledge for him because same-sex love was not a part of his experience. He also articulates the way he was forcefully 'outed' by his classmate who he tried to propose. His parents reaction to this incident and the silence around his sexuality made him realise that he had to keep his identity a secret. He further narrates his experience of first kiss and sexual engagement, relationship and forceful drug abuse. He goes on to narrate his story of coming out to his parents and their reaction to it. He concludes by describing his relationship with another gay person and how that relationship transformed his way of looking at gay identities.

Koushik's narrative shows how his first sexual encounter was with a heterosexual boy, who then forcefully outed him to the others in his school. This led to further humiliation for him. He was physically attached and forced to perform oral sex for a senior after that. Discussing his relationship, he says that it was an abusive one. His partner was a compulsive cheater and justified his actions

under the pretext of free-love. Finally he talks about his image consciousness during his late teens that led him to join the gym and start looking masculine.

Rayan's narrative shows how he first realised he was gay when he was already in a heterosexual relationship. It was his then girlfriend who introduced him to the literature of LGBTQ issues. He also narrates the physical violence he faced from his cousin because his sexual identity. Further he talks about his failed relationships for his way of dressing and carrying himself. He says he has been accused of being too emotional for a man but how he wears that as a badge of honour. He concludes by saying that men often assume him to be bottom because of his feminine nature.

Charlie's narrative shows how he discovered his sexuality through painting. He says he used to aroused male figures in painting. However, he remained in denial and suppressed it throughout most of his school life. He further talks about rejection, love and companionship. He further says that it was in his profession that he found a way to articulate his identity.

Kalpakk narrates how he realised at a young age that he was attracted towards men, but did not say it out loud for fear being a joke among his peers. He goes on to talk about his relationships, love and fantasy. He talks about his relationship and says that it was all about sex. He then goes on to discuss how his date tried to gang rape him with a few other men. He further talks about his engagement with survivors collectives and how that space gave him a voice to articulate his experience of violence.

Vaibhav narrative puts forth his experience of violence that was meted out by his classmate to whom he confided his love. He was threatened and humiliated for being gay. He also talks about the ways in which he faced discrimination and violence from his peers in school for being. Further he describes his relationship with his senior and how that helped him cope up with trauma.

SECTION IV: CONSTRUCTING GAY MASCULINITIES: UNITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Some reflections on Unity.

This section attempts to trace the unities and differences in the experiences of gay men in their negotiations with masculinities. I would first analyse the relationship between merit, sports and masculinity in the context of middle-class in Kolkata. Sen (2014) argues, the emphasis on education and merit have a long history in West Bengal, since the early 19th century. Education was intimately associated with the *bhadraloks*⁴¹ who differentiated themselves from the land-owning classes on the basis of merit and education. This was a symbol of cultural pride among the *bhadraloks* who were fighting poverty, lack of employment and immigrant influx in the post-partition era. While *bhadraloks* were not a homogeneous category, a majority of them belonged to the upper-caste, middle-class strata of Bengali society(Ibid.).

The emphasis on “good at studies” (Sen, 2014, p. 109) was narrated in children’s books and became a common narrative among parents of middle-class children throughout the 20th century and took a new shape in the post-liberalisation era in West Bengal and specifically in Kolkata, which had the highest population of middle-class in the state. The newer opportunities that shaped the economic landscape of Bengal with the advent of IT companies led to a new meaning for good at studies, which was associated with studying science and becoming engineers (Sen, 2014)

She further contends that ‘good at studies’ is often accompanied by ‘good at sports’ while creating the image of a good boy (Ibid.). The emphasis on being ‘good at sports’ comes from the insecurities

⁴¹Literally translated as respectable men, this group was referred to as the ‘colonial elites’ who were the first to gain access to administrative services during the British rule and become the middle-class . In the Weberian perspective, they are understood as a (see Sen, 2014)

of Bengali men portrayed as feminine in the popular discourse. This balance between education and sports is essential in the formative years of men's lives in constructing the modern *bhadralok*.

Connell (1995) argues that "sport provides a continuous display of men's bodies in motion" (p. 54) and it is a marker of "competition and hierarchy among men" (p. 54). Such performances of bodies in a routinized manner constitute masculinity therefore a lack in the capacity to participate in this competitive arena is seen as vulnerability among men (Ibid.).

Therefore, it is no surprise that dominant masculinities that young boys embody are often a careful combination of merit and sports. Such dominant masculinities are culturally legitimised through generations and therefore become acceptable or sought after. Youngs boys who do not embody such masculinity are therefore placed lower in the masculine hierarchy. Young gay boys in this context not only embody the subordinate masculinity in terms of their sexual orientations but also face marginalisation for their incapability to come into the fold of the *bhadralok* culture.

Another point of unity can be found in the relationship between bodies and masculinities. In most cultural contexts, bodies bear the mark of masculinity and femininity. It is not about the anatomy of the body but what bodies do and how they do it. This is not related to the biological acts of the bodies. It is essential situated in the social and cultural frameworks. It is a way in which bodies engage with the social realities and construct meaning of being masculine and feminine (Connell, 1995).

The social practices within the patriarchal order that constitute gender are scripted in the bodies of men and women. They are constructed through difference. Aggressiveness, agility, strength and such social scripts mark the bodies as masculine within the gender order, therefore in the relational framework, the absence of such scripts are marked as feminine or non-masculine. Therefore, men

who fail to embody the markers of masculinity in their bodies are seen as feminine. This allows one to understand how men who do not embody a masculine body face discrimination and violence.

Drawing on Foucault and Butler (2004), I analyse the ways in which gendered subjectivities are constructed among gay men through discipline of gender and gender regulation. Foucault's understanding of discipline as a tool of disciplining bodies and sexualities, an apparatus of surveillance and a technology for the production of heterosexual order can be seen in the light of the narratives that foreground the ways in which routinized violence and humiliation, body shaming and abuse are used to normalize the sexualities of these gay men and construct their masculinities in relation to the heterosexual order. It is through the process of disciplining that these men identify normative masculinity with respect to their own or embody the normative masculine self by rejecting feminine masculinities.

Butler (2004) on the other hand argues that gender itself is a product of regulation and therefore the discourse on masculinities and femininities need to be located within this regulatory framework. This framework becomes important in understanding how these men articulate the ideas of feminine and masculine in explaining their own identities. The normative understanding of masculine and feminine that they present while articulating their own gender performance reiterates this point (Ibid.).

Some reflections on differences

While multiple points of unity can be sought in the experiences of the gay men in this research, their lives and experiences are all product of various set of intersections. This makes their experiences diverse. The attempt to bring these experiences within one framework is not adequate. Their

masculinities are intersecting at each point, not only with their social identities but also with the larger LGBTQ movement and the issues that are constantly erupting and shaping their subjectivities. Theorizing of the everyday violence and abuse that shape their experiences within a single framework is an impossibility and therefore there is a need to articulate their experience through a framework that recognizes violence in the context of power relations that does not limit itself to intersectionality alone, but goes beyond. While intersectionality and relational model of masculinity can begin this mammoth task, a deeper analysis of the privileges and disadvantages need to be taken up in order to understand abuse and intimate partner violence in the context of homosexual relations.

Connell (1992) argues that gay men are situated in the heterosexual gender order therefore their lives, experience and subjectivities are a product of their negotiations with this gender order. The socialisation process of gender is ordered around the heterosexual norm where men are in control of the power and privilege, therefore situated in this norm, gay men are also products of heterosexual notions of masculinity and therefore they exert the same control over their partners in homosexual relationship (Ibid.). I contend that this framework is inadequate in understanding the relationships of gay men and violence they face in such relationships.

The rise of the LGBTQ activism has unearthed new ways of being men and embodying masculinities. It has allowed for an articulation of violence and hierarchy within the gay community and situated gay men's lives not just within the heterosexual gender order but at the intersection of this order and the rising challenges to it. Therefore, a theorization of intimate partner violence in homosexual relationships cannot be replicated using the framework of heterosexual relationships.

One needs to locate the “patriarchal and material dividend” (Connell, 1995, p. 82) not only in relation to women, but also in relation to men who are positioned at the margins of the masculine hierarchy. An uncritical understanding of power relations between men, replicated from the theorization of power relations between women and men will not be adequate in understanding gay men’s negotiations with violence and abuse.

SECTION V: CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to say that this research is itself inadequate to draw broad generalisations. In order to assess gay men’s lives in the context of emotionality, romantic love, violence, and LGBTQ activism, and so on, a deeper ethnography is required. However, this study has furthered my own interest in situating the research on gay lives in the field of memory studies.

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