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## No 'Sexuality' for All: Some Notes from India

'They are not homosexual. You have to be human first for that'  
- Ellis Boyd 'Red' Redding in 'The Shawshank Redemption', 1995

The language of human rights is a peculiar language. Its mode of action is the pursuit of social and legal justice, flourishing as it does, in public interventions and civil society activism. However, the very foundational rock, the very driving force of this idiom of rights is its human subject. It is the preoccupation of all public interventions, be it for universal education or for freedom of speech. This human subject, the constant prefix of the coinage *human rights*, is repeatedly defined in these pursuits.

This human subject is theoretically invested with certain inalienable attributes: right to livelihood, right to live without hunger, right to freedom of speech, to name a few. The implications of this idiom for the human subject are of many kinds: some attributes seek to define the space of living for an individual, her outside world of action, for instance - that she should have the right to live, learn and earn in a proper environment conducive to her endeavours. Other attributes, however, make it possible to imagine an inner space of this human subject, that which lay claims to define aspects of her personhood – what she, properly speaking, *is*. Here the right itself is not understood as a strategic claim made vis-à-vis a specific situation of oppression, a claim to be free of some particular wrong, but instead as a timeless given ownership - right not *for* something, but to *be* something. In this paper, I will look at one of these latter claims in the language of rights: that point where this rights defines its human subject vis-à-vis sexual desire i.e. that point in civil rights discourse where sexuality becomes one of the inalienable traits in the way it imagines its subject: *right to one's sexuality, right to be lesbian*, et al.

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I have argued elsewhere (Katyal forthcoming 2010) that this language of rights builds upon the knowledge that was already abundantly produced by late nineteenth century European sexology — whether in Richard Von Krafft-Ebing or in Iwan Bloch (Krafft Ebing 1903; Bloch 1928) — one which was perversely interested in creating an archive of sexual *types* of people and *kinds* of sexual acts. The words *homosexual* and *heterosexual* first entered English language in the 1892 translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. More importantly for our purpose right now, however, is the inflection psychoanalysis gave to this knowledge. Whereas sexology was interested in defining sexual acts and types of people based on their different sexual behaviours, psychoanalysis was interested in considering these *types* and *kinds* as inner attributes of people. What sexology only sorted, psychoanalysis interiorised. Psychoanalysis now made those categories – *homosexual* or *heterosexual* – indicative of the inner truth of the person. So much so, that Freud would spend hours with a patient in the hope of *recovering* truths, tracing a *sexuality* through the hoary rhythms of a person's childhood, as if there it lied, inside someone forever, either born with her, or formed through a complex series of identifications and withdrawals which Freud called the Oedipus and the Castration complex. This was the most momentous allusion to Sophocles in modern history and it was done under the sign of the reigning triad of 'daddy, mommy and me' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 101), as if all of the person's sexual desires were determined by some primal, clumsy pantomimes with her parents. It was the story of the family newly rehashed in the service of the self-reflexive story of an individual - the centre point of psychoanalysis, its main literary method.

What Freud did, or more broadly, what the Freudian did was to make sexual desire irrevocably a matter of the interior. The central preoccupation when talking about sexuality, and psychoanalysis did a lot of that, became the accounting of the origins and nature of desire. Abrupt episodes of desire that focussed on various outsides – like the charge you feel seeing a handsome woman, a beautiful man, things of attraction – were instrumentally included only so far as they allowed for some definition of an inner self. This was the peculiar setting of this branch of knowledge. After Foucault, it is easy to note the similarity of the counselling session with institution of the Christian confession (Foucault 1978: 58-67); in psychoanalysis '[t]he obtaining of the confession and its effects were recodified as therapeutic operations' (*ibid.* 67). Psychoanalysis made sexuality a matter of the self and one of its basic definitions. Already sketched in the 1910s is E.M. Forster's Maurice Hall who visits

the hypnotist Lasker Jones in London, one who claims to 'cure' what he defines as Maurice's 'congenital homosexuality' with a 50% success rate (Forster 1971). Ultimately fearing that these sessions were not working, Jones suggests to Maurice to relocate to Italy or France where 'homosexuality' was not criminal. Jones, a hypnotist, is steeped in the current psychoanalytic lingo of the early 20th century. His understanding of 'sexuality', already figures it as the primal component of the human self. When Hall pathetically asks Jones if homosexuality will ever be acceptable in England, Jones' answer implicitly conflates sexuality and being human in one gesture: 'I doubt it. England has always been disinclined to accept human nature' (1971:188). Sexuality, by the 1910s, already qualified as human nature. At the end of the 'Freudian' session, you were supposed to come into your own, realise your nature, and be nominally content with a self-reflexive narrative that you've arrived at with the shrink.

The 1960s and the Stonewall riots had only to take up this interiorized sexuality-based human subject and make it the basis of its pride and its fights for sexual rights. '[T]he most rigorous and sophisticated language about sexuality is that of psychoanalysis, queer critics from the heady days of gay liberation onward have developed varieties of psychoanalytic radicalism. They have traced the demands of lesbian and gay liberation to fundamental psychic structures: the preoedipal, innate bisexuality, the exchange of women, reverse oedipalization, the instability of identification' (Warner 1993: xi-xii). The political language of the lesbian-gay movement imagined sexuality to be distributed unequally – into a sexual minority and a majority – and it progressively became the duty of the liberal democratic citizen's conscience to imagine a small percent of homosexuals in any given society and then give them the rights to live and love. Global jurisprudence usually comes up with the figure of 5 to 12 percent. This interiorized sexual subject was also easily articulable in legal language – gay rights, gay marriage – and was statistically computable – forming a *minority*. Sexuality rights activism in contemporary India is part of the legacy of this register of rights, and of the Freudian baggage of *sexuality*. Elsewhere I have studied the ways in which personal narratives or testimonials, the genre par excellence of this rights language, are used in sexuality rights activism in India from the late 80s onwards (Katyal 2010).

It is part of my argument that the language of rights does not exhaust descriptions of human sexualness and that people draw on different idioms at the same time to talk

about themselves and their desires (*ibid*). In the shaping of these idioms, regional contexts also play a key role. Rather than simply marked by national or continental borders, regions should here be conceived as spaces of availability and participation in certain traffic of signs and forms of culture. A region is sign bound not geography bound; Latin *regere* suggests rule, which is the root sense of the word region. A region is made by what signs rule over it, not what physical borders contain it. The coming of satellite television in India in the 1990s or the setting up of NGO driven HIV/AIDS interventions from the same time onwards, would for example, change the contours of that region. They would usher a crisis that is primarily definitional in nature. Met by new ways, people would revisit their ideas about how they think of themselves and their desires. Translations, mistranslations, confusions, strong defences and unavoidable changes would ensue.

Let me cite an example. The Hindi term of abuse and of humour - *londebaaz* (*londe*: boys) - understands sex between men within an idiom of habit. Similar to *daarubaaz* (*daaru*: alcohol) or *taashbaaz* (*taash*: cards). The idiom of habit, or even of addiction, is a register different from that of the sexological category 'homosexual'. For instance, you might have an addictive love of stamps, but no excessive *coming-out* stories were ever written about it. This love was never accounted for or traced back to the hoary rhythms of your childhood, never considered an attribute of your unconscious and, no etiology was ever consciously produced for it as it has been done by Freud for same-sex desire. An 'interiority' or 'inner truth' are not invoked within a register of habit or addiction. *I have a habit for women* would then be theoretically and practically different from saying *I am lesbian* and would have huge implications for thinking about the self in relation to desire. One of my friend's grandmother in Lahore, Pakistan, tried to explain the love of her grand-daughter for another girl by saying that '*yeh to usko lat lag gayi hai* (she's got addicted). There are several versions of this: *chaska lag gaya hai*, for instance, you've got the taste of it. Or *aadat lag gayi hai*, *aadat* being the Hindi word for habit. Here the disgust, if any, is not the disgust for someone who is fundamentally of another kind, another sexual identity, but it is the disgust that respectability always reserves for the figure of the flaneur. For the one who indulges herself - the wastrel, the loafer, but also the flamboyant. 'In Urdu/Hindi India, *laundebaz* is not as exclusively an emphatic term of abuse as is *gandu* (*the one who is penetrated*)' (Naim 35).

There is another idiom that resists the psychoanalytic insistence on interiority: that is of affect, or of *bhaav*. Mark this: 'Chandrakant, 22, lives in Shahdara and works with

a voluntary group in New Delhi'. The following is his account, told in Hindi to a member of ABVA (Aids Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan): 'I have often felt an attraction towards boys and have even experienced some sexual relations with them. But I don't think of myself as a homosexual. Actually, I don't agree with what the word means. Tell me, if I have an intense, psychic friendship with a girl, would I be called a heterosexual? If you mean by the word homosexual a certain sensibility (*bhaav*), then I would agree, I am one. I have many intense, intimate friendships with boys. I like being with them, touching them, sleeping next to them. But perhaps I still have a hang-up about accepting myself as gay in sexual sense' (quoted in *Less Than Gay* 1991: 11).

Chandrakant takes a category that defines personhood or identity (*homosexual*) and translates it for his purpose into a term describing affect, mood, sensibility (*bhaav*). From a term that primarily denotes that which you are, a move is made to a term that mainly marks that which you feel. We are not here within the pool of interiority. Instead, what saturates us all around, is the gaze, the sound and the haptic. '*I like being with them, touching them, sleeping next to them*'. This is not simply an expression of some inner traits - that easy way in which psychoanalysis has taught us to understand the movement of human bodies and motivations of people. Here, it is also a sort of kinaesthesia. Or maybe kinaesthesia is a very bad word to use. Rather, felt movements. Sensation of being drawn. It is a literal being together of bodies and the push and pull between these bodies. It is a simple sort of physics of attraction. *Bhaav* is the ideal of Sanskrit *kaavya*: a state of heightened feeling, a mood, something you involuntarily enter, either due to music or a specific presence, your lover or your friend. In classic Sanskrit theatre, the capacity to experience or trigger *bhaav* was necessary. When the heroine for instance, spotted her lover, Shakuntala and Dushyanta let's say, she broke into an involuntary series of sweats and panting, submerged into a mood triggered by the sight of the lover, an overwhelming bodily experience. To be influenced by someone's presence, of feeling the charge of that presence, and entering an exquisite mood due to it, has no centre of subjectification like Freudian tales do. There is no reliance on a concept that can be considered as the equivalent of the Freudian unconscious, no tale about that kind of inside. Yet that model is something that Chandrakant has to deal with. It is right in front of him, beckons to define him. He engages with this other sexological model – this bit about the *homosexual*- and capitulates to it but only after a qualification; '[a]ctually', he says, 'I don't agree with what the word means.' A surrender without

agreeing on all its terms is a measly surrender. A few years back, Sudipta Kaviraj found an interesting frame for the 19<sup>th</sup> century in South Asia. He characterized the century with an ascendancy of 'inner attributes,' such as individual thoughts, ideas and traits, as the new mobilizing factors of love between people in the contemporary, developing genre of the Bengali novel. The flip side was the decline of the Sanskrit ideal linked to the genre of dramatic poetry, that had instead given primacy to the outer, physical attributes of its heroes and heroines (Kaviraj 2006). This newly dominant interiorization of the attraction and love between people, is also part of the same story as the modern psychologizing of the human subject with all its motivations. Chandrakant, however, sits on a cusp, at the constant insistence of the pre-modern generic habits within the modern psychologized way of seeing things that never does or can fully take over.

Different kinds of inventive coinages are making their presence felt within the sexuality-rights movement in India that attempt to take account of diverse experiences of people. For example, the Hindi word '*yonikta*', which crudely translates to 'sexualness' was created by activists in order to translate 'Indian' experiences of desire and sexual behaviour into a language compatible with the understanding of the sexual universe being constituted in terms of 'sexuality' (Khanna; 2005: 93). The Delhi Queer Pride (June 29<sup>th</sup> 2008) was simultaneously translated, spoken about and popularized as *Dilli Samlaingik aur Transgender Garv Utsav*. *Garv* implies pride. *Samlaingik* comes from Hindi *saman* that is same, from the Sanskrit prefix *Sam-* (*homo-* is the combining form of Greek for 'same') and *laingik* is a derivation from Hindi *ling* or gender. *Ling* is also part of the Hindi grammar system, *stri-ling* (female gender), *pul-ling* (male gender) and *napunsak-ling* (closest in sense to neuter, but outside grammar, also a term of invective for those who are effeminate or for *hijras*). It is used here in the sense of the sex of the person, male or female. *Samlaingik* is an attempt to create the nearest equivalent of the sexological term 'homosexual' for the sexuality-rights movement based in India; it is also an attempt to make the term widely putative. Sangini (India) trust simultaneously produced the *Guide To Your Rights: Legal Handbook For Sexual Minorities In India* (2005) with *Hakon Ki Aur: Bharat Ke Yaunik Alapmaton Ke Liye Kanuni Sahayata Pustika*. *Yaunik Alapmaton* as 'sexual minorities' initiates the formal recognition of this minoritizing idiom in another language. This specific idiom begins to dominate activist descriptions of the many situations of sex and desire. The back cover of a popular, recent activist publication *Because I Have a Voice* (Bhan and Narrain 2005)

recognizes the function of the book as giving 'a voice to a concept, an identity and a politics that is only now, and slowly at that, beginning to enter the consciousness of the nation...'.

*all m2m/gay sex liking r welcome 4 fun n masti [fun].hav gay life  
sex with ur boy friend.enjoy day n night whole life.its so gud n  
sexy*

- [amirraja], Brahmapur, Orissa; *PlanetRomeo*, a 'gay' networking website

What happens during and after such acts of translations? Names and allied concepts are rendered from one language into another. This rendering, however, is inventive and peculiar for each region. It could rely on new concepts unavailable within either of the two languages involved. Change in conception is wrought not only in the language in which the word is being translated but also in the language from which the translation is being sourced. Both the source and the destination undergo a process of change when such models adjust to each other. For instance, the languages of homosocial friendship and of homosexual subjectivity have to come to terms with each other in this example that Reddy offers: 'In February of 1999...a 'conference of gays in the country,' entitled Yaarian 1999 [*Yaar* crudely translates as 'male friend'], was held in Hyderabad. One of the self-conscious aims of this conference was to 'try and identify an indigenous, or *desi*, terminology for the concept of gay' (Reddy; 2006: 218). Coinages or 'terminologies' have to come to terms with their new found positions in other linguistic and cultural contexts – that is they have to display some form of regional acumen. They would be tested for their longevity and for their compatibility. They would either survive or fizzle over time and geographic space. They would seek to effectively alter the way in which people are conceived and make local preference for specific models over others.

When [amirraja] from Brahmapur, Orissa invites 'all m2m/gay sex liking' people for 'fun and masti' and for having 'gay...sex with ur boy friend,' he is at once using and conflating at least four available repertoires: (a) 'boyfriend', which is a lift from the register of romantic love and relationships, (b) 'gay' which is a clinical-cultural-commercial sexual identity, that people adopt, widely available in English, and increasingly, Hindi language media in the last ten-fifteen years in India, (c) 'm2m' which is a both a reigning internet abbreviation for indicating the male seeker/sought

equation, and a variation of MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) which is a functional term for describing the catchment area of the HIV-AIDS health interventions in India in the last two decades, and (d) *masti* (fun) which is a mutually negotiated terrain of play among boys or men, often thought of as rites of passage before, and even after, marriage with a woman. The rituals of *masti* are always oddly placed in their relation to the idioms of romance (*masti* always inhabits an interrupted time of friendship, and scarcely projects into shared future of a primary romantic pair), gayness (*masti* is not an adopted identity, or a specific orientation) and family (*masti* almost always happens outside the precincts of the familial). Remember Eve Sedgwick's 'Axiom 5', no 'Great Paradigm Shift' is discernible in the lived realizations of these models (Sedgwick 1990: 44). There is no simple 'supercession of one model and the consequent withering away of another, but instead...[there are] relations enabled by the unrationalized coexistence of different models during the times that they do coexist' (*ibid.* 47). The debate in any given region is never one of simple imposition but of odd interactions.

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