PERISCOPE

What's in a size?

Humankind seems to be enslaved by the size fetish. Bigger companies, larger scale production, thicker newspapers, taller buildings, bigger dams... one could go on and on.

The fetish is not restricted to inanimate objects. Bigger bodies are also more in demand. Taller models, heftier heroes with bigger biceps (in films), bigger bosoms, bigger crotches...

This is not to brush aside all things big as unwanted or unnecessary. Bigger dimensions can and do serve some purpose.

It is also not being insinuated that all people have lost their sense of proportion vis-a-vis the size of things.

On the whole, however, bigger things do seem to be blocking out the smaller ones-their importance, strength and beauty.

Why does a small size evoke ridicule or derisive laughter? Why are shorter people looked down upon?

Small can be beautiful, and bold. Why are more and more people forgetting this? Small firms do make profits; small dams can irrigate and generate electricity; slimmer newspaper can inform, educate and entertain.

The size fetish seems to have become a universal phenomenon-inter-cultural as well as intra-cultural. Knowing where and why it originated may be of interest. What we also need to realise is that bigger (big size) need not be right; that it's fast becoming a blight.

All beings-animate or inanimate, big or small-have an identity. And identity is what we're talking in this issue. See report (Pg.7) on the conference on emerging gay identity in South Asia held in Bombay in December 1994.

It was said at the conference that sexual behaviour is "down there", while sexual identity is "up there". But the general perception seems to be: Never mind how much grey matter's up there; down there it had better be big.

Perhaps saying so is being unnecessarily pessimistic. Even so, in many minds the size fetish evokes a real fear-a fear of inadequacy, of being unattractive; of being unwanted. This fear can only hinder the progress towards a healthier existence.

If only we could remember that the real enjoyment is "up there" and not in the size of what's in our hands. And if we look at the practical side of things, a small size can be so convenient. Tucking it away in a hurry becomes easier when you don't want it seen!

The previous paragraph was with regard to Pravartak, though it could be applicable to other situations as well. The journal has become smaller in size, albeit with more pages. This has been done in keeping with the feedback from our dear readers.

The halls are again in the readers' court. Pravartak hopes to have at least maintained its overall standards (with the only drop being in its size) So, more feedback please. But first; Happy reading!

"To be able to live among men and women we must allow everyone to exist with his given individuality. If we condemn another man absolutely, there is nothing for him but to treat us as a mortal enemy; for we are willing to grant him the right to exist only on condition that he becomes different from what he invariably is."

- ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER
LETTERS

Erroneous report

THIS is apropos the report in the Cityscape column in issue # 3 on a seminar organised by the Student’s Forum of the Women’s Studies Research Centre (Calcutta University) on September 14, 1994. It was mentioned that the issue of homosexuality was brought up by Ashwini Kumar. However, in reality the issue was brought up by the representative of Lady Brabourne College, even before Ashwini Kumar spoke about it. Ms Rituparna of Lady Brabourne College defined ‘gender discrimination’ in terms of discrimination faced by gay-identified men and women and the hijras. The audience loudly applauded to this. Ashwini Kumar followed up the issue and also replied to the questions raised.

-A reader, Calcutta.

Editor: The error is sincerely regretted.

Indigenous reality

THE last issue of Pravartak was excellent in its content, especially the surveys of Bengali literature done by Partha and Sunayna. Digging up these proofs of homosexuality in our own literature will help to bury the false perception that homosexuality is a western import. These prove that even if there was no word in Bangla for it, our authors knew about homosexuality and saw it in people around them.

-Sandip Roy, Oregon, USA.

Call for a follow-up

THANKS for the copy of Pravartak. I couldn’t wait to get home and read it. Partha’s feature on homosexuality in popular Bengali literature made excellent reading and Sunayna’s piece was straight from the heart. Sanjay’s poem too was beautiful. Congrats!

I hope the Bombay conference gives ‘gay activism’ a fillip now. The conference has already become a pleasant memory and unless we try and do something constructive, it will remain that way. Of course, gays in Calcutta have been involved in serious work for quite a while now.

-Sopan, Bombay

Editor: Your accolades are most welcome. However, We must thank you all in Bombay for all the help and inspiration.

Some suggestions

It has given me great pleasure to read two of your issues and I would like to make a few suggestions.

More material can be accommodated by reducing the point size. The number of pages could also be increased. Space should be used optimally by increasing the print matter in place of unnecessary cartoons or badly reproduced photographs.

Please try to include posters of hunks or body-builders. The size and binding of the magazine should be such that it is easy to carry.

Try to give more addresses in the listings column instead of code numbers.

Try to include some gay trivia: gay phrases, proverbs, expressions, a gay language column, etc. Also include information on cruising spots and other ‘gay venues’ of major cities in India.

Extracts from prominent books with gay themes would be most welcome. Also it would be better if you had more articles in English than in the regional Languages.

-Ashim, Calcutta.

Editor: Thanks for all your suggestions. We are trying to incorporate as many of them as feasible.
**Bombay chalo**

**Media coverage**

**Participants came from:**
- Akola
- Bangalore
- Belgaum
- Bombay
- Calcutta
- Cochin
- Dibrugarh
- Hyderabad
- Ichalkaranji
- Jaipur
- Lucknow
- Nagpur
- New Delhi
- Pune
- Secunderabad
- Trichur
- Indonesia
- New Zealand
- Sri Lanka
- UK
- USA

**Emerging Gay Identities in South Asia - Implications for HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health**

December 27-31, 1994

Bombay.

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**Sidelights**

1994: The year of India's beauty queens. But they couldn't have been a patch on the resplendent dress sense exhibited by the queens of another gender. The celebration dinner on December 30 was planned as a 'cultural night' and everyone turned up in traditional outfits - kurta, chola, achkan, coath, moja and whatever. Calcutta's three-member 'Kurta Brigade' were quite a few hearts.

There were condoms and safer sex literature up for grabs at the conference venue. Quite like at the Hiroshima Asian Games, 1994. The flavoured and scented condoms were the first to vanish. But the ordinary ones took only a little longer.

The walks and ice-creams on Juhu beach were a treat. The vast sea, wet sand, open sky and the breeze in the face - Bombay sure is well-endowed. And so were some of the human figures seen frolicking on the waves.

Heard at the conference on the frequent deafening roar of planes arriving or departing at the nearby Santacruz airport: "A conspiracy to silence gay voices."

The conference proved one big bear hug. There was a hugging orgy to celebrate the conclusion of the conference. In the end everyone was hacking for the sake of it.

One reason for the camaraderie at the meet surely was the food and refreshments provided. Breakfast, lunch and dinner and of course, tea and coffee: all were delicious. Some participants even forgot all about having shicked 'vegetarian' in their attendance confirmation forms.

Professionalism thy name is choosing the right colour for the conference pack. The organisers spared no quarters in putting the best foot forward, albeit within the budget.

The New Year's eve party was a big bash with around 200 gyrating and shaking to 'Ace of Bass', 'Hai hukku...' and 'Bally Sagoo'. The conference participants stuck together like there would be no tomorrow. Which was the case, for it was the last chance for sayonara for most. But hopefully there will be another occasion to be together.

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**COVER FEATURE**

**Humsafar - Naz Conference**

It was a tryst with destiny, says Pawan

Reporting on a conference is supposed to be an objective affair; a terse account of the what, when, where, why, who and how of the event. But this was no run-of-the-mill conference. It was, as many said, a "once in a lifetime" experience.

For me it was unique also because I was there as a participant as well as (very consciously) an observer (for Pravartak).

Admittedly, my observations are likely to have been limited by my participation, and I don't claim to have observed all that happened at such a large event as it was. Thus, this account is unlikely to be 'objective' or 'complete' in all aspects.

That is not the only dilemma I have. I would, if I could, say everything all at once. But I must. So I begin by commenting on the "flow of tension" at the conference.

Initially, the event helped us relax. Being in the company of around 60 others like us was like being in a sea of understanding and fellow-feeling. But simultaneously, a sense of urgency built up in us - of chalking out an action plan. A plan to recreate that understanding outside the conference venues. While 60 was an unprecedented number for many, everyone realised that several times more were yet to be reached out to.

The conference philosophy and objectives would be clear from its title: 'Emerging Gay Identities in South Asia - Implications for HIV/AIDS & Sexual Health'. The attendees were all 'gay men' and 'men who have sex with men'. (The presence of their women counterparts would have been desirable, but perhaps it's best to take small steps).

The initial discussions focussed on the fact that our cultures are mixing with the western ones more and more. Thus we see a growing sense of individual identity (of which sexual identity or sexuality is a part) in our peoples. The family's role in defining identity is diminishing.

One outcome of this has been a 'value addition' to something which dates back to the 'Kama Sutra' itself, perhaps even earlier. Indeed, homosexual behaviour has been part and parcel of our cultures since ages. But today we are speaking about homosexual (or gay) identity - of which homosexual behaviour is only a component.

The most visible face of this 'value addition' is the emergence of several 'gay groups' over the last 10 years or so, in the South Asian communities in the West to begin with, and later in the Indian subcontinent.

The conference showed the direction these groups now need to take. It dealt with questions such as: What is sexuality? What does 'gay mean in our context? How far is the concept of 'gay identity' applicable in our societies? After all, these concepts have been borrowed from the West.

Our societies are changing, yet they never will completely. The family will never (possibly not) lose all its power. Sex will continue to be seen as primarily for procreation, valid with the opposite gender and within marriage - even by the majority of those who have sex with those of their own gender.

This means there are amongst us many men who have sex with men (MSMs) and women who have sex with women (WSWs) with little or no sense of sexuality. Many of these people are married and have sex with their wives and husbands also. And the number of MSMs and WSWs would not be small, given the homo-eroticism and emphasis on same-sex friendships in our societies.

What are the implications of such a scene?

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PRAVARTAK JAN - APR '95
nario for the spread of HIV infection and other STDs? We need to know them thoroughly to plan a prevention strategy.

The "we" here stands for the entire society (including the government), but gay people can take the initiative. Primarily by fuelling the debate on sexuality and building a sense of identity, unity and cooperation among themselves. For, unless there is a sense of the sexual self, there will be no significance attached to sexual behaviour.

Same-sex attraction (among men) will simply mean hurried encounters in, say, a public urinal, before going home, very possibly for another encounter with the wife. What this means is perfect indifference to sexual health (including the wife's). It also implies total lack of self-respect and respect for the wife (surely a woman's issue).

A need was felt, therefore, to reach out to as many as possible with the message of sexual identity and health, but without resorting to self-defeating moralising.

All this and more got discussed, and a final report is being compiled on the recommendations and action plans thrashed out by the participants. The report will be sent to all the governments in the Indian subcontinent and all the participants as well.

The five days of the conference were preceded by more than a year's painstaking work. Teaching uncertainties, meeting deadlines, organising everything to the last detail - it was an administrative marvel indeed (see box). The men responsible: Ashok Row Kavi (Humsafar Trust chairperson, Bombay Dost editor and 'Mother Inspiration'), Shivananda Khan (Naz Project chief executive and one for a healthy release of all 'body tension'), Yusuf (administrator par excellence) and all others of Bombay Dost, Khush Club and Udaan who worked as volunteers.

The meet was flagged off, very appropriately, by Maharashtra Director of Health Services Dr Subhash Salunkhe. In a supportive inaugural speech, he urged gay men to organise themselves to tackle the HIV/AIDS problem. His presence provided a glimmer of hope that the government will, one day, look at homosexuality in a different light. As Kavi said later in the conference (referring to Section 377, IPC): "We want decriminalisation of homosexual behaviour, not legalisation. Does anyone ever speak about legalisation of homosexuality? What is natural should be left alone and not criminalised."

In a workshop on 'government policy on HIV/AIDS', Kavi also said: "The government began with an 'isolation policy' (based on HIV testing) which failed. An 'integration policy' (based on the premise that HIV testing is not necessary) is needed, but is yet to be formulated."

In another workshop on 'sexual health', Khan emphasised the need to convince non-penetrative modes of sex (such as body rubbing and thigh sex) can be as fulfilling as the penetrative ones (such as anal sex), even better. They are far safer as well, he argued, because the dependence on condoms (which are not always reliable) as a barrier gets reduced.

The conference, the first of its kind in South Asia, was for lay men (no pun intended): we were experts only with regard to our own lives and were there to share our experiences. But this did not mean guj-shup. There were five working groups of around 12 persons each. Each group had one or two facilitators entrusted with the task of steering the discussions to a tangible end, all the time ensuring all-round participation and defusing emotional outbursts deftly. The facilitators were aided by reporters (one in each group), whose task was to record the proceedings and present them at the plenary session every morning before the day's work began.

The four-hour-plus working group sessions worked along an idea-stream involving the 'context: the right to choose' (day 2); 'agenda: defining a South Asian identity' (day 3) and 'strategy: how to achieve empowerment and promote sexual health' (day 4).

In the evenings each delegate had a choice of two workshops to attend out of five offered. There were workshops on creative thinking, using dance for self-expression, marriage, speaking out, counselling, forming coalitions with lesbians, feminising, reclaiming gay histories, harassment and homophobia, funding proposals and several others closely related to sexuality and sexual health.

Khan conducted a mock working group session for facilitators and reporters two days before the conference - proper began.

The conference proved to be an unforgettable gay rendezvous. I met all those I had only corresponded with or heard of in the last few years - delegates from Bangalore, Secunderabad, Lucknow, Bombay, New Delhi and USA. There were new people to meet - from Pune, Dibrugarh, Belgaum, Chinch, Ichalkaranji, the UK, Indonesia and New Zealand. Of course, there were old friends to meet as well.

On the last day there was the excitement of knowing we were leaving. There was no more discussing or thinking. We just had to get back to work, that is, implementing the action plans. In time for the next conference.

For reports in Bengali and Hindi see Pgs. 25 and 29.

Participants are requested to send in their experiences at the conference. One report on such an event can never be inadequate.
**Appeal for a repeal**

May 1, 1995: Hearing on Section 377, IPC in Delhi High Court

Section 377, Indian Penal Code: "Of unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life or imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years and shall be liable to fine.

Explanations: Penetration is sufficient to constitute carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section."

By the time you read this, the above date will probably have long gone past. Irrespective of the outcome of the hearing, the date will have earned its place in the annals of what may seem to be an attempt to decriminalise just a particular sexual act (sodomy—presumably penetrative anal sex), but is an endeavour with much deeper significance.

Pravartak has received a letter from AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA), New Delhi, in connection with the hearing, excepts of which follow:

**Dear Co-worker,**

As you are aware that ABVA had filed a (public interest litigation) writ petition in the Delhi High Court last year. The petition urged the concerned authorities inter alia:

- to provide condoms to prisoners in Tihar Jail, one of the largest prisons in the Asia-Pacific region housing around 9,000 inmates,
- to stop forcible HIV testing of prisoners,
- to desist from segregating those found HIV positive,
- to provide health education on the issue of AIDS.

The petition arose out of the public debate generated on the prevalence of homosexuality among the jail inmates.

ABVA had prayed for a repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalises sodomy. It was submitted that Section 377 IPC violates the various provisions of the Indian Constitution. Sec. 377 — a legacy left behind by the British colonialists — is an insult to the Indian culture.

The petition was filed by Rajesh Talwar, Advocate, through Ms. Shobha Aggarwal, the petitioner on behalf of ABVA. The petition, ABVA Vs. Union of India & Others has eight respondents including I.G. Prison, Jail Superintendent, Delhi Administration, NACO, AIIMS, ICMR, Union Home Ministry.

Soli J. Sorabjee (former Attorney General of India) and Ms. Indira Jai Singh, Sr. Advocate would be arguing the present case, scheduled for hearing on 1.5.1995. Help has been received from other lawyers - Rajeev Dhawan, Murli, Sharmila Khanne, Madhu, Kapil Sibal. A number of gay / lesbian lawyers / activists from India and abroad have provided moral / material support...

ABVA feels that it is imperative that the campaign for repeal of Section 377 should be stepped up. Towards this end, ABVA is organising a day-long meeting in Delhi on Saturday, the 22nd April, 1995 from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. This meeting is also the logical follow-up of a day-long seminar organised by ABVA in 1992 on the ‘Politics of Sexuality’ which was attended by 125 persons. This seminar had ended on a note for a need to publicly stand up for the cause of lesbians / homosexual persons. Deliberation on this aspect would be the objective of this meeting. Individuals / organisations already exerted on this issue as well as human rights groups, women's organisations and those involved in the area of health, law, etc. need to ponder over the question: How should the campaign be carried out further — individually and collectively? During the course of the meeting on 22.04.95, lawyers involved would share the course of the legal struggle in the court in the last one year...

It is expected that the meeting would be an activist affair rather than an academic or socio-cultural one. No formal papers would be read. One could speak in any language but all the participants would have to exert and help each other. Individuals / organisations are expected to share their views and experiences in the struggle for the sexual minorities.

Yours sincerely,

ABVA, P. Box No. 5308.
Delhi 110 053.

Less Than Gay. (1991), p31

In effect, it is an endeavour to show:-

(i) By law, sodomy is a crime, but that it should not be. Two consenting adults should be within their rights if they wish to have anal sex in private, Besides, the law is often misused to harass innocent people. Thus, many people live under the fear of being penalised under the law, because they don’t know the law exactly OR they feel they can’t prevent its misuse.

(ii) By law, homosexuality (being a homosexual person) is not a crime which is what many people (including many homosexuals) believe it to be and what unscrupulous policemen often make it out to be.

(iii) Sodomy and homosexuality are not synonymous. Love and sex between men need not include sodomy, quite simply because it loses out to other forms of love-making both in terms of enjoyment and safety (via a.v. HIV — infection and other STDs).

Thus, de facto it is an attempt to decriminalise sodomy (in the court of law), while de facto it is an attempt to decriminalise and desegnify homosexuality (in popular perception — inside and outside the court of law).

See Pravartak issue #2 (APR-JUN'95)

The argument was that if the government agrees to condemn distribution amongst the Tihar inmates, it would be tantamount to accepting and allowing (not ‘encouraging’ or ‘promoting’) the prevalence of homosexual behaviour — including sodomy — amongst the prisoners. This then would necessitate striking down Section 377 which criminalises sodomy.

P.S.: Before this issue went in for printing, the latest position vis-a-vis the hearing was that it might be postponed to July.

PRAVARTAK JAN-APR'95
Wrong arm of the law

On Sunday evenings a well-known park in New Delhi transforms into a cruising spot for gay men. As someone who is working on issues around sexuality and AIDS, and who is closely associated with gay people, I have been going regularly to this park for the past few weeks. It is perhaps one of the only times that as a woman, I can feel safe in a public place. I also get to learn a lot about gay life in the city.

Some Sundays ago, when I was about to leave at closing time, I heard a commotion near the entrance. Some panic-stricken boys told me that the cops had arrested someone. I went across to where I could see a group of people. I saw two uniformed policemen with guns. One of them was holding a very young boy by his collar and was shouting and abusing him. The boy was looking terrified. I intervened and was told by the cop that the boy had committed a "very dirty" and "unnatural" offence which came under Section 377, Indian Penal Code.

Section 377 is an offensive and outdated anti-sodomy law originally drafted by Lord Macaulay in the early 1830s. Though in no way makes homosexuality a crime, it is used to harass and criminalise the already marginalised gay community. This law is currently being challenged in the Delhi High Court by an activist group which is demanding that it be struck down.

I mentioned these facts to the cop and asked him what exactly the boy was supposed to have been doing which warranted an arrest under Section 377. He was very reluctant to tell me, because, as he said, I was a "ladies". But when I insisted, he had no choice but to finally say, "Madame, he was sucking". "In that case," I asked, "where is the other boy?" To this the cop had no clear answer, probably because there was no other boy. I then proceeded to tell him that "sucking" was not a crime under section 377 and that only if someone was caught inserting the penis into the anus could he be arrested under this law. That then would be a human rights violation if the act was between two consenting adults. And as far as "sucking" was concerned, I said there was nothing wrong with it; we all did it and I'm sure he did it too.

At this, the cop's mouth fell open with shock and disbelief. The cop reacted violently and moved forward as if to hit me. I quickly added that I did not blame them for thinking that homosexuality was unnatural and perhaps all they needed was some more information on it. I even offered to hold a workshop in their thana.

By this time, the cops had realised that I knew what I was talking about and they couldn't get away with what they were trying to do. They decided to leave the boy, saying that with such "dirty" things happening no wonder AIDS was spreading in our country.

The cop I was dealing with was smelling strongly of liquor. He was not wearing his badge and refused to tell me his name. I ought very much if he would have taken the boy to the police station. The two cops would either have forced the boy to have sex with them or blackmailed him into giving them his money and watch, as it happens in most such cases.

- Anuja

...misguided AIDS policies and targeting by the government of certain groups as the only ones spreading the disease have led to damaging myths about how and by whom the virus is transmitted...

I have heard numerous accounts from gay people of similar encounters with the police. Gay-bashing seems to be a popular sport of the police in blatant violation of the law and human rights. Incidents such as these also bring forward the question of the vulnerability of gay people to attacks on their dignity and person. Fear of disclosure of their identity in our homophobic society forces gays to suffer rape, blackmail and other kinds of humiliation in silence.

Moreover, misguided AIDS policies and targeting by the government of certain groups as the only ones spreading the disease have led to damaging myths about how and by whom the virus is transmitted, as is demonstrated in this particular case. Such information only furthers oppression of already marginalised people. No AIDS control policy can be effective if people's rights are violated as a result. Harassment of gays in the context of AIDS or out of it needs to be recognised and checked. Repeal of the discriminatory Section 377 can be a major step in this direction.

* The article was written in November 1994.

** During this exchange, the cop asked the author whether sex (presumably meaning any sexual act) in a park was decent. She said it was indeed not the right place for sex. But the cop did not realise that he possibly could have arrested the boy under a relevant public nuisance/indecency law (not Section 377). The author, on her part, could not explain to the cop why so many men have no choice but to have sex with each other in public places such as parks and lidos. These positions were deliberately left out of the narration of the incident.

PRAVARTAK JAN-APR '95

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Gay people in India should know that 'wrongful restraint' or 'confinement' of any person is an offence under the Indian Penal Code, Sections 341 and 342, punishable by imprisonment and fine. Besides, 'assault' and 'extortion' are also punishable under Sections 351 and 383, respectively. Most importantly, Section 399 makes it a serious offence for a person to ask for money under the threat that he has caught you committing an offence under Section 377 (sodomy, unnatural offences) and will accuse you if you don't pay up. [Less Than Gay (1991), p 77,78]. Prawatatak proposes to give detailed information on these laws in future issues. Ed.
FIRST PERSON

My kind of animal

- Partha

A friend had once told me that, for a long time, he was under the impression that homosexuality was a trait unique to him. My problem was exactly the opposite: a voracious reader, I knew about the widespread existence of homosexual behaviour even before I was old enough to realise its full implication, and it was not long before I realised that I, too, was homosexual.

Yet, that's where the buck stopped absolutely. Because, try as I might - and, let's face it, I was too timid to really try - I couldn't manage to meet anybody who was, you know, 'like me'.

Then, suddenly, a flash of lightening. I got the address of 'Bombay Dost' from 'Debonair' of all the places! In fact, I constituted that infinitesimally small percentage of that magazine's readership which bought it purely for its literary merits.

A confession: I also bought it and flaunted it so as to appear 'straight', an extension of the ultra-masculine swagger I tried to incorporate in my personality. It was through BD that I made my first friends in Calcutta - not a lot of friends, to be sure, but I was in no condition to be choosy.

I guess there is a lot of difference between the me of then, who had made the closet his home, and the 'new improved' me of now, who is an active member of Counsellor Club. Though, sexually, I am still just where I was - which is nowhere. And no, I am not - god forbid - what is called a puritan. I am a perfectly normal healthy male.

To begin with, there are certain physical acts I just refuse to perform: while I have no problem with sucking or smooching or nipple licking or..., I wouldn't let anyone bugger me, or be interested in penetrating anybody either.

Again, on a more conceptual level, I don't feel ejaculation to be the whole point of love-making. Because, you see, I can even ejaculate alone.

However, there are lots of things which I just can't do by myself: taking my partner's clothes off real slow and watching him get horny, feeling our nude bodies next to each other, holding and being held, the hugs and kisses, the touching, cuddling together without any thought of erection or orgasm. It is these that form the essence of love making for me.

Wait a minute. Do I hear a couple of sniggerings? Do I hear a few muffled cries of: 'A gay who is neither active nor passive? What kind of an animal is this? But then, you would be wrong. You see, what I have written above, though expresses my sentiments perfectly, is not really my language: I have been quoting (almost verbatim) from 'Name Calling' by Sultan Khan (Bombay Dost vol. 3, #3) and the 'Hit Report on Male Sexuality'.

Yet, while these publications renew my hopes of companionship, the frustrations of existence make me feel like mirages. May be I am one of an endangered species; I sometimes think.

Searching for a sanctuary in this world made of stones. Searching for my kind of animals.
SAFER SEX

Less hep but just as smart

THAT's just about the right way to describe the Hepatitis B Virus. It was around even before the advent of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), but thanks to the media's hysteria about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), it has lost out on the attention it deserves. LIKE the more "glamorous" HIV, Hepatitis B can remain dormant in some people and get passed around without anyone being the wiser. If and when it becomes active the Hepatitis B virus can even cause death if not detected in time (though a blood test) and if proper care is not taken.

OKAY, let's not talk about death. But if we don't want to die because of "mere" germs, we should also know that like all other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), Hepatitis B infection can also weaken the body's immunity. And this is especially so against HIV-whether infection with HIV is already there or occurs subsequently.

HERE's a rundown on the virus:

HEPATITIS means "inflammation of the liver". There are different types of hepatitis infection. Type B can be spread through sexual contact and contact with body fluids such as blood, saliva and urine. (While the Hepatitis B virus has been isolated in almost all body fluids, transmission is most effective through blood.) Hepatitis B can cause long-term liver damage in some people.

TRANSMISSION: Sexually, it is possible through anal sex, oral sex (stimulating the genitals with the mouth or tongue), vaginal sex and rimming (licking the anus). Fingering the anal passage and the vagina-in case of open cuts and sores on the hands-is risky.

SYMPTOMS: These occur in three stages.

But a person can have Hepatitis B without any symptoms and can pass it on without knowing.

IN the first stage, the symptoms may appear between one and six months after infection. These include flu-like symptoms; severe feeling of tiredness and loss of appetite, and pain in the joints.

THEN comes the jaundice stage. Jaundice is the most obvious symptom of Hepatitis B. The signs of it are: The skin and whites of eyes turn yellowish; urine turns to darkish brown and stools become light and clay-coloured; and soreness in the abdomen. This stage may last two to eight weeks.

IN the recovery (final) stage, the yellowish tint in the skin and eyes disappears gradually; urine and stools return to their normal colours. Weight loss of up to 4.5 kg during this illness is quite common.

TREATMENT: The only treatment for Hepatitis B infection is plenty of rest and healthy food. It may take several months to get back to normal.

PREVENTION: A vaccine against Hepatitis B infection has been developed. But it is prescribed only for the sexual partners of people who have been infected with Hepatitis B. The vaccine should be taken only through a medical advice and NEVER over the counter.

USING a condom (in case of anal, oral and vaginal sex) and avoiding activities such as rimming and fingering (when there are cuts and sores - covered or not - on the hands) can help reduce the risk of sexual transmission.

HAPPY hot days ahead!

SAFER SEX MANIA

PRAVARTAK JAN-APR '95

NETWORKING

Please send us your listing as you want it to appear in print. We may need to edit your listing. * Each appearance of the listing will cost Rs. 15. Send cash / cheque/DD crossed account payable, payable to Counsel Club. There is no charge for CC members. * Non-member readers abroad may send a nominal amount (in US$) as donation towards CC. * For prompt response, use a personal mailing address-residential or a post box / bag number at the local P.O. * If you don't want your address printed, we will forward your mail. You will be given an advertisement code number. * All mail to be forwarded to an advertiser with a code number should be sealed in a STAMPED envelope. Only the advertiser's name and code number need be written in pencil on a corner of the envelope. Place this in another envelope addressed to CC. * Please remember that Pravartak is read by non-gays also. * We take no responsibility for what happens as a result of meeting people through Pravartak. * Please reply to any response as a gesture of courtesy. * Pravartak reserves the right to refuse a listing. * Send your listing / mail for forwarding to: Counsel Club, c/o Pawan, Post Bag, No. 10237, Calcutta - 700019.

24 - YEAR old, sensitive, fun-loving and lonely guy, enjoys almost everything under the sun; appreciates a sense of humour and is looking for close committed friendships. Sure reply. Write to: Rajarshi Sen. [Code No.4A]

HELLO, I'm Keshav from Calcutta; warm-hearted, understanding and against aggression; in my early 30s; into business. I would like to correspond with persons in a similar age bracket travel often to Bombay and New-Delhi. [Code No.4B]

Hi! I'm Vishal, 22 years old; fun-loving, open-minded boy from Assam. I'm into music, swimming, movies, and travelling. I want friends ranging from 15 to 50 years old. Write with photo. [Code No. 4C]

M Hem, 47 - year old gay man; staying alone, seeking a companion with the intention of a lasting relationship; preferably with someone between 21 and 35; interested in music, gardening, cooking and writing. All letters with photos will be acknowledged. Write to H.C.Muliyil, 14A/1, N.N.Ghosh Lane, Calcutta 700 040.

HERE'S a fun-loving, affectionate and witty guy of 32, 5'9" tall. The sky's the limit for anything and everything. Write with snap reply and confidentiality assured. Mukesh, Post Box No. 520; City P.O.; Laxmi Road; Pune - 411 002.

KIND and loving man, 37 years old, (170 cm, 60kg.), would like a sincere young man to correspond with - for friendship or love; fond of music, cinema, art, travelling, economics and nature. Would love to hear from Indians, but any nationality is welcome. Send photo, will reciprocate. Write to G. Poully, C. Case postale 31 1000 Lausanne 25, Switzerland.

21 YEARS, 180 cm., 65kg., white-skinned, brown-eyed with brown hair, moustache and beard. Originally from Iran, now a Swedish citizen; interested in correspondence and friendship with Indian men; especially those with a moustache or beard. Will answer letters with photo first. Write to: Sriti, c/o Rethnajit, Uttamakargatan 52, 11358 Stockholm, Sweden.
India

- ARAMBH SUPPORT GROUP; P.O. Box 9522, Delhi 110 095. For gay men and lesbians.
- BOMBAY DOST, 105, Veena Beena Shopping Centre, Opp. Bandra Station, Bandra (W); Bombay 400 050. If you are in eastern India, contact CC for copies of 'Bombay Dost'.
- FREEDOM: P.O. Box No. 80, Gulbarga 585102. Gay group, publishes newsletter 'Freedom'.
- FRIENDS INDIA: P.O. Box No. 59, Mahanagar, Lucknow 226006. Gay men's group, publishes newsletter 'Friends India'.
- GAY INFORMATION CENTRE: C/o Owais, P.O. Box No. 1662, Secunderabad HPO, Pin: 500 003.
- GOOD AS YOU: C/o Samraksha, 201, 2nd floor, Royal Corner, 182 Laibagh Road, Bangalore 560027. Gay group, meets Thursdays (6:30-8pm).
- KHUSH CLUB: P.O. Box No. 57351, Bombay 400053. Gay men's group.
- MEN INDIA MOVEMENT; C/o Nikhil, P.O. Box No. 885, Cochin 682005. Gay men's group.
- SAATHI: B5/207, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi-110029. Sexuality group focusing on counselling and workshops; focus on gay and women's sexualities, runs a gay support group in collaboration with Naz Project (India) Trust; meets once a week for discussions, sharing experiences and ideas.

Abroad

- ASIANS & FRIENDS-SYDNEY; P.O.Box No.238, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010, Australia. Support group for gay Asian men and their friends; publishes newsletter 'South Pacific PEARL'.
- GAYA NUSANTARA: Jalan Mulyosari Timur 46, Surabaya 60112, East Java, Indonesia. Gay men's group; publishes newsletter 'Gaya Nusantara'.
- HOMODOK, University of Amsterdam; ILGA Archives, Oudezijds Achterburgwal, 155 NL-1012 DK, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Documentation centre for gay and lesbian studies.
- ILGA (International Lesbian & Gay Association); C/o Antenne Rose, 81 rue Marche-aux-Charbon, B-1000 Brussels 1, Belgium.
- PAZ Y LIBERACION, P.O. Box No. 66450, Houston, TX 77266. USA. Publishes newsletter 'Paz Y Liberacion'.
- SHAMAKAM; P.O.Box No. 460456, San Francisco, CA 94114-0456, USA. For South Asian lesbians and bisexual women; publishes newsletter 'Shamakam'.
- THE NAZ PROJECT; Palingswick House, 241 King Street, London W69LP, UK. (081) 6360191. An HIV/AIDS education, prevention and support service for the South Asian, Turkish, Iraqi and Arab communities; publishes newsletter 'Naz Ki Pukaar'.
- TRIKONE; P.O. Box No. 21354, San Jose, CA 95151, USA. (408)270875. For South Asian gay men and lesbians; publishes newsletter 'Trikone'.

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COUNSELLING HELP

We have come across many who are often not comfortable with their identity, who are not sure of their sexual orientation, or having once discovered their true orientation, find themselves unwilling to accept it. It is for such that we at Counsellor offers counselling services. COUNSELLING in other areas - profession, choice of career, how to handle parents, family, health, safer sex and pre- and post-HIV test is also provided.

WHATEVER your problem, wherever you are in Calculita or outside write in or meet us. We will help you help yourself. Here's how:

We will answer your queries in Pravartak's forthcoming counselling column (keeping your identity undisclosed).

IF possible, CC counsellors will reply to your letters personally. Please mention if you wish to avail of this service. We will help you get in touch with the CC counsellors in Calculita whom you can discuss your problems freely.

YOU would be most welcome to attend CC talk sessions and workshops.

COUNSELLING help, in case it involves sessions with counsellors, may carry a charge.

For CC members the charge may be waived with/subscription with preference to students and those who cannot afford to pay. Those earning will be requested to pay in full.

Counsellor Club, c/o Pravartak, Post Bag No. 10237, Calculita - 700 019. Subscribes your envelope 'COUNSELLOR'.

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MES AMIS

The nuclear family...

...and the extensions

- AIDS BHEDBHAW VIRODH ANDOLAN; Post Box 5308, New Delhi 110053. Community work on issues of education, health, law, women, gay men, lesbians, professional blood donors and drug abuse.
- BHORUKA PUBLIC WELFARE TRUST; Futnari Chambers; Gates No. 4, Corporation Place, Calculita - 700037. Conducts AIDS awareness programmes amongst truck drivers.
- CINI-ASHA (Child in Need Institute-Asha); 63 Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, Calculita - 700016. Works with street children.
- CLPA (City Level Plan of Action for Street Children); Flat No. 2; 17 Bondel Road, Calculita - 700019.
- JABAL 6A Outram Street, Calculita - 700017. Works with children of the Bow Bazar red light area in Calculita.
- SANLAAP, 171A Rashbhirai Avenue, 1st Floor; Opposite Aelaya Cinema, Calculita - 700019. Focuses on women's issues.
- STD/HIV INTERVENTION PROGRAMME (Sonagachi, BowBazar and Kalighat red light areas); c/o All India Institute of Hygiene & Public Health; 110 Chittaranjan Avenue, Calculita - 700073.
- THE SALVATION ARMY Social Service Centre 172 A.J.C Bose Road, Calculita - 700014.
- THOUGHTSHOP FOUNDATION 2G Mauya Centre, 48 Garibat Road, Calculita - 700019. Community work on issues of street children, sex education for children, etc.
- VIVEKANANDA EDUCATION SOCIETY; 25/1A Dock Harbour Road, Calculita - 700034. Involved in STD/AIDS awareness work.
Gay Islands - Hem

The small emerald green islands could be sighted at the horizon, as my flight approached the Andamans. I could see, on the deep blue sea, near the breathtaking blue horizon, these islands appearing as small dots and then growing larger and larger, as the air hostess's voice came over, "In a few minutes from now we shall be landing at Port Blair. Kindly fasten your seat belts and ..."

The Hotel Bay Islands was on the hills. Each room faced the sea. One could gaze eternally out of the large windows at the marvellous wonder of the Great Creator and watch the surf break and come foaming on to the beach, on to the sparkling white sand.

I changed quickly and went over to the beach. I was amazed at the beauty of nature. Hermit crabs scurried into their shelly shelters. Cockles dug themselves into the sand, as the waves receded, to be dug out once again by the waters, as the surf came in.

Then I saw two big snails mating. With their necks stretched, each had shot a horny calcite like projection into the flesh of its mate. They seemed to be enjoying each other. They were both male and female. Was this nature?

"The Sentinelese could not be civilized by us," the chief of anthropology told me, as he showed me round the museum.

"The Jarwas have now accepted us," he continued.

"The Onges were the first, theoretically," I asked.

"Why theoretically?" I asked.

"You see, the British used the Great Andamanese tribe to fight the Jarwas. So when the British left, they were butchered. Only 27 of them were left, and that too with low fertility, when they moved them over to an isolated island. We look after them. This year one baby was born after 13 years!"

I should not have taken the boat. But some wanderlust prevailed on me and I roved on and on towards the horizon.

The blue waters of the Indian Ocean were calm and invited me to invade their privacy.

When my senses returned, I found myself surrounded by the deep blue waters. Lazily, I stretched my aching arms, resting them on the side of the boat as I watched the dolphins playfully jumping and rubbing each other. These creatures knew what love was.

The storm came suddenly. The sky grew cloudy within minutes and the waves rose. My boat was tossed and turned. I really do not remember what happened. When I woke up, I was surrounded by beautifully built naked, Mongoloid men. They were excited. I was being sprinkled with water and an acrid-smelling leaf was held under my nose. To my horror I realized that I was naked also. They carried me over to a hut and put me on a bed of straw and grass. I was too exhausted and drifted back to sleep.

They were dancing round the fire. The captive boy was a Jarwa. I could see his sharp features: Negroid, dark and with curly hair, his large expressive eyes, filled with terror, were shining bright. A deer was being roasted on the fire and the aroma of grilled venison filled my nostrils.

One man with feathers round his head came over to me and bowed. In their sign language, I was asked to get up.

I was to initiate the ritual; I was supposed to deflower the boy.

Drums were beating loudly. The naked dancers pulled the boy over to an elevation on the rock and made him lie down, embracing the rock.

To the rhythm of the drums, I danced over, with the beautiful people, towards the boy. I was excited.

It was exhilarating to explore the beautiful boy, and I enjoyed the bliss to the magical beats of the pulsating rhythms of the drums.

After the first time, the boy also responded and began to enjoy the act. This pleased the natives so much, they unbound him. He was now a member of their tribe—a gay!

Then there was an orgy. Each partner having sex, without any bother, with anyone he liked. The waves of the Indian Ocean were a silent witness to this scene, accentuated by the pink rosy laughter of the setting sun.

I was accepted because I was gay.

I lost track of time as I enjoyed myself in this paradise. I was like a god to them. They were gay and they hated modern civilization. Their women lived separately in a secluded area. They were also gay, but twice a year on the full moon night of the dog star (i.e. August/September as per our calendar), the men went over for recreation. They performed their duties and later, when the offspring were born, they were brought up inside the caves. Then, according to their sex they were initiated into the gay world.

There was such blending of their lives with nature, that they were all happy. There was no quarrelling. Violence was used only against enemies.

The attack from the mainland came as an ugly surprise. They found me and took me away with them. But not before the Sentinelese had killed three of their team.

I was questioned by the police officer at Port Blair, but I refused to answer. After long hours of interrogation, I was sent back to my hotel.

Then, as I drifted off to sleep, I had a dream. I saw the sky getting blurrier. Black, dense, dark smoke of civilization was changing the colour of the sky to black. Industrial wastes and pollution were killing nature. I was rushing, helter skelter in search of blue sky, but to my horror, I found only black sky everywhere. I found blue sky at last, but that was over the Sentinelese islands.

Next day, when the police interrogated me again, I only repeated one sentence. And that was:

"Long, long ago, when the sky was blue..."

"What?" barked the sergeant.

"Long, long ago, when the sky was blue..."

I went on saying.
A tribute

January '95 was a great time for film buffs. This was the IFFT '95 in Bombay, where we at Calcutta had our very own "gay film fest"—notwithstanding it being a non-starter of sorts. Many first attempts are.

Among all this signficant event went almost unnoticed. This was the film festival organised in New Delhi on January 29 as a tribute to the late Siddhartha Gautam (1964-92).

The programme entitled 'Images on AIDS and Sexuality: A Tribute to Siddhartha Gautam', was organised by a small group of Siddhartha's friends who wanted to remember him and honour him. They wanted to share with others his particular sensibility engaged with many crucial issues of our times.

The event commenced with the screening of three short documentaries: Interview with Dominique D'Souza, 'Song from an Angel' and an interview with Siddhartha recorded by 'Newstrack' in 1991.

Siddhartha Gautam
25.1.64 - 13.1.92

This was followed by three lengthier documentaries: 'Straight for the Money' (based on interviews with lesbian sex workers in California); 'Paris is Burning' (delving into the radical sub-culture of the Harlem drag balls) and 'Before Stonewall' (on the history of the gay liberation movement). An hour of discussion followed, before the screening of the concluding film, Fassbinder's 'In the Year of the Thirteen Moons'.

The festival brought back Siddhartha's memories to all who had known and loved him. Among all the people who never even cared, he wanted to know, he asked why and dared to try.

- Partha

Welcome debut

- O Come Bulky Stomach
- Written by Shantanu Nagpal.
- Directed by Barry John (TAG, Delhi).

Shantanu Nagpal writes his first script for a play and guess what he writes about? AIDS. He accepts that this complex subject found him "inexorably lured into its web-like relationships with sexuality, morality and ethics."

Though Barry John, the director of 'O Come Bulky Stomach', may not have been able to give an indepth study of AIDS as one of the most serious problems facing the 21st century, he does lay bare those many taxing questions on sexuality and morality which most of us give a back seat.

Mention must be made of some striking performances by Bhaskar Bhattacharya (enacting the role of Dr. Virendra Sahi), Lopa Banerjee (Pallavi), Sunita Jain (Anmol Bahl), Ramesh Venkataraman (Tejander Bahl), Vivek Mansukhani (Akhilesh) and Ashwini Chadha (Jaiprakash Bhatt).

Parvez Sharma of CC did us proud by appearing in the role of Raj—a small role as far as the play goes, but a big event for CC!

- Sanjay

Becoming a man

- Becoming a Man—Half a Life Story
- Paul Monette.
- Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, USA.

This man (or should I say gay?) takes us three decades back and tells us 'about growing up gay, and about the tyranny and self-hatred of the closet. One man's struggle, for half his life, to come out'.

There have been experiences more trying and poignant than Paul Monette's, but the author's simplicity and honesty are striking. In the event of not being able to come out, we generally blame a brutal 'straight' world, adverse circumstances or unsympathetic parents and friends, but Paul also lays part of the onus on his weak self which lacks an inherent conviction. 'That's how the closet feels, once you've made your nest in it and learned to call it home. Self-pity becomes your oxygen. Enchanted by my own homophobia, I preferred a life of isolation to being one of them.'

Even though the context of Paul's problems is not Indian; I suppose, just as human nature is basically the same everywhere, so is the intensity of basic gay problems.

Two jarring notes of the book are Paul's breaking into diversions giving medicinal and unnecessary background details. And his descriptions of his pseudo-obession with the opposite sex carried to an avoidable extreme. Despite these, some of his classic statements apart from being universally truhs are etched in every gay's heart. I'm sure: "The self-obession that fears exposure will grab at almost anything to keep the closet door shut."

"All I would have to do was to exist below the waist..."

"Poetry was better than reality. The imagination was the only country where a man could truly breathe free. Thus the map of my own misreading, believing I could imagine life instead of living it."

"His father later took him aside and said, "There's nothing wrong with those gay magazines, Paul. That's perfectly natural, you're almost a man. But the homosexual urge... that's not good."

"It wasn't sex I couldn't keep up with... being gay and invisible... It was self. Hiding the truth would require ever more elaborate stratagems... Relations with women would soon take on the hue of the Big Lime. But the hardest part was having no one to bond with... no companion..."

Available at the American Centre Library, this book is undoubtedly worth reading and absorbing. Those interested could further read Monette's 'Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir'.

-Sanjay
POETRY

Calling the shadows

Lonely figures pass by the placid lake
When zephyr of May blows-
It titillates the skin with ripples of pleasure:
On the skin of the lake and on shadows.
Smoky yet groovy clouds pass by
Sometimes overshadowing the moody lunatic full moon:
The scent of wild flowers kissing and whispering
Amongst bushes of wilderness Intoxicates.
Barefooted, two male dogs frantically make love;
Soft kisses, amorous touches of tree branches
Suck the nipple of nobility
Undraping the coyness of bodies, tradition and puritanism:
Of those lonely timid gay shadows-
Lottering, whispering, meeting, disappearing?
Pairing, holding hands, kissing and making love.
Pair of eyes, pair of hands, pair of lips
Vanish into shadows of smiles!

The silhouette of dreams cradled in vision
Milking thoughts with sounds of frothy laughter
Overshadows the lapping of waves
And the lilting stereo music of distant highrisers.
A gossamer of imagination marries truth
Equating existentialism with fantasy and myth.
Vibrant emotions bottled in Time;
Caged in ruthless hard chains of Law
Cajole shadows to break rules and taboos
Which bodies cannot in sunshine, in daylight.
Who are these silent observers?
Who are these nocturnal creatures accompanying the shadows?
O shadows! Don't go away!
Wait for me! Wait for the others!
Take us with you!

-Ashim

REPORT

আমারা মিলেছি বোম্বাইয়ের ডাকে
দত্তন এসিসিসম সম্পর্কিতা এক্‌টি জাতীয় অভিনন্দন কমিটি

-শিল্পী শ্রীনিপু দত্তন

The conference was attended by delegates from various countries. There was a wide range of discussions on the impact of technology on community work. The highlight of the conference was the participation of experts who shared their insights on the conference and the role of the community.

Conferees were primarily aimed at discussing the role of community in sexual activity. Among them, the omophobias counseling panel had a mixed reaction. Some delegates were against the idea of sexual activity, while others were in favor of it.

The conference started at 11.00 am and ended at 3.00 pm. Working groups were set up for discussions.

Continued on Pg 28
SAFER SEX

আমি জানতে চাই

হঠাৎ কল্পনা করলে নিজের আলোকায় একটি প্রথম ভাব সত্য হবে যে, আমি নয় কিন্তু যদি আমার কোনো একটি প্রথম ভাব থাকে তা হলো সত্য নয় কিন্তু আমি আত্মসমর্পণ করলাম।

"আমি যখন দেখলাম যে আমি কভু ভাবি তা হলো সত্য নয়। তাহলে আমি আত্মসমর্পণ করলাম।"

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PRAVARTAK JAN-APR’95

HUMOUR

একটি পুরানো হাসি

ব্যাখ্যা, ব্যাখ্যা নয় নিবন্ধপুস্তকে তে; রাজনীতির কথা মানুষ সুন্দর মসন্দরসাদের; রূপস্রীনরলাদের নিপুণতা বহনকরী; নজর দিয়ে স্পর্শ হিসাব ভালো হয় নিকটসহ আভ্যন্তরিক।

উত্তরাভিজ্ঞানিক, ২৩

হঠাৎ কল্পনা করলে নিজের আলোকায় একটি প্রথম ভাব সত্য হবে যে, আমি নয় কিন্তু যদি আমার কোনো একটি প্রথম ভাব থাকে তা হলো সত্য নয় কিন্তু আমি আত্মসমর্পণ করলাম।

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PRAVARTAK JAN-APR’95
POETRY

मेरा अपना

अपने कभी क्या है मेरा अपना।
अपना कहती है, तू है वह मेरा अपना।
सत्य दिन सिये अब कौन में नहीं
शेष तो यह कौन सा सपना?
किसका नाम तुझे है जाना?
तू स्वयं कहता है?
तू यह कुछ पी नहीं है तू
सूखा है वह मेरा अपना।
अवधा कहते हैं: मैं एक खानदान हूँ;
नाम हूँ।
तू तो है वह मेरा साता,
तू यह कौन है नहीं है?
अपने को हूँ दिखााँ गया;
मेरा मुझे पर करने जाता।
अपने को तू मार बना;
क्या कुछ, तू फर्स्ट उमरान,
अपने को बदौलत बना;
फरस्त वे नजर ली कोना,
अपने को फौलद माना?
हूँ ही सिंवर मेरा हिस्सा?
अपने को आलद बना।
कहते हैं मेरे पार हमसफर,
चूँकि तुम्हे ये कौन ठगा?
बीत चल
कोशा समझा?
तू नहीं कोई मेरा अपना;
मत अपने दिल का टक बढ़ा
नाकाम ना ये बोले क्या?
मैं तो हूँ अपना बादल
मैं तो हूँ पंजाबी पतल।

PRAVARTAK JAN-APR '95

CITYSCAPE

Dekho ... filmy chakkar

WHAT was billed as a film festival on gay themes, turned out to be a mini-mini-show of two films. It was to have been Counsel Club's first major programme with a public face, in collaboration with Tritone (USA).

FILM shows spread over two days were to be combined with a seminar on sexual health. But several organisational and technical glitches later, 16 or so viewers assembled at a CC member's residence on January 8 to watch a few films on video-on-air BW TV.

THE news of Calcutta hosting a film fest had generated quite a response among the non-resident Calcuttans (and even some non-resident Bangladeshis) in far-off USA. In the end, they constituted one third the audience.

WITHIN the city, the grapevine says, there was a lot of anticipation which fizzled out like a pricked balloon.

TRUE to their word, the Trikonians were there with the film cassettes. But only two attracted serious viewing: 'Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun' featuring Firdaus Kanga and Zahid Darr's 'Destiny, Desire, Devotion'.

THE feed, music and dancing livened up the show considerably and helped diffuse the disappointment in many minds.

Book fair debut

THIS was another shaky start—an attempt to hawk copies of Bombay Dost and some of Pravartak at Calcutta's annual book gala in January-February.

THERE were quite a few volunteers, which was heartening. On the last two days of the fair the magazines were displayed along with safer sex literature—alongside a little magazines stall with which there was an understanding. But before long, on both days, a couple of volunteers insisted on packing up the magazines. Finally, only a few pamphlets on safer sex got distributed.

FULL marks to all volunteers, never mind the jitters.

Counselling workshop

COUNSEL Club continues to participate in the West Bengal Sexual Health Project workshops.

TWO members represented CC at a workshop on counselling techniques in February-March, held at the Calcutta Samaritans premises on Ripon Street.

THE CC members discovered that a lot of what they had been doing on the basis of gut feelings were indeed recognized counselling techniques. The workshop also provided a lot of information on HIV/AIDS and STDs.

It was another occasion for CC to interact with other NGOs. Homosexuality was discussed, both within the workshop and during informal chats. Hopefully, some myths about homosexuality will have been debunked.

Tailpiece

CLASSIC bookshop at Middleton Street has joined the ranks with other book outlets in Bombay and New Delhi as Bombay Dost stockists. A few copies of Pravartak are also available.

CLASSIC is a one-stop shop for those with a taste for "alternate" books. The accompanying eating is also a nice place for a rendezvous. CC has already had a meeting there on April 9, to chart out a memorandum of support for ABU's petition against Section 377, IPC.

HOW did CC become friends with Classic? Well, that's a story worth serialising, but for the moment it's going to be part of CC's growing oral history tradition.

ROVING EYE
IN THE METRO

The doors open and shut in the Metro
But no one comes
And no one sits
No one holds out his hand
And no one says those thousand things.
Yet, I feel it is all there,
But that must be the light
Of the decorated platforms that pass by -
They give the heart a jerk
like a hundred rejuvenated candles,
But all that is bright
Perhaps soon fades out
And all that remains is the hollow dungeon.

With of course the light inside the compartment
without which the journey onwards would be a fright.
And when the stations come
Hope again builds up
The doors invite,
But no one comes
And no one sits.
The destination shall soon come
When willingly or reluctantly
we must leave our seats:
The doors shall yawn.

May be that that is not the end
May be that the tunnel shall continue
The lights, hollow and lights again,
But I shall not travel
in the Metro again
Where the doors open and shut
And no one comes
No one sits
And no one says, 'Wait, Please, don't go,'
No one holds out his hand.

SANJAY