

May 2006

# Economic Liberalization and the Empowerment of Gays and Lesbians in India

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**ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION AND THE EMPOWERMENT  
OF GAYS AND LESBIANS IN INDIA**

An Honors Thesis

Presented by

**Priyanka Gupta**

To

The Department of Economics

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Honors in the Major Field

Prepared under the direction of

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of my family, friends and professors to whom I am deeply indebted.

Professor Mardon and Professor Segrest (thesis advisors and mentors): Your dedication, readiness to help, enthusiasm, commitment to thoroughness, sensitivity, and sheer brilliance are contagious. I am afraid you have spoiled me with all the attention you give me and my work – I find it so flattering that someone as talented and busy as each of you, has spent all this time and effort on my undergraduate thesis. I consider myself really fortunate to have met you and to have spent my undergraduate years under your guidance. You mean the world to me.

Mummy & Papa: Thank you so much for always being proud of me, for supporting me, for loving me as much as you do!

Alok (brother and role model): While I may not say it or show it, I am hugely proud of who you are and what you do. You have mentored me every step of the way, and I always seek your stamp of approval. Thank you so much!

Ashley Hanson (library mentor): Thank you, Ashley, for helping me through my research, always responding promptly, and patiently answering my questions.

Nora, Caite & Nicole (my feminist network of support): You are an inspiration, a tremendous force that has helped me remain hopeful throughout this endeavor.

I would like to thank my friends Anne and Crookie for their relentless support and encouragement over this last year. I am also grateful to the participants of my research, for filling out the survey, for sharing their stories with me, and for helping me keep things in perspective.

Finally, I am thankful to the Economics and Gender & Women's Studies Departments and the Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts (CISLA), who awarded me research grants to enable my travels to India.

## ABSTRACT

Economic liberalization in India has transformed Indian gay identity. The information revolution and expansion of employment in high-paying jobs have brought about significant changes in the economic independence of the youth in urban parts of the country. Improved economic opportunity strengthens the fall-back position of many young gays and lesbians, in so far as they are better equipped to locate their sexuality within the Indian context. Drawing on feminist and queer theory, I hypothesize that economic liberalization has contrasting effects on the autonomy, freedom and bargaining power of middle class gays and lesbian young adults. I contribute to the research on inter-generational and intra-family bargaining relations; I posit that adult children negotiate with their parents over their adherence to social norms concerning gender roles. My quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that the empowerment of gay and lesbian youth in India is strongly associated to their access to networks of support. The process of negotiating sexuality in public and private spaces ultimately influences their willingness to be engaged in social change and policy formation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i> .....	<i>ii</i>
<i>ABSTRACT</i> .....	<i>iii</i>
<i>LIST OF TABLES</i> .....	<i>vi</i>
<i>PREFACE</i> .....	<i>vii</i>
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Starting Points.....	1
Adding Sexuality to Gender: Queering Household Economics .....	6
Queering the '90s: Sexuality and Economics during the Third Wave.....	12
Research Methodology .....	20
Chapter Descriptions.....	22
2. QUEERING THE ECONOMIC THEORY OF THE HOUSEHOLD .....	24
Introduction.....	24
Household Economics and Issues of Resource Allocation.....	27
Adding Sexuality to Gender: Queering Household Economics .....	35
Theory of Kids, Income and Social Networks.....	40
3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT .....	45
Introduction.....	45
Economic Reforms in India:	
Oscillations of Regimentation and Liberalization .....	45
Rise of Queer Politics in India .....	49
4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS .....	61
Introduction.....	61
Methods and Sample Data .....	62
Descriptive Analysis of Sample Data .....	67
Status, Earned Income and Autonomy.....	74
Age, Occupation and Autonomy.....	85

Social Networks, Political Participation and Autonomy .....	90
Concluding Remarks.....	94
5. QUEERING POLICY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS .....	95
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i> .....	99

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Gender Identity and Sexuality .....	65
2. Interviewee Characteristics by Sex and Sexuality .....	66
3. Age and Occupation by Sexual Orientation.....	68
4. Socio-Economic Class and Political Affiliation by Sexual Orientation .....	70
5. Percentage of Queer Population Out to Family and Friends .....	72
6. Reported Monthly Household Income by Sex and ‘Out to Parents’ .....	76
7. Reported Monthly Earnings by Sex and ‘Out to Parents’.....	81
8. Age and Population Out to Parents.....	86
9. Occupation and Population Out to Parents .....	88
10. Social Activity, Political Involvement and Population Out to Parents .....	91

## PREFACE

He said without a preamble, “I am gay, Priyanka.”

My brother’s coming out to me when I was twelve years old marked the beginning of an exploration of my social location, and negotiation of mine and my brother’s identity in a largely conservative Indian setting. As my brother began to articulate his needs and preferences, my personal experiences took a political course; I became aware of issues of social visibility, political backlash and legal security faced by sexual minorities in India. I was both proud of my brother and afraid for him as he took on bold challenges to negotiate his sexuality.

For the first few years after my brother came out to me, I observed the developments in Indian queer politics through his experiences, narratives, collection of articles and the rare occasions when he allowed me to come along to meet his gay friends. For an insecure teenage girl, it meant a lot that her older brother (and then he seemed a lot older) trusted her with such a significant aspect of his life. Not only did I feel privileged to keep his secret safe at home, I felt that I had, in fact, suddenly matured. I was conflicted because while on one hand I had to keep my brother’s sexuality a secret, on the other hand, I felt obliged to speak out against the homophobic remarks made by my peers in school. I would place my watermark on those early months after my brother came out as the time when our lives outside became sharply distinct from our lives at home. We discovered ourselves publicly: in school, in college, with friends and with both of our boyfriends. Simultaneously we struggled with negotiating these public experiences in the private realm of our close-knit family.



I realized soon after (and rather unfortunately, as my brother jokes) that I was, in fact, straight. However, my desire to belong, to be a part of my brother's life, to not be the only straight person at a gay meeting, was so strong that we both began introducing me to his gay friends as "bi-curious!" As my brother's involvement in the gay political scene grew, so did my interest and level of awareness about issues of sexual minorities, HIV/AIDS, sex-work, eunuchs and the Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. I was allowed to go anywhere outside the house, as long as I was accompanied by my brother. While my parents were not only unaware of where my brother was taking me, they also were unaware of the mobility I was seeking as a result of my interest in queer politics.

During the mid-1990s, India was in its third attempt at liberalizing its economy, opening it up to foreign trade and reducing barriers of entry for foreign goods and services. What's more, and these events are not entirely disconnected, is that those years marked our family's shift from a lower-middle class immigrant family in Bombay (Mumbai) to an upper-middle, affluent one. As our family wealth increased, so did our access to information, internet and various elements of Western culture.

It was only with my relocation to an undergraduate academic institution in the United States and exposure to feminist/queer struggles and their links with economic development that I could begin to contextualize my personal experiences as an adolescent. Coming to the United States held for me a certain promise of independence – freedom to explore, experiment and expand my horizons. My years at college helped me shift from the safe space I sought in my identification as "bi-curious" to the refuge provided by the re-claimed term "queer." The queer identity includes people of all sexes, genders, gender non-conformity, sexuality, race, class, ethnicity and nationality who

challenge normative heterosexuality, on whatever continent. I also realized how much my brother's active pursuit of a gay social/political life had to do with the success my father had in his business and therefore our increased access to the internet, foreign media, and our ability to travel abroad.

In observing the rapidly liberalizing economy and the emergent queer politics in India, I sought to understand the phenomenon of the “pink rupee” or young people's use of quick money to lead gay/lesbian lives in India. It is precisely the relationship between gay/lesbian youth's disposable income, performance of identity and negotiation of sexuality within the household and beyond it that I explore in this thesis. I write it at the point of confluence of several academic disciplines: feminist economics, feminist theory and queer theory. I write it to better understand and to help others understand the inner-workings of queer politics in India and the significant role that economics and culture play in the performance of (sexual) identities.

In this endeavor, I aspire to find my own voice, to give voice to my brother's experiences and to the people I interviewed as part of my research.

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Starting Points

This thesis explores the link between the economic liberalization of India and the empowerment of middle-class gay and lesbian youth. Inspired by the contributions of Amartya Sen (1990) and Bina Agarwal (1997) and others, I question the extent to which material resources determine an individual's welfare and bargaining power within the complexity of familial relationships, particularly those between parents and their adult children. I elaborate upon Sen's and Agarwal's hypotheses that social norms and individual perceptions impinge on an individual's ability and willingness to protect their interests in intra-family bargaining. I also draw upon the significant contributions of Indian queer scholars, such as Vanita (2001), Bhaskaran (2004), and Narrain (2004), who have pioneered the research about the ways in globalization has shaped the Indian gay movement. Going beyond both feminist economics and queer literature, I posit that children are decision-making agents within their families. In doing so, I offer insight about the ways in which norms of gender and sexuality constrain the choices that young adults really face, and how important independent income is in overcoming these.

The research in feminist economics and gender and development departs from standard economic theory in several ways, particularly in its assumptions about people, the scope of economic analysis, and the economic importance and character of social norms and ideology. During my field work in four cities in India, I have had the experience of conducting analysis and drawing inferences that take into consideration my standpoint epistemological perspective as a straight, middle class Indian woman from an

American undergraduate institution. I have analyzed both the stories that quantitative data tell, and the qualitative complexities added by the narratives. While my research is similar in its assumptions to those postulated by feminist economists, it is also unique because of its focus on power relations between adult children and their parents.<sup>1</sup> This is a perspective that is of growing interest to activists and researchers in feminist economics and gender and development, because sexual minorities are often the least free and least safe across the globe. An understanding of how sexual minorities overcome or adjust to heterosexual biases in social institutions (and ideologies) will shed light on the perpetuation of social institutions which unfairly and persistently disadvantage some groups of people.

I intervene in the narrow conceptualization of liberalization both on the right and the left. While I question the simplistic assertion of neoclassical economics that increases in free market exchanges lead to increases in human welfare, I do not argue the opposite. Instead, I situate the market as only one (of many) social institution which interacts with others to shape the real choices and opportunities people face as they compose their lifestyles. Against this setting of parent-child bargaining, this thesis poses a crucial critique of the in-built heterosexism and gendered conception of the existing economic models of the household.

Many economists now recognize that power matters in the intra-household allocation of resources, and that inequality among household members is not neutral. However, most of the research has focused on married-couple relationships, though Agarwal (1994), Folbre (1997) and others argue that relationships of power between

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<sup>1</sup> Sociological research on power relationships in families has also questioned the importance of relative resource endowments as a determinant of power.

*family* members are also highly relevant. My focus is on the power relationships between adult children and their parents, which I theorize in the context of the “bargaining approach” outlined by Agarwal (1997). I test the hypothesis that social norms and cultural values strongly affect any individual’s bargaining power, but especially that of middle-class, young adults in India.

In outlining the existing cooperative, non-cooperative and mixed models of household bargaining processes that Agarwal and Sen critiqued and expanded, this thesis highlights the importance of the feminist conceptualization of household processes. In India, social norms dictate that children remain within the household until marriage and that married couples retain close ties, including intergenerational living arrangements, with parents and in-laws, as opposed to a more white and Western model in which young adult children are expected to become financially independent from their households in their twenties and thirties. This study is based on a small sample of gay and lesbian survey responses and interviews from four cities in India. Its inter-disciplinary character and contemporary relevance contribute to the process of “queering economics” in India.

While liberalization has fueled the gay movement in India, both through increased jobs and increased contact of Indian activists with their counterparts in the West, it has also led to a form of virtual equality for young gays and lesbians. Many middle class gays and lesbians seek support online as they create new social networks on the internet; in many cases becoming part of the internet closet. The political struggle is carried forward mainly by the queer women and the lower class gay men.

Liberalization has led to creation of jobs, in call centers, information technology and service industries, and the introduction and spread of internet and international

media. This thesis explores how gay and lesbian youth from the middle classes are impacted by such rapid liberalization, particularly in the way they channel this access to income and information as a fall-back position in negotiating sexuality. The primary contributions of the research lie in highlighting that income may not be the only suitable measure of fall-back position in analyzing bargaining between parents and children. Given the strong gravitational pull of the family in India, many of the negotiations between parents and children result in outcomes of increased mobility, ability to resist marriage and/or in establishing support networks outside the family.

In this liberalizing Indian context, transnational queer movements, along with forces of the international economy and polity, hybridize the Indian gay identity. Continuous cultural exchange between India and the West through travel, written or cyber correspondence, language and literature influence the queer identities in India. This cultural exchange is directly associated with the increased economic activity between India and other countries. People's experiences with homosexuality and queer issues, particularly in the West, bring about an awareness and acceptance that travels back to India with them, or through the products of liberalization such as media, publications and the internet. This spatial interaction, linked through economic ties, is enhanced by the exploration of same-sex practices and identities within the Indian history and cultural lore and the indigenous Indian terminologies that marked them (example kothi, humjinsi, sakhiyani).

Susan Stanford Friedman (2001) discusses the effects of spatial and temporal tensions on international and domestic feminism. She posits that globalization opens up national boundaries not just for free trade but a free flow of ideas and means for building

transnational solidarity around women's issues. However, each nation arrives at its own political expression based on its history and culture. Her theory can be applied to liberalization and Indian queer identity. The confluence of the dimensions of space or geography (here, economic liberalization that is occurring globally) and time or history (here, the cultural negotiation of sexuality in a specifically Indian context) have not only led to the emergence of a middle-class of socially active and politically articulate gay and lesbian youth, it has also helped create an Indian queer expression that is culturally rooted, unique in its description and diversity. This theory of "glocalized" queer identities offers an alternative to the claims that homosexuality in post-colonial nation-states is a Western import and a legacy of colonialism. Queer identity, then, is much like *locational feminism* in that as Friedman (2001) states it is "situated in a specific locale, global in scope, constantly in motion through space and time (p.15)."

It is the nexus of experience I have garnered growing up in India, and traveling back and forth between India, the United States and the United Kingdom over the past four years, that has shaped my interest in exploring how the phenomenon of the "pink rupee" is marked by both global and local forces. The phenomenon of the "pink rupee" as it is catalyzed by the role of language, communication, and internet, spreads across the space dimension. "Pink rupee" refers to the newly generated disposable income as a result of jobs created through liberalization that is specifically used by middle class gays and lesbians to articulate and perform their sexuality. One legacy of English colonization of India was proficiency in written and spoken English. English, the chief language for all official and legal correspondence, is the backbone of all development of Indian contact with the West and has increased exponentially in the number of jobs transferred to India

in the service-sector. However, in India, fluency in English necessitates a discussion of the extreme class stratification of society. Most of the positive impact of the economic liberalization of the country has been on the emerging middle/upper-middle English-speaking classes.

Since my research focuses primarily on the gay and lesbian youth of the middle/upper-middle classes and those who have been able to move up in class status due to increased class mobility, my findings are applicable to only the particular section of Indian society that has benefited from liberalization. My research, methodology and findings are by no means an attempt to capture the general patterns of same sex, queer, and gay and lesbian expression in India across classes. No such work can be done without an in-depth analysis of class conflict and inter-sectionality because of the interconnectedness of issues of class and sexuality. The strength of my research is reflected in the new additions it makes to economic theory of the household by incorporating children as decision-making agents trying to bargain over their sexual preferences.

#### Adding Sexuality to Gender: Queering Household Economics

Feminist economic analysis has highlighted the shortcomings of standard economics in considering gender differences as solely resource-driven, when, in fact, they are both resource as well as norm driven. Feminists have pointed out that economic theory of the household lacks in its application to women and children; however, not much work has been done towards incorporating children as economic agents. Feminist economic analysis has focused on heterosexual social norms and opposite-sex



relationships, offering little insight on the role of an individual's sexuality or the role of children in the household bargaining processes.

Before considering how queer theory may shape household theory, it is important to recognize the contributions made by some pioneering queer theorists. Ruth Vanita (2001), speaking primarily in the Indian context, urges policy analysts, feminists and development workers to push beyond the strict gender categories of "men" and "women" (p.534). Queer theorists also take on a different stance in their challenge to the biological sex/social gender distinctions by using Butler's claim that there is no biological body onto which the social gender is inscribed. They believe that the body and the social are interactive and influence each other (Jolly, 2000, p.3). According to Butler (1999), the classifications of men and women are due to the discourse around bodies, rather than the nature of the bodies themselves. Thus sex, as well as gender, can be rendered as a socio-political construct. If the heavy emphasis on sex is relaxed by theorists as well as policy-makers, then the usually marginalized same-sex relationships (like opposite-sex relationships) can be freed from the socio-political constructions. Hence the birth of the self-empowering label queer has been taken on by people who are willing to enact their socially prescribed roles with variations and with a different meaning to mark the ascent of new politics.

The word "queer", originally an insult for marginalized sexualities and other "deviants," was in the late 1980s reclaimed and invested with new meanings by activists in America. "Queer" constituted a rejection of the hetero-homo binary and a conception of sexualities as non-essential, shifting and transitional - a post-structuralist understanding of sexual identities. Sexual identities were viewed as being much more

complex than the simple classifications involving a single type of “man” and “woman” as “gay” or “straight.” This new energy permeated into academia, and a body of “queer theory” emerged with thinkers such as Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick (Jolly, 2000, 3).

While a certain space is opening up in development theory for looking at the “intangible,” or non-material, and at “subjectivities,” sexuality is still largely ignored. Sexual identities are seen as linked to Western wealth and privilege. Many in development would argue that “basic needs” are a more immediate priority than sexual expression for those in economic difficulty. However, sexuality can itself be a basic need, and basic needs can be contingent upon sexuality, for example where economic resources are dependent on a marital relation, or where homophobic or other sexual violence is a problem. Social marginalization due to sexual non-conformity can lead to material deprivation or even physical violence. It is certainly true that, for some, food may indeed be a more immediate priority than sexuality. However, the separability and order of priority of the two issues should not be assumed.

Sex, gender and sexual identities, then, are not an essential “who we are,” but instead a performance, what we do moment by moment. There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; gender is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” which are said to be its results (Butler, 1999, p.25). While gender may be a performance, however, it is not a free one. We usually act out the socially prescribed and internalized roles assigned to us. We can act out variations on the prescribed performances, or reenact the same roles with a new meaning. This analysis provides a useful framework to understand the performance of the urban Indian gay and lesbian

identity given the access to income generated from increased Western contact and the centripetal tensions of the insecure Indian middle class family.

The consideration of factors such as sexuality and age expands upon feminist contributions to reveal that intra-household dynamics are marked by the complex interplay of identities, behaviors, perceptions and social structures. Not only does sexual identity impinge on the narrow definition of gender identity and stereotypes, it also has a distinct relationship with social norms that affect the processes of resource allocation within the household. For example, even though a gay son in the household may be the primary bread-winner, he may not have the same influence on household decision-making that he would have if were straight. He could lose the privilege associated with his image as being “masculine” or “manly.” This could be because of the social stigmas attached with homosexuality, his perception of his alternatives outside the household, or his need to not reveal his sexuality to other household members.

Economists have not devoted much attention to the impact of inter-generational forces in intra-household bargaining. Alderman and Gertler (1997) as well as Folbre (1997) have written extensively on the impact of parents’ (specifically women’s) access to economic opportunity on their children’s health and education. For all practical purposes, they have theorized children as dependents, with no agency or power. Furthermore, these economists have used fixed parameters in considering the impact of social norms. I extend their work by positing children, particularly adult children, in a different light. In this study, children are considered active decision-makers, making choices under circumstances of perpetually changing social norms. Young adults not only earn wages, they also bargain over their adherence to these social norms. The following

chapters expand upon one such form of bargaining – that between parents and their adult children over the children’s ability to perform a sexual identity that maybe contrary to the prevalent social norms.

This thesis introduces the dimension of sexuality and age as key parameters in the determination of intra-household bargaining relations. By doing so, it furthers feminist contributions and highlights that identities are complex entities - consolidated within an individual, changing over time and space, and thus fluid in character. This fluidity of identity is crucial to an understanding of the intra-household bargaining process, given that the economic decisions an individual makes depend upon which identity they choose to act upon. This thesis develops a multi-dimensional framework that incorporates the movements in identities and their impact on economic decision-making and bargaining power within the household.

Household bargaining involves two major components: “voice” (the say in the collective decision-making process) and “exit” (the ability to quit the bargaining process when the outcome is not beneficial or less beneficial than the alternative fall-back position). According to the feminist contributions to the existing theories of household economics, the “voice” and the “exit” options of an individual are remarkably limited by her/his gender and the surrounding social norms. This thesis first outlines the developments in the field of household economics and then highlights the feminist contributions made in the field that help explain the interplay of gender with forces of economics and resource allocation. It provides an insight into the queer critique of the existing models - in their in-built heterosexism, confined nature of “gender,” and rigidity in consideration of identity and social norms. In doing so, the theory section of the study

goes on to provide an inter-disciplinary framework to analyze the intra-household bargaining process given the gender and sexuality of the individuals, along with their age and position within the household.

Furthermore, the relationship between the macro-economic phenomenon of economic liberalization of the economy and the micro-economic effects on intra-household bargaining power is explored through several lines of causality. The first part of the hypothesis is based on the link that liberalization has resulted in massive relocation of labor-intensive industry from the developed nations to India. The outburst of call-centers in urban areas of India is used as an example of this relocation. Call-centers are commercial complexes equipped to handle a large volume of telephone calls, especially for taking orders or serving customers, most of whom are located in the developed world. The primary reasons for the call-center boom in India is the abundance of English-speaking youth seeking primarily part-time jobs (so as to be able to pursue an education degree on the side) with night hours (which is ideal in that it is day-time in the United States then). Attractive monthly wages and convenient working hours (along with a pick-up and drop service) have led call-center jobs to become a major source of income for young adults in urban areas.

The different lines of causality will examine the impact of liberalization and the outburst of jobs in the export-processing zones on the migration and mobility of the youth, changes in their disposable incomes, their social status, their financial independence, their ability to be out as socially active as gays or lesbians, and their levels of political involvement. They will also explore the negative lines of causality to analyze how the growing income inequality patterns within a rising middle class are enhancing

the middle-class insecurities among Indian families and possibly driving young gays and lesbians back into the closet. Fear of rejection or loss of love and support of families can also deter gays and lesbians from being out despite their economic situation. Moreover, right-wing backlash on queer politics, perhaps, is also a factor, both affecting the ability of young people to lead an openly gay or lesbian life and/or politicizing more sexual minorities to openly counter the backlash. In deconstructing the data through these lines of causality, the qualitative and quantitative analysis will develop a comprehensive understanding of the nature of impact of economic liberalization on various aspects of gay and lesbian life in India.

#### Queering the '90s: Sexuality and Economics during the Third Wave

Economic development over the past 50 years has been concerned with national processes of accumulation, structural change, poverty, inequality as well as the impact of international economic relations. Development plans considered “traditional” economic policies as those focused on agricultural and the “modern” ones as dealing with import-substituting industrialization. In 1960s with the ascent of the “dependency school,” the simplistic vision of development as a transition from traditional to modern, from less developed to developed was challenged (Elson, 1999, p.98). The dependency school postulated that the key problem of development was the dependency of less-developed nations on the international capitalist economy – an economy that exploited the dependency of these developing nations. However, by the 1970s both modernization and dependency paradigms were being challenged. There was no coherent model to explain why even though Brazil was experiencing industrial growth, its standard of living had

barely risen or why the East Asian economies were enjoying sustained increased in income (Elson, 1999, p.99). In this moment of international spate of strategies of development, women's concerns began to gain weight. In 1970, when Boserup first published her book *Women's Role in Economic Development*, male dominance in the field of development was first called into question.

Through its state-led political and economic reforms during the five decades following its independence in 1947, India experienced different waves of economic development policies. The timing, characteristics, underlying conditions and implications of economic reforms in India, given its regional politics, historical trends, and class conflicts, made it a special case of the course of market-oriented restructuring.

*Liberalization* was a new buzz word encompassing the most critical reform measures, deregulation and increased privatization. Liberalization episodes generally involved two distinct but interrelated measures: 1. creating macroeconomic stability through a blend of budgetary restraint, monetary policy and market-defined exchange rates, and 2. limiting the role of government price controls, subsidies and regulations. Liberalization in India occurred in three waves (1966-68, 1985-87 and 1991-1994); it was stalled each time by tremendous backlashes stemming from population explosion, bureaucracy and corruption as well resistance by the middle classes. However, economic reforms were implemented over and over, each time reducing the role of the state.

The 1991-1994 economic reforms took India closest to complete liberalization. The Soviet Union had collapsed, shutting off all aid from Moscow and signaling the end of the viability of "command economies" globally. The failure of the "big push" ideology of the 1970s in simultaneously mobilizing various sectors of the economy through

balanced growth had been markedly unsuccessful. There was dire need to reduce inefficiency in the industrial sector, generate exports, and draw foreign direct investment (FDI) for development of new growth sectors. Under Finance Minister Manmohan Singh's leadership, the reforms were pushed through. Liberalization's benefits became evident in many ways. The real GDP grew over the next few years. Imports and exports increased substantially in the early 1990s as compared to the 1980s. The dynamics of investment and ownership changed as the private sector grew and the public sector declined. Foreign aid was particularly effective in the development of the financial sector, transport and telecommunications.

The strongest move forward for gay visibility in India occurred in the context of the third oscillation of liberalization in India. India drew the attention globally of development economists and policy planners as a site of "population explosion." Issues such as rampant poverty, nuclear threat, the need for economic planning, and the spread of the HIV pandemic, brought India into the limelight of the international health and development agenda. Women in the sex-work industry were considered the primary carriers of the virus infection, making the HIV/AIDS issues a primarily heterosexual concern during the 1980s in India. (Bhaskaran, 2004, p.72) With the economic reforms of 1991 and the international pressures of structural adjustment arose many nation-wide discussions - around the inflow of "western" ideas; the need for HIV/AIDS education; relationships among tradition, modernity and the Indian culture; and the politics of class and identity. These discussions spurred right-wing political backlash within the country and led to the conflating of all issues responsible for "polluting" an Indian culture posited as "authentic" and "pure," such that commercial sex workers, sexual minorities, and



migrants drew negative political attention. The rising need for HIV/AIDS education provided a platform of visibility to the “Indian Gay” and “men who have sex with men (MSMs).” MSM visibility further led to the national discourse on sexual rights, anti-sodomy laws, need for political organizing at the grass-roots level. In this rise of visibility the gender disparity was apparent in the relative silencing around lesbian issues.

The resulting move from “sex” to “same-sex” marked the historical rise of gay visibility in India and began dialogue around sexuality in the Indian context.<sup>2</sup> It is not only true that with every leap forward, the gay-movement in India was forced to retract because of the right-wing backlash, but it is also true that the growth of the movement was slow given the need for activists and social workers to reconcile the articulation of their identity with past notions of tradition and *transmodernity*. I use the word “transmodern” to emphasize the need to “muddy” the waters when dealing with the debate of tradition versus modernity. I understand “modernity” as determined by a complex of forces, including industrialization, urbanization, secularization, the emergence of the contemporary nation-state, and the struggle of anti-colonial insurgences that produced post-colonial states.

In this framework, “tradition’ refers to an historical period prior to modernity (marked by some combination of agricultural, rural, indigenous, emphasizing kinship networks rather than the state) rather than to a universal claim to a pure and static culture needing protection from pollutions. I think that both tradition and modernity, instead of being in opposition with each other or in succession, are actually co-evolving in small

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<sup>2</sup> By fluidity of identity, I mean the notion that identity is not fixed or definite, but changing over time and space, taking various forms, resulting from an overlap of other identities and social norms and conditions. Instead of being definite individual points on a scale, it is a spectrum of positions along which people move back and forth.

transitions. There is no trade off between tradition and modernity in seeking homosexual recognition in history and progress in the globalized world. Instead, tradition and modernity are in a spectrum of co-evolution, thereby strengthening the case for retaining culture through a process of “glocalization.”

Transmodernity in India was triggered by liberalization as the opening up of the economy created a platform for both foreign investment and foreign cultural ideas. These international concepts needed to be located within the Indian cultural so that they could be applied to enhance the queer movement. Queer activists grounded them by reinterpreting Indian history, Hindu as well as Islamic texts, to generate a place in contemporary Indian society where Western ideas could interplay with traditional Indian notions of same-sex behavior. The glocalization of same-sex relationships is evident in the recognition of homoeroticism, transsexuality and transgendered behavior among Hindu gods and goddesses in the epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and in the Urdu-Persian literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, in backing Western influences with Indian references, the leftist activists gradually split in their justifications and critiques.

The renegotiations of market-state relationships came under severe critique globally by feminists who lamented the loss of social supports for reproductive and caring labor and by leftists who linked decline of the public sector with an increase in inequalities within and between countries. Arundhati Roy (2001) in her essay "Power Politics" offers a biting critique of a Call Center College on the outskirts of Delhi

...hundreds of young English-speaking Indians are being groomed to man the backroom operations of giant transnational companies. They are trained to answer telephone queries from the US and the UK (on subjects ranging from a credit card enquiry to advice about a malfunctioning

washing machine.) On no account must the caller know that his or her enquiry is being attended to by an Indian, sitting at a desk on the outskirts of Delhi. The Call Center Colleges train their students to speak in American and British accents. They have to read foreign papers so that they can chitchat about the news or the weather. On duty they have to change their given names. Sushma becomes Susie, Govind becomes Jerry, Advani becomes Andy. (Hi! I'm Andy, gee, hot day innit? Shoot, how can I help ya?) They're paid exactly one-tenth of the salaries of their counterparts abroad. From all accounts, call centres are billed to become a trillion-dollar industry. Recently the Tatas announced their plans to re-deploy 20,000 of their retrenched workers in call centers after a brief 'period of training' for the business, such as 'picking up the American accent and slang (p.83).'

Roy's diatribe against liberalization and call centers suggests that major corporations enter the Indian market, employ Indians to do the actual financial exploitation, and therefore recreate colonies. They do so under the pretense of aiding the Indian people, thus donning a mask for third world repression. My research positions the youth working in these new jobs, in call centers of IT industry, in a different light than does Roy. It is true to a certain extent that the winners may have come from the middle classes, and the losers have come mostly from the rural areas and lower classes. As the May 2004 policy report by Food First points out, one of the biggest consequences of the new free market policies is acute inequality. The Gini index, a standard measure of income inequality, has risen from 30 to almost 38 from 1991 to 1997 (Muller & Patel, 2004, p.5).<sup>3</sup> Job creation in the urban information technology sector does little to create economic gains for India's rural poor.

The “queer” lens through which I examine globalization achieves different results in gauging effects of liberalization on particular sectors of the population than Roy's

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<sup>3</sup> The Gini coefficient is a measure of inequality of a distribution; a number between 0 and 1, where 0 corresponds to perfect equality and 1 corresponds to perfect inequality. The Gini index is the Gini coefficient expressed as a percentage, and is equal to the Gini coefficient multiplied by 100. India's inequality is particularly high when we compare it to a country such as Sweden which has a Gini Index of 25 (CIA World Factbook, 2000).

class critique. The initial articulation of queer politics in India came from the middle and upper classes of the gay community, which has since been struggling with the issue of class and ethnic biases. The channeling of income and access to resources by middle and upper class gays and lesbians to negotiate sexuality is a fascinating phenomenon in itself and opens doors for further research and critique of the path adopted by Indian young adults. The distinct effects of liberalization shape these urban classes as well, in the way that while the youth may be benefiting from new jobs and income, the aspiring-to-be middle-class families are dealing with the insecurities that come with new money. On the one hand, families are grateful for this new income and access to the foreign market; on the other, they are also exposed to the right-wing propaganda that flows in and responds to liberalization. The complexities lie in the families trying to “accumulate” more and more of wealth as well as more of “Indian culture.”

Moreover, the perceptions of call centers themselves are changing. More and more people in the West are aware that India is answering their calls. The need to pose as “American” on the phone is no longer stressed at training sessions in call centers. More and more employees are using their Indian names when answering calls and are speaking in their standard Indian accents. Even the emphasis on American accents is fading so long as the employees can be understood by the customers and can help solve the problem within a certain amount of allotted time. In one of my interviews, a young student working at a Canadian-owned call center said that he did not need to worry about “being discovered” anymore and that his Canadian clients were, in fact, excited when they found out he was helping them from India.

The third wave of economic liberalization has had a remarkable impact on gay and lesbian politics in India. This impact has been multi-faceted on individual welfare, community-level and national growth, but also in the way it has redefined gay and lesbian politics as identity politics and mobilized queer activists across the country. Globalization has, through the channels of informational revolution and employment expansion, increased exchange of ideas and support from transnational movements for gender and sexuality and led to the changes in economic independence (and survivability) of young gays and lesbians who may or may not be out to their families.

Given the contemporary nature of the economic boom and the rapid development in Indian queer identities and queer politics, another relevance of this study lies in its timeliness. While the social repression and discrimination of queers in India has been the focus of most studies conducted on gay and lesbian politics in the country, very little research has been conducted on the impact of new avenues and agency created by economic liberalization of the country. For instance, much of the work conducted in the queer realm has been to draw attention to the ignorance, denial and harassment of alternative sexualities in India. Such work has been significant in the contribution it has made in bringing gay and lesbian issues to light in mainstream media. They range from discussions of the Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (the sodomy law), to the pressures levied on gay people to get married to the harassment by police in gay cruising areas. A series of recent economic and political events have contributed in bringing queer politics into the limelight of mainstream Indian news and media. The movement (in the form of a court petition) to repeal the section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that renders sodomy illegal and punishable by law has succeeded in involving the Supreme Court in

addressing the issue, but has not managed to obtain any ruling in favor of the queer population's call for equal rights. This has resulted in the launch of the "Voices Against Section 377," a coalition of nongovernmental organizations (NGO) working for the rights of children, women and gay rights groups that has asked the federal Minister for Law and Justice to protect those being discriminated against because of their sexuality. "Voices against 377" includes groups such as Amnesty International, Prism, women's group Jagori and the New Delhi-based Talking about Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues (TARSHI).

With rapid economic growth and greater access to political developments in other countries, there are better means by which activists may organize themselves in contemporary India. Better connectivity with transnational organizations for sexual minority rights (largely through the internet) has emphasized the need for Indian queer activists to articulate their identity and needs in the Indian context. The transformation caused by the television and the film industry (Bollywood) has brought wide attention to queer issues as these agents of media have recently played a vital role in increasing visibility of gays and lesbians in a positive light among segments of the population that have traditionally been hostile and/or uninformed about same-sex relationships. The internet, the wide-spread use of the mobile phone, intra-national rural-urban migration and inflow of foreign direct investment are continuously re-shaping the Indian urban gay and lesbian identities.

### Research Methodology

Feminist scholars rely on social research methods that challenge the dualities between theory/praxis, researcher/researched and subject/object (Naples, 2003, p.13).

They draw from both the natural and the social sciences to obtain a balance between perspective and method. Feminists emphasize the position of the researcher in their analysis of different epistemologies. The mainstream way of conceptualizing knowledge has been from a positivist epistemological position, or the so-called “scientific” method. According to this position, there is only one logical truth that can be derived from a causal relationship between (numerical) variables. The social world, in the positivist school, follows one general order and is thus predictable (Nagy et al, 2004, p.6).

Feminists challenge the positivist position on account of the inherent androcentrism in its assumption of absolute rationality and in the distancing of the researched group as the “other.” At the heart of much feminist research is the goal of taking action and bringing about change in the condition of women (Reinharz, 1992, p.251). At the most basic level, then, feminist research simply attempts to incorporate into social reality the female perspective. In examining various feminist social research methodologies, Shulamit Reinharz asserts that this focus on perspective is a central theme across the work of many feminist researchers. She also argues that feminist criticism of established research stems from a distrust of the power and perspective of androcentrism in research and society, not from a rejection of traditional methods of inquiry.

Going into my field work, I was conscious of my position as a middle class, heterosexual Indian woman from an American academic institution. Despite the risks associated with this position, I have tried in my research to place myself in selected narratives. I have had the experience of conducting analysis and drawing inferences that take into consideration my standpoint as the researcher, the stories that numbers tell, and the qualitative complexities added by the narratives. I was confronted with the

implications of my heterosexuality, my apparent femininity, and my fluency in English; all markers of my socio-economic status and a sign of privilege. However, at the core of this privilege lay vulnerability – in the fear of being challenged as an outsider in the queer space into which I was trying to fit. I was faced with many questions regarding the interplay of power-differentials in researching a group of which I was not entirely a part. Some of the lesbian and gay people to whom I talked thought I had no legitimacy as a research; others acknowledge the usefulness of my research to queer organizing in India, noting that my study was much more inflected for differences than most of the information available on lesbians and gay people in India. In fact, it is my hope that this thesis will provide useful information for queer organizers in India as they seek to shape public opinion and public policy. And as I gathered narratives and the personal experiences of the gay and lesbian youth I interviewed, I tried my best to make sure I could transfer the information I gathered, with as little distortion as possible through clarity about my own subject position.

### Chapter Descriptions

The next chapter of the thesis will provide a detailed explanation of the theoretical grounding for this research. The existing models of the household are explained, and simultaneously critiqued through a gendered lens. Furthermore, the theoretical framework discussed takes into account negotiation between parents and their adult children, given the sexuality and lifestyle choices of the youth in the intra-family bargaining process. The third chapter provides an overview of the development of queer politics in India, the review of the existing literature on Indian sexuality as well as the



measures and impact of the present economic boom. It describes the phenomenon of the rising middle class in India and the insecurities that come with such class mobility.

The fourth chapter delves into a detailed analysis of both the quantitative and the qualitative data. The study uses descriptive statistics and analytical reasoning to test the hypothesis. I problematize the neo-liberal emphasis on income as the sole measure of bargaining power to include other measures of autonomy derived from social networks, from the family and from the market. Statistical data are used to examine the relationships between income, age, occupation, social activity and political participation and ability of gays and lesbians to be out to parents. The qualitative data provide insight into the structures of constraints posed by gender and social norms and the different ways in which individuals negotiate their sexuality given their dependence on family for support and security. The final chapter provides a synthesis of the theory, as well as the statistical and qualitative analysis. It contextualizes the findings of the study given the moment of social influx of Indian society and the volatility of economic change. It also provides insight into the inherent contradictions of the transmodern dialectic – a force that holds the promise for economic opportunity and empowerment for gays and lesbians in India.

## CHAPTER II

### QUEERING THE ECONOMIC THEORY OF THE HOUSEHOLD

#### Introduction

Feminist contributions to the economic theory of the household shed light on interactions between gender relations and social norms. Individuals are not perfectly rational but they are purposeful agents who engage in decision-making. These decisions or choices are shaped by social construction of individual preferences and cultural norms. (Folbre, 1994). Neoclassical institutionalists and neo-Marxists have been concerned with inefficiency and inequality within market and state structures. Feminists have emphasized the need to consider family relations between parents, and parents and children to reveal gendered roles that influence and are influenced by these economic and social institutions. (Folbre, 1994). Economists such as Bina Agarwal (1997) and Amartya Sen (1990) provide a useful framework to analyze the impact of gender differences in the exercise of self-interest on bargaining. However, this analysis draws from heterosexual social norms and says little or nothing about the impact of an individual's sexuality or the role of children in the household bargaining processes. I extend their framework to shed light on the nature of bargaining between parents and their adult child over the child's non-conformity to social norms; particularly those regarding sexuality and ability to be open about it.

In much of standard economic theory, the family is considered an “undifferentiated unit governed primarily or solely by altruism” (Agarwal, 1997, p.3). With growing evidence to the contrary, the family is now recognized as constituted of many actors with varying preferences. Most economists who seek to explore the inherent

complexities of gender inequality and resource allocation within the household, take as their starting point a critique of Gary Becker's unitary model (Agarwal, 1997). A range of models use the game-theoretic approach to elaborate upon the complexity of family decision-making. They allow for varying individual preferences and although do not explicitly consider gender norms can be applied to consider the impact of gender asymmetries within the family. However, they are unable to capture the complete range of factors that interact with gender relations both within and outside the household. Agarwal (1997) points out that these models are only a subset of the methodology, and can be strengthened by incorporating a qualitative analysis of the role of social norms and perceptions in the bargaining process.

Unsatisfied by the restricted applicability of the existing models, especially in discussing the role of sexuality and age as they interact with social norms and cultural transformations, I elaborate upon Agarwal's framework to study bargaining within the household. Agarwal (1997) posits that models and policies will always be limited in their scope if they assume intra-household dynamics to exist in isolation, "without examining the extra-household socio-economic and legal institutions within which households are embedded, and how these institutions might themselves be subject to change" (p.2). I problematize the use of income as the sole measure of fall-back position of an individual and situate the bargaining process in the context of the simultaneous contests over sexuality, age, social norms, gender norms, amidst changing cultural expectations and external economic forces. Not only do I consider the different forms of bargaining given the various identities that an individual may choose to act on, I also consider alternatives to bargaining itself. The significance of this elaboration of Agarwal's framework lies

both in its unprecedented character and large scope for applicability. The crux of this analysis lies in its potential to offer insight into the interplay of the forces of social norms, perceptions, value systems, ideology and the complex nature of individual identity.

The consideration of factors such as sexuality and age expands upon the feminist contributions to reveal that intra-household dynamics are marked by the complex interplay of identities, behaviors, perceptions and social structures. Not only does sexual identity impinge on the narrow definition of gender identity and stereotypes, it also has a distinct relationship with social norms that are active during the process of resource allocation within the household. For example, even though a male member of the household contributes significantly to the household budget, his bargaining power may become relatively less, if he were to come out as gay, because of the social stereotypes associated with gay men as effeminate or feminine.

Economic theory of the household has not devoted much attention to the impact of inter-generational forces in intra-household bargaining.<sup>4</sup> Almost all bargaining is considered in terms of a (heterosexually) married couple with no discussion of cases when adult children are financially independent and participate in decisions regarding their conformity to social norms. Therefore, there is a need to critique the existing models both from a feminist perspective and through a queer lens to bring out the impact of sexuality and age on the bargaining processes.

This chapter outlines the existing economic models of the household critical for understanding their accomplishments and shortcomings, as well as the feminist critique that stemmed out of their deconstruction through a gender-sensitive lens. In subjecting

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<sup>4</sup> See Folbre (1997)

these models to a sexuality-sensitive and inter-generational critique, the chapter explores the confluence of a range of factors that determine bargaining power: What role do social norms regarding sexuality play in the bargaining process? How does the inclusion of sexuality challenge the stereotypes regarding gender roles? What happens when children pool income towards the maintenance of the household? How does their sexuality affect their position in the bargaining process? And finally, given their fall-back position, how can their sexuality itself be bargained over?

This chapter introduces the dimension of sexuality and age as key parameters in the determination of intra-family bargaining relations. It considers identities as being complex, consolidated within an individual, changing over time and space and thus fluid in character. This complexity of identity is crucial for a holistic understanding of the intra-household bargaining process, given that the economic decisions an individual makes depend upon which identity is playing the dominant role in a given setting. This chapter discusses a multi-dimensional and inter-disciplinary framework that incorporates the movements in identities and their impact on economic decision-making and bargaining power within the family.

#### Household Economics and Issues of Resource Allocation

The collective decision-making processes by which resources within a household are allocated among individuals are referred to as “intra-household resource allocation.” Intra-household bargaining power is an individual’s ability to have a “voice” or say in the collective decision making process or to “exit” the process if and when the outcome is not beneficial for the individual. The individual’s ability to “exit” (to walk out or not cooperate) may depend on the availability of alternatives or his/her fall-back position,

also known as the threat point. Nancy Folbre (1997) emphasizes family rather than household allocation by pointing out that both legal rules and implicit contracts generally pertain to familial relationships rather than to co-residents in a given physical location. A focus on family allocation also allows economic analysis to concentrate on the changing family and household boundaries, such as families maintained by mothers alone, same-sex families or families with members who identify as gay or lesbian.

Gary Becker, the 1992 Nobel Prize winner in economics, in the mid-1960s was first to fully develop a model of the family and the household (Haddad, et al, 3). The crux of his approach was that, in abiding by a single set of preferences, members of a household combine their time, goods purchased in the market as well as goods and services produced within the home to produce commodities with utility for the household. This approach is referred to as the “unitary” or “common preferences” model. In this model, the household is considered to act as a single entity in the decision-making process. The assumption that the (male) head of the household is inherently an altruist and represents the tastes and preferences of his family is questionable and representative of a patriarchal point of view. The underlying notion of exogeneity of preferences (that they are immutable) is problematic because it implies that all gender and age bias considerations lie outside the household sphere and remain unexplained.

Contrary to the hypothesis of the unitary models, Sen points out that the member of the household with the least bargaining power (usually women), rather than the most, tends to behave most altruistically. (Folbre, 1997). Bina Agarwal offers an extension to Sen’s hypothesis by highlighting that the interaction of social norms, values and gender roles may actually prevent women from rejecting “bad deals” by limiting awareness of

alternatives (Agarwal, 1997). When a woman perceives no exit option she may be induced to accept an outcome that may make her worse off even if she realizes that it is against her best self-interests. A common example of this condition is when women who are in abusive relationships continue to stay in them because of lack of information about the support services for battered women outside the house, or because of cultural sanctions against leaving. Another example would be that of young lesbian couples who attempt suicide because they are unable to seek approval of their relationship from their parents and are not aware of the help-lines or shelters available to help lesbian women.

Pierre-Andre Chiappori (1997) identifies the main shortfall of the unitary model as its inability to tend to the principal rule of neo-classical micro-economic analysis, namely, that of individualism. His critique stresses the need for consideration of household decision-making at the individual level and the treatment of outcomes as a result of strategic interaction between individuals. Such strategic interaction is particularly distinct when young adults negotiate with parents over issues of sexuality, mobility, financial independence and ability to lead queer lives. Young adults may choose their association with an identity given the social privilege tied with it: for example, a young gay man might choose to remain in the closet to safeguard the mobility and gendered privilege he may have access to, given that he is a male child. Also, wage-earning children may find it more conducive to their bargaining position to not come out to parents and cooperate with them, as long as their income provides them with a channel to lead a gay life outside the house. However, it is important to note here that these young adults might still choose to cooperate with parents at home, given that the family is their primary network of social support.

Elizabeth Katz (1997) provides a comprehensive overview of cooperative and non-cooperative bargaining models of the household and offers an insightful feminist critique of their limitations. Cooperative models are based on two common assumptions: (1) individuals within a household have distinct tastes and preferences that cannot be aggregated into a singly utility function; and (2) the outcome of resource allocation depends upon an individual's bargaining power which, in turn, depends upon the individual's access to extra-household resources. The scope of the non-cooperative models appeals to many institutional and feminist concerns. In contrast to cooperative models, the non-cooperative models do not assume that members of a household necessarily enter into binding and enforceable contracts with each other. The non-cooperative models posit that there is asymmetric information among family members with regard to each other's earnings.

An important aspect of this approach is that it does not assume that income within the household is pooled, a common feature in the unitary and cooperative models. These models also account for the fact that the incomplete nature of the conjugal contract ("terms under which household members exchange goods, incomes and services among themselves") makes it difficult to enforce cooperative decisions (Carter & Katz, 1997, p.96). The principal-agent models compare the spousal relationship to the employer-employee relationship whereby one partner has a distinct advantage in the determination of resource allocation given his/her ownership of the means of production. A relevant example of such a case would be when a lesbian young adult might refrain from coming out to her parents (if the parents own the house) because she fears that she might be forced to leave the house upon coming out.



The non-cooperative models hold potential for the development of an analysis that can explore the systematized socio-political, gender-based and identity-based biases that influence the bargaining process. They allow for gender analysis when considering the constraint exerted by monopolization of control over productive resources by one member and the subsequent limitation of another member's access to even a minimal wage to keep him/her within the household. Such practices are rooted in social norms and the incomplete nature of some conjugal contracts, whereby women are disadvantaged by their position in society and by unequal access to means of economic opportunity.

What each household member gains from cooperation between household members in this model is driven by the so-called "threat-points" of each individual, or the expected level of utility expected from the fall back position, when the individual quits the cooperative setting. "Threat-points" have been defined as a condition of "dissolution of the household (divorce)" or as the measure of the impact of "extra-environmental parameters (EEPs)" – impact of independent wealth, available gender-specific well-being options, interaction of gender norms or biases, outside of the household (Katz, 1997, p.6). When a change in price or a shift in institutional factors, such as norms, bears an impact on an individual's fall-back position, there is a subsequent impact on the individual's willingness to cooperate within the household. Inclusion of sexuality and age into a new framework may necessitate the extension of definitions of EEPs to include queer support networks outside the household, role of duality of identities within and outside the

household, or ability to navigate through social pressures by entering into alliances of convenience.<sup>5</sup>

Change in norms affects men and women in different ways. For example, women may be at a disadvantage given that they are more socially conditioned to cooperate and maintain a household, or that the community is unable to value their work as biological and social reproducers. Norms impinge on women's ability to bargain by limiting what they can bargain over and how they can conduct the process of bargaining. In her critique of the cooperative models, Katz (1997) challenges the assumption that all members of a household, irrespective of their gender, have equal opportunity to transform the net difference between their inside and outside utilities, into their bargaining power. Sen (1990) and Agarwal (1997) elaborate on this by considering the impact of self-perception and self-interest.

Kandiyoti (1998) discusses how the notions of bargaining power have evolved and how these are based upon implicit assumptions about "consciousness, personhood and subjectivity (p.136)." She brings out the contention between several viewpoints by shedding light on the work of Amartya Sen. Sen (1990) claims that women may sometimes define their interests differently from what would be an objective measure of self-interest. According to Sen, the outcome of bargaining is less favorable to the woman the less she attaches her own well-being relative to the well-being of others. This may bear effects on women's bargaining power in the household. For example, they may act in the way they consider best for the welfare of their children. Or in the case of gay and lesbian youth, they may choose to remain in the closet about their sexuality to protect

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<sup>5</sup> By alliances of convenience I mean, for instance, a situation where a gay man might marry a lesbian woman so that both are able to resist the pressure to have an arranged marriage and still have the ability to lead their gay and lesbian lives.

their parents from the emotional trauma of finding out about their child's socially-unaccepted sexuality.

Agarwal (1997), on the other hand, lays less emphasis on women's perception of their self-interest and highlights the material impossibility for women to realize their self-interests. Rather than sharpen women's sense of self-interest, Agarwal calls for a need to improve women's ability to pursue their interests. Kandiyoti (1998) states that the main area of dispute is centered around the subordinates' capacity to see through the "mystificatory discourses of the dominant or, on the contrary, their tendency to fall prey to false consciousness" (p.136). Kabeer (1998) sums up the discourse around power dynamics within the households by drawing out the difficulties involved in the "disentangling of choice and power in a set of social relationships in which some of the most selfless examples of love and sacrifice and some of the most terrible forms of abuse and oppression have been documented" (Kabeer, 1998, p.103).

In regard to the cooperative models' treatment of exit options, Katz points out that "symmetry of exit does not mean equality of exit" (Katz, 1997, p.32). The assumption that all members of a household can accurately value their own assets as compared with the valuation of similar assets by the other household members is unsound. Non-labor income or assets, human capital, reproductive activities or activities usually carried out by women within the home may carry different weights for men and women in the bargaining process. Furthermore, women who are subject to the severities of the public/private dichotomy may be confined within the household to the extent that may not perceive or value their alternatives outside the household. To make matters more complex, women may be discouraged to seek a divorce due to the negative stereotypes

regarding divorced women in some societies. The gendered disadvantage to women coupled with social stigmas attached to the dissolution of the household or divorce maybe so strong in some cultures that women may not even consider exit as a viable option.

Mixed models of the household postulate that socially systematized gender biases, embedded in norms, lead to gender-specific sub-economies and split the terms of trade between men's and women's "separate spheres" (Mardon, 2005, p.4). Such gender-based assignment of household duties marks the most fundamental economic disadvantage to women. The convergence of gender roles with social norms, in most societies, leads to a division of labor whereby the women are responsible for caring for children, meals, cleaning and other household chores that are not perceived to be as valuable as market-oriented work. Add in the element of perception and it can be found that social norms and gender stereotypes affect women's perceptions about the value of their work, their social responsibilities, their self-interest and needs. Therefore, the women are doubly disadvantaged when negotiating bargaining with an inaccurate perception of their own economic worth; with a man who is making a more definite monetary contribution to the household, women may overvalue his contribution to the household.

My research sheds light on contemporary Indian political economy as the country experiences as strong wave of liberalization. On observing the post-industrial economic phenomenon in India, I sense an augmenting of insecurities among middle class families as women's entry into the workforce of the service industry is rapidly challenging the "separate spheres." While their families may be coming to terms with the changes in gender balances, much of the household tensions may be focused on the deviant sexual preferences of these young women. However, given their mobility between these

“separate spheres,” women nowadays maybe in a better position to draw on tools from both spheres, creating for themselves a safe space, whereby they are able to achieve some level of cooperation with their parents, while being able to negotiate mobility and sexuality outside the house. Given the context of my study, in the framework I suggest, “voice” can be related to a young adult having the ability to “come out” to family and lead an open gay or lesbian life. The concept of “exit” is slightly more complex given sexual preferences given that some individuals may choose to be out outside the family (to friends etc.) since being in the closet at home might enhance their bargaining power over decision-making. In the following sections, I expand Agarwal’s and Sen’s analysis of perceptions and social constraints to include their impact on young adults’ bargaining over sexuality. Before doing so, I lay out the various ways in which a discussion of sexuality and age adds to the range of factors to be considered in the measure of bargaining power.

#### Adding Sexuality to Gender: Queering Household Economics

While the bargaining models have developed from unitary models to multi-faceted approaches that address the issues of social norms, perceptions, values and gender, they are still not well equipped to explain matters of sexual identity and the impact of age as determinants of intra-household negotiation. Even when attempts have been made to incorporate gender and social norms, the consideration, in most cases, has been in binary terms. Binary division of gender implies the boxing of biological sex and gender stereotypes into the two strict categories of male/man and female/woman. Such a notion makes it difficult to understand individuals as people who are distinct in their identity; who in defining their identities might draw upon traits that may be classified as

“masculine/feminine” or “gay/lesbian/straight” or “dominant/subordinate” or “western/traditional” in some combination or all together. For example, a more butch lesbian might transcend the boundaries of gender-determined physical appearance or a gay older son may not be particularly worried about playing the role of the “man of the house” by curbing the independence of the younger women in the house.

In considering gender and social norms, it is important to keep in mind the complexity of identities and the individual’s choice of acting upon them in different ways under varying circumstances. Hence, the field of household economics must draw from other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and social psychology, to continue to improve ability to understand the logic of the household and family. While the feminist approaches to the household mark a tremendous progress in the field of household economics, formal models are unable to adequately link the effects of sexuality, age and the complex role of identity in general on the bargaining process.

Firstly, even though a typical household considered in all intra-household economics is usually gender-neutral, most analysis and gendered critiques assume a heterosexual relationship at the core of the household. Implicit in these models is the assumption that a man and a woman need to come together to establish a family and have children, and that the children are public goods. The sexuality of children, their contributions, or their bargaining power in the household is rarely considered. While feminists may have made noteworthy contributions by designing models that can be utilized to understand women’s issues in different countries and cultures, across the world, there has been no study or research conducted on what lesbian experiences have been in the bargaining processes given their dual social disadvantage as women and

being part of a sexual minority group. In addition to being a lesbian woman, such an individual might also face an additional set of constraints given that she is unmarried and living with her parents. Also, young gay adults may not necessarily fit into the gendered norms around masculinity as outlined by some feminist economists. Hence, there is a need to analyze the bargaining process as taking place between parents and adult children, as between queer young adults and their access to gay or lesbian support groups, and between young adult's negotiation of sexuality itself.

Secondly, the inclusion of sexual identity into intra-household bargaining models necessitates a problematization of the stereotypical gender-roles at different levels. Feminists have devoted much literature to establish that the difference between men and women in standard economics is resource-driven, while it should actually be both resource-driven as well as norm-driven. However, in stressing the importance of norms in economic choices, feminists have mainly relied upon hetero-norms and have analyzed the household as featuring heterosexual families with similar sexual preferences. It considers limited the notion that the bargaining processes usually takes place between a man and a women, whereby, according to the feminist analysis, the women are usually at a disadvantage. I expand this analysis to emphasize the need for including bargaining between parents and their adult children.

Not only is it heterosexist to assume that men are in tension with women alone in the household setting, given the rising numbers of same-sex household where men and men or women and women live together and partake in the resource allocation process, it also does not account for an analysis of the study of labor division and negotiation processes between two men or women in a household with different economic standing,

perceptions, preferences and identities. Moreover, it does not explain similar tensions as present between parents and their children who may bargain over their ability to be open about their sexuality. The models do not account for the transfer of power or privilege in determining resource allocation that may be linked to income, rent, ownership or property, age or other influential factors. These power differentials are present not only in bargaining between men and women, but also between parents and their children. Chapter four (empirical analysis) of this study will explore these power differentials and tensions in greater detail.

Thirdly, in limiting feminist analysis to the interplay of stereotypical gender roles with social norms, most models run the risk of enforcing a gender bias of a different nature. In hypothesizing the impact of “maleness” and “femaleness” on the bargaining process, they remain confined within the boundaries of a socially-constructed concept of gender and the responsibilities and behavior associated with it. They are unable to incorporate fluidity of gender identity and expression whereby men may choose to behave in manners that may be perceived as “feminine,” and how the expression of gender-non-conforming identity can influence their position in the household. Some gay men may be victims of stereotypical visions of sexuality whereby if they portray an identity that is a hybrid of other socially confined behaviors, they may not be considered “man enough” or “macho enough.” Similarly, lesbian women who are typically classified as femme or butch might have different experience in the household setting due to the intervention of outside stigmas and stereotypes into the family’s conception of their credibility and role in the decision-making processes. Furthermore, the social conceptions confined within gender roles may be at play in same-sex household where a macho man



may take on the role of the man while the other partner is domesticated into assuming the role of “woman.”

Fourthly, the queer analysis requires that the feminist intervention into the institutionalization of socio-economic factors be expanded to incorporate the effects of structural bias towards gays and lesbians. The masculine and, largely, heterosexist construct of the State, the Market and the economically-productive individual may bear an impact on a gay or lesbian person’s ability to gauge and benefit from their “true” economic worth. Not only can they be required by the public economic sphere to suppress their sexuality, they may actually be induced into devaluing their position in comparison to that of other members of the household, simply on the basis of socially-inscribed identity-privilege. On the personal level, they may be subject to Sen’s perception hypothesis in that they may not be able to articulate or truly capture their own needs and preferences in the household or they may choose to be secretive about their sexuality due to the fear of rejection from other household members. There is also the possibility that in their perception of negative responses from their family members, they strengthen their bargaining power by seeking support from gay and lesbian networks. They may also decide not to bargain at all given their ability to be open about their sexuality in specific queer spaces. These factors may not only affect their “voice” in the bargaining process, but also may lead to a distorted calculation of the “exit” options.

Finally, a crucial shortcoming of the intra-household bargaining models is their inability to provide insight into the interplay of power dynamics with social norms, gender and sexuality. Ultimately social stereotypes associated with gender and sexuality label with them in extremely rigid ways. A model that considers the role of different

social norms (norms of gender and sexuality) together may be more precise in explaining the struggles associated with different identities. To illustrate the complexities that I theorize and to show what such multi-dimensional bargaining would look, in the following section, I use the hypothetical case of the Sharma family. I consider specific scenarios to explain the interplay of intergenerational bargaining with access to income and social networks.

### Theory of Kids, Income and Social Networks

Let us consider, hypothetically, the Sharma family: The Sharma family is a middle class family in Mumbai, India. It consists of Mr. Sharma, Mrs. Sharma and their one adult son Rahul. Rahul is twenty-five, gay and works at a call-center. While his income is substantial for himself, and he contributes a part of it to the household budget, Mr. and Mrs. Sharma are not entirely dependent on it. Rahul is not out to his parents and is not sure how to approach them about his sexuality. Rahul faces many choices in terms of negotiating his bargaining power. Using this new framework, we can deconstruct the various types of ways the negotiations between Rahul and his parents can go.

Given that Rahul makes a substantial amount of money through his job at a call-center, he has access to gay clubs, gay-groups meetings, and gay spaces on the internet. Rahul has a boyfriend, who also works at a call-center. Rahul and his boyfriend have an active social life – they are able to go out to dinners, party, shop, and be together whenever they like. For most practical purposes we can assume that Rahul derives a sense of independence from his income that allows him to lead a life of his choice, even in the largely conservative, homophobic Indian setting. He has the ability to move out of his parents' house, but so far he has preferred to stay at home – a choice perfectly

consistent within the Indian cultural norms where families tend to stay together. Since he can make decisions independent of the will of his parents, simplistically speaking, Rahul's bargaining power is a function of his wages.

We can also extend our analysis of Rahul's situation to observe how Rahul's negotiation of his identity outside of the family setting is coming primarily from his connection with the market. He is able to "consume" a certain queer culture through the internet and the urban social scene that allows him to "perform" his gay lifestyle. Given that Rahul is receiving his bargaining power from the market, it may also be true that Rahul is less likely to be motivated to participate in the queer political movement in India to challenge the homophobic policies of the State.

Even though Rahul is not out to his parents and maintains an air of secrecy around his sexuality at home, he continues to live with his parents in their house. An important set of factors that often goes unacknowledged in economic theory of the household are love and concern for the well-being of others.<sup>6</sup> Love is a force not accounted for in classical theories of self-interest and individual agency. Rahul loves his parents and looks at his family as his primary support and security network. He fears hurting them or upsetting them by adding to their insecurities. He is not sure about how the Sharmas would react to his sexual preferences. The Sharmas may be progressive and accepting of their son's choices or they may be influenced by negative stereotypes associated with gay men. Rahul is unsure about the outcomes of his coming out. While he would like to be honest with them, he figures the best solution for him is to continue living his dual-identity lifestyle. Moreover, here is an important, almost reverse scenario from that often

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<sup>6</sup> Some feminist economists do include love and concern for well-being in their analysis. For example see Agarwal (1997) or Folbre (1994).

considered. Instead of worrying about who cares or pays for the kids, in this given situation, Rahul is concerned about who would care for his parents if he were to move out. Given the fact that sooner or later, Mr. and Mrs. Sharma would be dependent on Rahul, his bargaining power would only increase. Therefore, we can see how terms are reversed when considering parent-adult children bargaining processes.

The only bargaining that Rahul is not involved with is that over his sexuality. As long as he has a well-established fall-back position outside the household and a happy family within the household, he does not need to rely on coming out as the only means for exercising his “voice” or performing his sexual identity. His access to social spaces outside and the networks available on the internet offer him a diverse and fulfilling means for pursuing his queer choices and thus let him enter the bargaining process implicitly. One issue that might upset this equilibrium would be if the Sharmas pressured Rahul to get married. At that point he would have the option to come out and/or move out, given his financial independence. He also has the option of entering into a marriage of convenience in order to pacify the pressures at home, help out a lesbian friend in a similar situation, and continue to live his life as he desires. In other words, he has a range of fall-back options, not all of them afforded by his income.

If we were to modify the Sharma family a little bit so that, instead of a gay son, they had an adult lesbian daughter called Radha, we can come up with another interesting set of negotiations. Let us assume Radha has a job in a media and public relations company. Radha is the only income-earning member of the household with both her parents retired and financially dependent on her. Given that Radha is a young, unmarried woman, the terms she is bargaining on are different from those of Rahul. Radha is

primarily concerned with her mobility. Even though she is financially independent, the Sharmas have significant control over where she goes, when she goes and when she returns. The Sharmas' ability to control Radha's mobility stems from the gender norms that surround the women's ability to transcend the private spaces into public sectors. She is living in her parents' home, and they consider that doing so puts her under their rules and expectations, both as a sign of parental respect and her duty as they contribute to her upkeep. In this situation many issues are being bargaining over: gender, mobility and sexuality.

Having a job already allows Radha a certain bargaining power as she is able to channel her mobility through it. A reason to exit the household everyday allows Radha to seek another safe space outside the household that comprises of her lesbian friends and support groups. She is able to negotiate her way through the gender norms by relying on her fall-back position – created by her income, her parents's dependence on her, and the relatively lesser pressures on her to continue the family name or heritage (as they might in Rahul's case). Given her diverse fall-back positions, Radha decides to come out to her parents. While they are not comfortable about their lesbian daughter in the beginning, they make the choice to attempt to come to terms with it an expression of love on their part. While Radha is able to pursue her independent life and choices, her parents continue to be worried about her marriage prospects. Here again, Radha can choose to move out, or continue to resist the pressure to be married using her access to both financial and emotional resources outside the household.

While these scenarios allow us an insight into the types of bargaining taking places between parents and adult gay or lesbian children, in the Indian context, they do

not speak in detail about the confluence of sexuality and class. For example, class may allow both Radha and Rahul a certain agency when it comes to their access to income, internet, support groups, articulation and mobility. However, in conducting my research I was informed of cases when young lesbian couples from lower classes had attempted joint-suicides or eloped as a way of negotiating their sexuality and claiming agency over their lives by either ending them or by pursuing them elsewhere. This is not to suggest that the only option for lower class lesbians is elopement or suicide. Nor is it in any way to affirm lesbians' suicide as an adequate fall-back position, even though it demonstrates collective agency and the ability to publicly act out a contract together – a contract of death. It is merely to highlight the agency that comes from rejecting income as the only source of privilege. Also, in some cases, lesbians from lower classes have greater mobility on account of the family's reliance on wages earned by every member of the household. Therefore in considering women's autonomy as a function of class, it is helpful to imagine a U-shaped curve whereby access to the public sphere and independence may be higher for women in the upper-most and lower-most classes and lower in the middle classes.

The scenarios considered above shed light on the severity of social norms as they interplay in household bargaining processes especially as they interact with gender and class. Therefore, while income may be an important means for defining an individual's fall-back position, it is not the only factor considered in bargaining processes. Familial, social and gender norms play a crucial role and need to be accounted for as well.

CHAPTER III  
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: firstly, to outline the economic history of Indian liberalization, from being heavily state-led to the rapid growth of the private sector and secondly, to trace the emergence of the queer movement and place this research in the context of the contemporary queer political-economy. In the first part of the chapter I focus on the three attempts at liberalizing the Indian economy and the distinct features of these attempts. The second part chalks out the events that led to queer visibility in India against the background of liberalization and changing international development thought.

Economic Reforms in India: Oscillations of Regimentation and Liberalization

India, through its political and economic reforms during the five decades following its independence in 1947, poses as an interesting example for the study of political economy factors affecting development-focused policy in third world nations. The timing, characteristics, underlying conditions and implications of economic reforms in India, given its regional politics, historical trends, and class conflicts make it a special case of the course of market-oriented restructuring. While there are some consistent patterns in the economic growth strategy undertaken by India, there are also some remarkable anomalies. The liberal pluralists and the Marxist schools of thought shed light on the significance of cycles in liberalization and government controls. It is the fear of these oscillations between attempts to free markets and to control them, that has prevented fundamental structural transformation of the economy. Liberalization in India has been made complex by incomplete cycles and deep distrust of the private sector.

The pluralist work reveals that the rigidity of the social structure and the considerable autonomy of Indian states are major factors in determining the pace of reform. By addressing India's diversity of cultures and languages, it relates that large government intrusion is a means to check the uprising of extremist factions. Therefore the extensive involvement of the government is a solution to the magnitude of India's problems. However, the pluralist work fails to explain why, then, there is wide-spread discontent in the government and the why there have been attempts to open the economy. The Marxist school blames political power of influential interest groups (landlords, businessmen, professionals, civil servant). "Structural" Marxists also portray the state apparatus as pursuing its own interests. As discussed later in the paper, the 1985-1987 (second wave) liberalization was a result of the Indian government's inability to raise adequate revenue. The Marxist viewpoint is convincing when India's severe levels of poverty, illiteracy and inequality of income are considered. It fails, however, to account for the presence of a large middle class in India. Furthermore, with the demise of the Soviet model – the Marxist school lost much of its credulity in India (Byres, 1998, p.12).

The central focus of the three waves of liberalization in India was to reduce controls. The government intended to accelerate growth, admitting that its micromanagement was hindering performance. The government's web of controls had created a class of powerful groups who would lose if controls were relaxed. Even after years of debating the prospects of liberalization and after three attempts at implementing it, the public sector remained fairly large in size.

The first attempt at liberalization was made during 1966-68 by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The underlying political economy factors that led Gandhi to devalue the



currency were the 1965 India-Pakistan war that cut off most prospects for foreign aid, the drought of 1965 that reduced exports and the soaring balance of payments crisis (Dennon, 1998, 52). The reforms were also crucial for Gandhi's political standing. Foreign aid was needed for the "green revolution" which was vital for congress party's rural base. There were attempts at major structural reforms. The currency was devalued to prevent surge of imports and to boost exports. As the neo-classical economists suggested, there was a shift in focus from investment as key to growth to efficiency of resource use. World Bank aid was increased. Gandhi's plan, however, fetched wide-spread criticism from the left and from the business community. Her popularity and her votes declined. Gandhi, then, swung the pendulum of reforms in the opposite direction and reversed the course of liberalization. She nationalized banks which in turn led to far-reduced banking efficiency. She also began to strengthen ties with the Soviet Union, which caused disappointment among donors and decreased foreign aid.

The 1985-1987 attempts at liberalization were initiated by Rajiv Gandhi (Indira Gandhi's son). Rajiv Gandhi lessened the licensing restrictions, eased import regulations, boosted exports through tax concessions, raised interest rates on government securities and lowered taxes to reduce tax-evasion. These moves were bold and the liberalization appeared to have transformed the face of the Indian economy. The momentum lost its force soon, and the government deficits and levels of inflation began to rise rapidly. In addition to economic slump, political factors turned against Rajiv Gandhi as his suppression of the LTTE in Sri Lanka and his purchase of artillery from Sweden became publicly known scandals. While Gandhi's reforms were a good idea, in theory, they were not internally (and uniformly) backed. Although economic performance following the

year 1987 was exemplary (10.5% increase in real GDP in 1989), the pendulum began to swing back towards controls as Congress came to be known as a corrupt party not concerned with the problems of the poorest sections of the society (Dennon, 1998, p.53).

The 1991-1994 economic reforms stemmed out of international crisis. Finance Minister Manmohan Singh launched what later became popular as *Manmohanomics* – or the set of economic reforms taking India farthest out in the direction of liberalization and drastically reducing the role of the state. The real GDP grew rapidly in the 1990s. Imports and exports increased substantially in the early 1990s as compared to the 1980s. The dynamics of investment and ownership changed as the private sector grew and the public sector declined. With the economy growing at a slow pace, aid was more effective in raising growth levels.

The reason the 1991-1994 reforms began to eventually stall was because the inherent weaknesses of the Indian economy and its infrastructure were revealed. With an inefficient public sector accounting for more than one-fourth of the GDP contribution, long-term growth was at the mercy of political parties that maintained employment in outmoded companies. When the Board of Financial and Industrial Restructuring recommended that around 150 public enterprises be shut down, by the end of the year 1995 none of them were terminated (Dennon, 1998, p.56).

In looking at the various phases of partial liberalization in India, and the country's gradual embracement of free market forces, it is clear that the intricacies of the political economic structure within India re-cast economic reforms in special way to suit the inherent paradoxes of policy implementation. While liberalization came with its share of

backlashes, it also resulted in curing parts of a largely sick economy and released it (if only partly) from the leashes of the government bureaucracy.

### Rise of Queer Politics in India

“To speak of sexuality, and of same-sex love in particular, in India today is simultaneously an act of political assertion, of celebration, of defiance and of fear” (Narain & Bhan, 2005, p. 2). Queer visibility is rapidly emergent in contemporary India – it is both volatile and hesitant. There is a sense of freedom in the lives of many queer people who in celebrating their recent access to accepting spaces are aware of the sheer fragility of their success. Queer resistance in India takes different forms – alternative interpretation of mainstream Bollywood cinema, public display of affection, coming out to family and friends, or choosing sex/gender, identity and expression (Narain & Bhan, 2005, p.4). These small successes, along with new means for articulation, hold the promise for nation-wide queer organizing in India.

Any talk of sexuality in Indian society is masculine, heterosexual and within the realm of marriage. On the other side of this “normal” desire lie a variety of those desires that are “different,” sometime deemed “unnatural.” The queer movement in India encompasses a large array of desires and identities that come together to challenge the naturalness and inevitability of heterosexuality. Nivedita Menon points out how the Indian left has not fully grasped “the subversive potential of the queer identity” (Menon, 2005):

At its worst, the Indian women’s movement has been and is, homophobic. But even its best response to the question of sexuality has been in the form of “respecting choice”. Such a response leaves unquestioned

heterosexuality as the norm – that is, “most of us are heterosexual, but there are others out there who are *either* lesbian *or* gay *or* B, T, or K.” The alphabets proliferate endlessly *outside* the unchallenged heterosexual space. But if we recognize that this “normal” heterosexuality is painfully constructed and kept in place by a range of cultural, bio-medical and economic controls, precisely in order to sustain existing hierarchies of class and caste and gender, then we would have to accept that we are all, or have the potential to be – “queer” (p.39).

The term “queer,” while untranslatable into Indian languages, serves to help Indian activists use the experience of the struggle and of that term in the West to remind themselves that there are discontinuities and fluidities to the ways in which sexual desire has been experienced, constructed and appropriated in India. The beginnings of scholarship in this area (for instance, that of Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai) point to the existence of many sexual identities in pre-modern social formations in South Asia and to the normalization of heterosexual identity as a part of the processes of colonial modernity.

Suparna Bhaskaran (2004) brilliantly outlines the four varying positions on gay identity and behavior in modern India that variously theorize the relationships among Westernization, sexuality, indigenous Indian sexual histories, and identity. First, there is the homophobic right-wing nationalist response, which claims that homosexuality is a western import/white disease and therefore foreign and unfitting in the Indian context. Second is the position that recognizes that India has a history of accommodating fluid homoerotic spaces, given that it is so extremely segregated by sex and gender that, “in fact, being straight in India is almost queer” (Bhaskaran, 2004, p.97). The third narrative refers to the “global gay” identity, created at the nexus of modernity and globalization, characterized by diaspora and the exchange of ideas. Finally, the fourth position suggests

that pre-colonial same-sex behavior co-exists both easily and uneasily with the postcolonial same-sex identities and that their perpetual tensions maintain the fluidity of identity in the modern and its postcolonial re-configurations. While these four categories of identity classifications are not rigid in themselves and inform each other, they are useful in understanding their corresponding interaction with economic forces.

Who are the Indian queer and how do they fit into the four categories outlined by Bhaskaran? To begin with, there are the *hijras*: men who undergo hormonal treatment, sex-change operations or those who are born hermaphrodites. The *hijra* community has its unique culture and ways of living, its own festivals and gods, and contests the hetero-normative understanding of gender, sexuality and the body. The strength of the *hijra* community lies in its close-knit relationships and support network. Secondly, there are the *kothis*: a feminized male identity, characterized by gender non-conformity. Though biologically male, *kothis* adopt a feminine mode of life, dress, speech and behavior. They come, primarily, from non-English speaking, lower-income backgrounds and identify as passive sexual partners (Gupta, 2005, p.125). Some lesbian women associate themselves with the *sakhi* (meaning female friend/partner), *sakhiyani*, and the like. The middle and upper middle class queers identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. They reside mainly in urban Indian cities and are mainly English-speaking. They have access to gay/lesbian social and political spaces, the internet and queer culture in the West. This class of gays and lesbians will be the focus of my analysis.

Then, there are also the men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSMs). Jeremy Seabrook's discussions highlight a more rural viewpoint on homosexuality in that there emerges a fine line between gay-activity and gay-identity (Seabrook, 1999, p.45). Men

who have sex with men (MSM) he interviews, provide various reasons for their taking part in “homo” sex, not ever identifying themselves as “gay” or “homosexual.” Some of them are married and are unhappy with the sex they have with their wives. Others are happily married and think that by providing their wives with children, they have fulfilled the sexual needs of the marriage and are now free to seek higher pleasures of oral sex in the park. Some are there for money, some because they find women hard to get or too expensive, others think that sex with men is safer in terms of transmission of STDs than with women, and some are there because they see it as a recreational activity.<sup>7</sup> Although most of them are in the park seeking “homo” sex for various reasons, most of them share in common a feeling of guilt and shame. Some feel disloyal to their wives; some feel they are inadequate while others experience sheer shame in enjoying sex with other men. Despite their involvement in such activities, most of them either have never considered being labeled as “gay” or completely deny any connection with their “homo” activity and their being “homosexual” or “bisexual.”

Seabrook’s research raises several important points about the role of a gay identity among the various classes of people in India. While it is an established privilege for those in urban areas, people from rural areas either refuse to acknowledge that they might not be “straight” or fear being labeled lest they might face discrimination within society. As a result, although same-sex activity transcends all classes, races, states, regions of the country, it is difficult to draw generalizations in patterns of identity that is common among all on account of their clashes in perspectives in defining their sexual behavior. Also, as Alok Gupta, gay activist and lawyer, points out, “Natural assimilation

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<sup>7</sup> There is existing queer literature that traces the transmission of HIV/AIDS via MSMs to their wives and children.

of all gay-identities into a single unified category is unrealistic. Gay movements cannot be a catalyst for eradicating class differences.”<sup>8</sup> Since queer struggle is not the same as class struggle, gay movements cannot be the primary catalyst for change. However, queer organizing can take on class differences when it locates itself within leftist politics.

Much of the initial queer organizing in India was concerned with responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Gradually, the movement has shifted away from a discourse strictly based on fighting violence and disease prevention to one that is more rights and identities based. Foucault (1978) identified the moment in the nineteenth century in the West where sexual practices congealed into sexual identities. As in France, in contemporary India, while “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (Foucault, 1978, p.43). The left has taken upon itself to challenge various kinds of gender, social, sexual, regional, caste, class and language-based hierarchies. The gay movement in India is striving to develop points of intersection between the feminist movements and other movements for marginalized groups. Legal challenges that surround queer sexuality in India primarily center on Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. This colonial legislation almost a century and a half old still shapes public policy in India. Section 377 is discriminatory towards sexual minorities; it prohibits their right to equal opportunity, same-sex love, privacy, public safety and legal security. Moreover, it prevents any policy initiative from the government to assist in HIV/AIDS prevention measures. Changes in this homophobic public policy, then, require legal reform or judicial overthrow of its provisions.

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<sup>8</sup> Alok Gupta, human-rights law student and gay-activist, in a personal interview. (Bombay, 16 December, 2003).

Section 377 reads:

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, animal, shall be punished with imprisonment...which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in the section (Bhaskaran, 2002, p.20).

In this context, “against the order of nature” has been interpreted as hierarchical division between natural/unnatural, public/private, heterosexual/homosexual sex in the legal code. Section 377 is an example that the state, law and society have the right to decide that certain sexual acts are “unnatural.” Despite the conceptual invisibility of female sexual autonomy in the overt legalism of Section 377, the law has been used against some women who have wished to live as long-term lovers or friends and create new forms of kinship. However, the gay male community bears the primary brunt of the social discrimination as a result of the law. The queer movement in India aims to challenge the arbitrary and narrow definitions of Indian values, culture and of “natural/normal” desires.

Furthermore, given the absence of separate laws on rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse in India, Section 377 is used by courts to criminalize these behaviors. The power of section 377 is vested the symbolic impact that it has on conceptions and understandings of queer communities in the larger society. This law is not simply a mode of enforcement, but it is an active authority of social norms and morality. The real danger of Section 377 lies in the fact that it permeates all parts of society: the medical establishment, schools, media, the family, and the state. It is part of ordinary conversations in workplaces, families, hospitals and the popular press. Section 377 enables a deep societal repugnance towards queer people and provides legitimacy to the harassment in both public and private. The colonial imposition of language against



sodomy in a range of cultures around the globe is part of the transnational dimension of queer organizing.

Several topics for debate arise from this problematic law. Firstly, the law in itself leaves no room for sex between consenting adults. The consent factor remains irrelevant in general, whether discussing same-sex or opposite-sex relationships. Secondly, debate arises over whether homosexual acts are suspect as a colonial inheritance. During the shift in viewpoint immediately following British Rule, homophobia emerged as a result of the failure to comprehend the complexity of sexual acts and identities. However, after the Indian independence, homosexuality was also added to the lists of cultures and attitudes left behind by the British, and labeled “western” or “un-Indian.” The right-wing claims that homosexuality is a “western” concept become invalid for a rational observer given the explicit mentions and hyper-visibility of alternative sexualities and homoeroticism in the Hindu as well as Urdu Persian texts and the origins of pejorative Indian legal terms in Christian narratives of Sodom and Gomorrah. The existence of this sodomy law also seems particularly incongruent in the post-colonial Indian context given that the British, who created the law, have successfully repealed it in the United Kingdom.

Within the realm of Section 377, another critical public policy problem arises when the law impinges on the ability of human rights and HIV/AIDS activists to pursue awareness and education initiatives in the country. In 1994, in the North Indian city of Lucknow, the local police arrested NGO workers and charged them under Section 377 because they were involved in HIV/AIDS prevention efforts with the indigenous men-

who-have-sex-with-men (MSMs). The arrests in Lucknow led to the national spate of protests by queer activists and spurred the need to push for policy reform.

In the late 1990s the queer movement organized a number of different protests and demonstrations: against the right-wing vandalism and the general controversy surrounding the release of the first Indian lesbian film, *Fire* and then *Girlfriend*, the arrests of HIV/AIDS workers in Lucknow, as well as the police brutality against the *hijra* community. What is both interesting and troubling about these protests and demonstrations is that, over the course of the last ten years, they have featured an overwhelming support by *kothis* and *hijras* (Gupta, 2005, p.137). It has always been the *kothis* and *hijras* marching with banners, representing the entire queer community. As Gupta points out, something seems to have gone wrong with the Internet revolution. While the Internet revolution broke all records given the large numbers of mainly gay men who accessed gay spaces through the web and joined the community, it had limited impact on their politicization. While between 300 and 400 gay men usually attend a GayBombay party, there were barely a handful of them who showed up to protest against the Lucknow arrests. It was only *kothis* and *hijras*, lesbians and women's activists who came in large numbers. According to Gupta, "The assumption that the availability of support and social spaces, as well as the medium of the Internet, will push (if not all, at least a few) gay men into the politics of the movement, has been proven wrong" (Gupta, 2005, p.138). As Sandip Roy, editor of the San-Francisco based South-Asian LGBT Journal *Trikone* notes, even as the Internet allows gay men to find friends and boyfriends, it is putting them in a giant virtual closet (Gupta, 2005, p.138).

As a result of the gradually increasing spaces for lesbian women online, the social space for queer women in urban areas is also increasing. Symphony-In-Pink (SIP) is an excellent example of one such online form of connecting queer women, who actually are able to meet every month at exclusively lesbian parties, potlucks and movie-screenings. In my attempt to gain more lesbian responses to the survey, I attended one such SIP party in January 2006 and was excited to see more than a hundred queer women together in Bombay club. But in talking to the women there I was told that while the membership into the SIP lists was increasing, it was still fairly more difficult for women to be out, to seek support online and to manage to actually attend one of these parties. I will expand more upon this issue of mobility of women in the chapter on empirical analysis.

A more prominent queer culture has emerged out of the internet that has subsumed political expression. Gay-group meetings, parties, gay-clubs, movies, plays and other performances are the media's latest obsession. It is almost becoming fashionable for Bollywood film-makers to include nuances of homosexuality in Hindi movies. For example, the recently released Bollywood blockbuster, *Kal Ho Na Ho* (meaning "tomorrow may never arrive") contains homoerotic references between the two lead actors. The film is a traditional Indian film story featuring a love-triangle set in New York City. Although, the gay romances between the actors are merely for humor, they offer a refreshing break from the stereotypical heterosexually centered Hindi love stories.

However, what remains unique to Bombay and in fact most of India is the presence of the "under ground" gay world. Bombay, a city with more than 14 million people, provides a certain kind of "queer anonymity." Homosexual activity in Bombay is quiet, hidden, ignored, yet omnipresent, loud and energetic, all at the same time (Ratti,

2000, p.9). When observed closely, a mere nod or an eye signal is sufficient for the regular male cruiser in Bombay. Local train stations, sometimes specific platforms, are usually the hot pick up spots for those accustomed to the subtle tricks of male cruising. Women's experiences are relatively subdued, subtle and difficult to trace. Women tend to create communities with their fellow commuters in the "ladies compartment" of the local trains. They share experiences as they chop up vegetables in the train during their commute to prepare for the meal they are expected to cook once they reach home. One of my female interviewees informed me about the tremendous support she found from both lesbian and straight women at her workplace, in local trains, at railway station and grocery stores.

Queer expression as culture is at a highly productive moment. Many queer people are interpreting Indian history, re-writing history, to construct their own communities and tell their stories. One of the most prominent efforts towards applying a queer lens to Indian literature has been by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai. From stories in the *Panchatantra* of ancient India to texts in Kannada, Urdu, Bengali and other Indian languages, the authors demonstrate that same-sex activity has always existed in Indian culture to dismiss the right-wing claim that homosexuality is a "Western import." Publications of this kind bring the hidden and alternative narratives of queer lives into the center of Indian culture, history and politics.

Giti Thadani (1996) examines Hindu mythology and links same-sex romance between women in ancient India to the evidences present in the lesbian impressions on architecture from pre-colonial times. Traces of same-sex eroticism in Indian history are evident in the tales of female interactions, paintings in caves and stone architecture.

There has been a strong attempt to control mentions of homosexuality by heterosexual domestication or by totally eradicating any culture reference to it. Thadani discusses the dual roles played by a woman and the conflicts of interpretations that arise from this “dual feminine.” For example, the usage of the word “sister” in describing the relationship between two women has been used in ways that could mean either blood-related or a female partner. Whenever the relationship between two women has been sexually intimate, there has been a forcible neglect of eroticism between them. Lesbian sexuality was made punishable according to the guidelines provided by Manu. Manu’s work is a famous piece of literature in Hinduism and it laid out the different punishments for different kinds of sexual acts between women.

Control of homosexuality took on a different course when milled between the colonial and national movements within India. British strongly condemned gay activity among their soldiers. Nationalists, on the other hand, sought re-affirmation of the male “masculinity” and authority by portraying women as self-sacrificing, submissive homemakers. Nationalists defaced statues and images depicting two or more females in sexual poses. Mentions of Goddess Kali kissing Krishna’s lover, Radha, were considered blasphemous by society. Ancient texts that feature Radha secretly bathing with her *Sakhis* (female friends) in modern times are interpreted as acts of male seduction for Krishna. This is telling of the right-wing backlash as nationalist propaganda works to silence the slightest sign of opposition from the left. Lack of information and rationale among the Indian politicians becomes evident when they clump together with the liberalization of the Indian economy, “incest, depravity, perversion, aberration, the breaking up of

marriages, pre-marital sex, marital rape, degeneration of Indian morality, easy divorce and even scented condoms” (Thadani, 1996, p.85).

In analyzing the hybridization of Indian diaspora and the formation of the urban queer identity against the background of the rapidly liberalizing economy, the tensions between space, time and identity become evident. The fluidity of sexuality is apparent yet obscure, empowering yet complicated, pervasive yet controversial all at the same time. In the following chapter, I draw on both the notion of fluid identity and its interplay with economic forces to analyze patterns of household bargaining between parents and their adult children.

CHAPTER IV  
EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

At this point in the study, I have laid out the theoretical framework that allows us to understand how bargaining over sexuality takes places between gay and lesbian young adults and their parents. The previous chapter provided context regarding the effects of liberalization on the rise of queer movement in India. After gaining insight into both the theoretical intervention of this study and its relevance given the contemporary socio-economic movements in India, our next task is to implement the theory to analyze the nature of bargaining in a small sub-section of middle class families. The empirical analysis tests the simple hypothesis which predicts that an increase in individual's income leads to greater empowerment. Consideration of factors such as social and gender norms, individual preferences and perceptions, leads me to reject this simple line of causality as I explore alternative ways in which gay and lesbian youth define their fall-back position.

Inspired by the efforts of Agarwal (1997), Kabeer (2004), and others, the empirical analysis presented in this chapter draws on both qualitative and quantitative research methods. I attempt to capture the complex relationship between young people's socio-economic status, their earnings and their willingness and ability to be open about their sexualities. The individual's occupation is used to establish the indirect link between liberalization and income. Empowerment is measured in terms of the individual's ability to be out to her/her parents. After a brief summary of the research methodology utilized, the chapter delves into a description of the sample data and finally into both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data.

In this chapter I will utilize data on gays and lesbians to find patterns in their being out to parents as they are affected by their income, socio-economic class, access to internet and access to gay social and political groups. The chapter is broken into sections – each section analyzing the impact of a particular factor on the autonomy of a young queer individual in India. In order to seek evidence that contradicts my simple hypothesis, I use each of these sections to analyze specific lines of causality. The major lines of causality discussed in detail are those that individually link socio-economic status, income earned, age, occupation, as well as access to social networks and political groups, to empowerment. The analysis considers both the relationships as seen in statistical correlations and in the narratives from interviews. In developing the lines of causality, I pay careful attention to the simplicity of cross tabulations, the gender and class related social structures of constraint and the varying measures of autonomy.

### Methods and Sample Data

The purpose of the survey data is to understand the systematic links between key variables. The interviews allow us to interpret the survey data. Quantitative data measure whether or not a particular characteristic is present in a given sample. It allows us to detect patterns of behavior and to summarize large datasets. Qualitative data measure the degree of presence of a characteristic and capture better the complexities of relationships between factors than quantitative data. Qualitative data are collected through focus groups, interviews, opened ended questionnaire items, ethnographies, observations and other less structured situations. This form of data collection aims to capture descriptive



information regarding behaviors, choices and experiences of individuals or groups, which is difficult to measure or express in numerical terms.

In my study, I use both the quantitative and qualitative data (through surveys and interviews) to gain information about the income, employment, sexuality and level of performance of sexual identity for young adults in mainly lower to upper-middle classes. My methodology is consistent with feminist research and survey methodologies because I have used different methods of data collection to approach my topic from various different contexts and angles. Reinharz (1992) explains the concept of “dual vision” as the most suitable and strategic synthesis of quantitative and qualitative analysis: combining mainstream social science research (validity and objectivity) with principles of feminist methodology (challenging rigid dichotomies and reducing distance between researcher and researched), merging political with the scientific as well as incorporating feminist epistemology, standpoint and dedication towards social emancipation. In rejecting the rigid positivist stance and in utilizing the evidences from different correlations, I have incorporated the feminist “dual vision” of research methodology.

I focused my study on young adults between 18 and 25 years of age. The focus on this particular age group is unique because young adults are transitioning from being dependents to creating their own households. I posit, however, that it is inappropriate to consider adult children as entirely de-linked from parents, especially as the parents themselves transition from being independent to dependent on their children. The patterns of age (in lying between 18 and 30 years) are helpful in many other ways as well. Firstly, people in this age group are either pursuing higher education or have entered the job market. Secondly, they are the ones most likely to have benefited from the internet (in

terms of being able to articulate their sexual preferences and identity or to find communities) and likely to be encountering the pressures to get married. Thirdly, although adults, these are also people who are likely to still have strong emotional and financial links to their families. While the data may not be representative of the entire Indian gay and lesbian youth, they are unique because they offer an opportunity to better understand the links between income and empowerment that lead to alternative means of negotiating sexuality within and outside the realm of the household.

As part of the thesis research, I created a questionnaire to obtain my sample dataset, which was distributed both in the paper-format and on the internet.<sup>9</sup> The questionnaire was tested in the summer of 2005 and subsequently developed in the fall of the same year. The internet version of the survey was promoted through gay and lesbian e-mailing lists such as *GayBombay*, *Khush*, *LGBT-India*, and *Symphony-in-Pink*. The survey was posted online from November 2005 through January 2006 on the survey administering website *SurveyMonkey.com*. I also collected paper responses to the survey while conducting my field work in India during December –January 2006.<sup>10</sup> The paper version of the survey was distributed at lesbian parties as well as gay social and political meetings.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The survey was approved by the Connecticut College Human Subjects Institutional Review Board in early November 2005.

<sup>10</sup> The hypothesis is developed specifically in the context of urban middle class families in India. There is an inherent urban and class bias in the sample because of the focus of the study and the data collection methods I used.

<sup>11</sup> The conditions under which both the online and paper surveys were conducted varied: the internet setting might have allowed for greater privacy, more time and more flexibility in responding to the survey as compared to a public, social setting whereby people responded to the survey while engaging in other activities. The responses from the paper surveys were significantly smaller in number than those collected via the internet. Owing to this small sample size, I decided to merge both the paper and online surveys. I realized this was pertinent because of the preliminary nature of the study; it was an experiment in collecting this unique data and acts as a starting point for more in-depth research in the future.

Table 1: Gender Identity and Sexuality

Sexuality	Female	Male	Gender Non-Conforming	Total
Gay	~	64%	25%	45%
Lesbian	45%	~	50%	14%
Bisexual	32%	23%	~	25%
Straight	18%	11%	~	13%
Other	5%	2%	25%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(n=38)	(n=92)	(n=4)	(n=134)

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

In both the online and the paper surveys together, there are a total of 134 responses by gay, lesbian, bisexual and straight people living in India. The population contains 45 percent gay men and 14 percent lesbians.<sup>12</sup> About 25 percent of the respondents are bisexual with more bisexual women than men.<sup>13</sup> The straight participants account for 13 percent of the sample set while 4 percent of the population identifies with other sexual orientations. I decided to include the category of “other sexual orientation” to allow the participants of my study to have the option to describe their sexuality in their terms, without imposing on them the already created categories of “gay” or “lesbian.”<sup>14</sup> Some of the people who selected the option of “other sexual orientation” identities as “queer,” “questioning,” “sakhi,” “experimental” and “multi-identified.” In order to make the survey more trans-friendly, I had also included the category of “gender non-conforming” which drew four responses, two of who were gay and one lesbian. However,

<sup>12</sup> The survey received responses from more than 10 different cities in India. In addition to responses from the metropolitan cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta and Chennai, there are also some from smaller Indian cities such as Pune, Hyderabad and Indore.

<sup>13</sup> There is controversy about bisexuality; some participants in the intensive interviews suggested that lesbian women may identify as bisexuals because it offers greater economic and physical security. The pressures to get married in some cases can be so strong that women need to have the option to go back into the closet.

<sup>14</sup> In speaking with gay activists in Mumbai during the summer of 2005, I was often challenged in my assumption that all queer people in India fit comfortably into the western created labels of “gay”/”lesbian” given the plethora of alternative identities in the Indian lore (kothi, men-who-have-sex-with-men, hijra and so on). It was after those discussions that I decide to include the category of “other sexual orientations” in my survey.

due to extremely small number of responses in this category, I had to eliminate them from quantitative analysis of this study. Henceforth, the sample is restricted only to gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight respondents.

Many important factors contribute to the reasons for the significantly larger number of gay responses as compared to lesbian responses. In conducting my field work I found that the e-lists had an overwhelming larger number of gay-male members than lesbian-women members. There were more lists that discussed primarily gay-male issues than lesbian issues, and more men reported to have access to the internet than women. This could be because of gendered disparities in men and women’s access to resources. Although some lesbians take part in the political discussions on the e-lists, recently there have emerged e-lists that seek membership from women only.

Table 2: Interviewee Characteristics by Sex and Sexuality

Sexuality	Female	Male
Gay	~	7
Lesbian	3	~
Bisexual	2	1
Straight	1	1
	(n=6)	(n=9)

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

I also conducted 15 structured interviews with gay and lesbian youth from Mumbai, Bangalore, New Delhi and Pune. I contacted some of the interviewees through the online survey and some during my field research over the summer and winter during 2005. I focused on obtaining a more or less equal set of responses from gays and lesbians. Most of the interviewees perceived their class status to be middle-class, and all of them

were English-speaking. Table 2 provides a breakdown of some descriptive characteristics of the people I interviewed in terms of sex and sexuality.

In this section I have provided an overview of both my quantitative and qualitative sample data. This familiarizes us with the characteristics of gender and sexual orientation of the sample population. In the next section, I will provide more in-depth information about the likelihood of the population to be out to their parents, their socio-economic class, age, occupation as well as political affiliation. The following discussion will set the ground for an examination of the various lines of causality that will relate factors these factors (socio-economic class, occupation, political affiliation) to the likelihood that the individual is out to her/his parents.

### Descriptive Analysis of Sample Data

Table 3 describes respondent characteristics by sexuality, age and occupation. Both age and occupation are crucial factors – information regarding age tells us how many of the participants are young adults. Occupational characteristics tell us how many of the youth are employed in sectors that have been influenced by liberalization. This establishes the indirect link between liberalization, availability of jobs and increased income. The majority (43 percent) of the population is between 18 and 25 years while about 31 percent of the respondents are between 26 and 30 years of age. These findings verify that 74 percent of the sample is, in fact, young (between 18 and 30 years) and thus suited for the analytical scope of this study. The main exception is that lesbian women are more likely to be over 30 than both gay and straight men, which suggests that the lesbian social and political scene probably comprises of older women (who may have already

have greater independence) rather than younger women (who have stricter constraints regarding independence, mobility and ability to negotiate sexuality).

Table 3: Age and Occupation by Sexual Orientation

Age group	Lesbian	Gay	Bisexual Women	Bisexual Men	Straight Women	Straight Men	Total
18-25	31%	40%	50%	40%	50%	80%	43%
26-30	37%	36%	17%	30%	17%	20%	31%
30-40	32%	15%	33%	20%	17%	~	19%
Above 40	~	9%	~	10%	17%	~	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Occupation							
Student	16%	18%	17%	5%	17%	20%	15%
Media Information Technology	37%	10%	33%	~	~	~	14%
Marketing	21%	33%	~	17%	17%	40%	25%
Call Centers	5%	8%	8%	28%	~	~	9%
Other	~	4%	~	11%	17%	20%	6%
Total	21%	27%	41%	39%	49%	20%	30%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(n = 19)	(n = 53)	(n = 12)	(n = 20)	(n = 7)	(n = 10)	(n = 121)

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

The process of sample selection prevented me from stratifying the sample by occupation. However, the data on occupation suggest that many of the respondents hold positions directly or indirectly affected by liberalization.<sup>15</sup> About 15 percent of the population consists of students; no significant difference exists among gay, lesbian or straight respondents. Many of the queer women, lesbian or bisexual, are employed in the media sector. This could be attributed to the general conception of the media circles as being more progressive and queer-friendly. Also, jobs in the media tend to offer flexible

<sup>15</sup> I was unable to target those sectors specifically that were most directly affected by liberalization. For example, while I tried to collect responses from call centers, the sample size is not significant enough to focus on a particular sector alone.

work hours that particularly suit women – women are able to work from home, or return home before dark, when it is considered safe for women to travel outside.

As expected, a significant portion of the sample is employed in the information technology sector, especially both gay and straight men. About 6 percent of the respondents work in call-centers; the majority of them are straight with almost equal number of men and women. Call centers serve as a fascinating example of the newly created job owing to liberalization. Despite small number of call center employees in the survey sample, the intensive interviews suggest that call centers provide an open work environment that is particularly attractive to the youth. The call centers pay well, have low eligibility criteria and provide health benefits. Call centers specifically attract young women as they provide pick-up and drop service to enable them to get out of the house easily and safely. The remaining distribution as shown in the table allows for a comparison between the gay and straight men and women - whether employed and independent or students and dependent. A large number of women (21 percent lesbians, 41 percent bisexual women and 49 percent straight women) work in “other” sectors such as non-profit, finance, medicine, fashion and art sectors. This could be because it may be easier for women to get low-paying jobs in non-profit organizations or in the art industry.

Table 4: Socio-Economic Class and Political Affiliation by Sexual Orientation

Reported socio-economic class	Lesbian	Gay	Bisexual Women	Bisexual Men	Straight Women	Straight Men	Total
Lower	~	2%	~	~	~	~	1%
Lower Middle	6%	9%	~	11%	33%	11%	8%
Middle	67%	42%	33%	50%	50%	33%	45%
Upper Middle	28%	43%	59%	39%	~	11%	42%
Upper	~	4%	8%	~	17%	45%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Political affiliation							
Bharatiya Janata Party	~	40%	17%	36%	~	50%	34%
Indian National Congress	67%	51%	67%	64%	100%	25%	56%
Community Party of India	33%	9%	17%	~	~	25%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(n = 19)	(n =53 )	(n = 12)	(n =20 )	(n =7 )	(n=10)	(n =121 )

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

Table 4 describes respondent characteristics by sexuality, socio-economic class and political party affiliation. The data on socio-economic status is self-reported.<sup>16</sup> The gays, lesbians, bisexuals as well as straight men and women are fairly evenly distributed through the middle classes. Not only has the middle class been greatly affected by the liberalization of the economy, in the increased access to disposable income, it has also expanded significantly due to the increased class mobility. With this increased income and upward mobility, the insecurities of the middle class have also grown as they struggle to adjust to their newly earned wealth. Furthermore, in their exposure to the foreign influences, the middle class is struggling to negotiate its cultural values in this new era of capital, social influx, and right-wing backlash. More women's entry into the workforce disturbs the cultural and traditional norms regarding women's restriction to the private

<sup>16</sup> Though the data is self-reported, it provides insight into the vast majority of participants who lie in the middle/upper middle classes (as expected given the data collection methods).



sphere. As women navigate their way through the post-industrial economy, they gain access to resources that allow them to challenge social restrictions on their mobility, freedom and choice. The shifting of gendered imbalances further threatens the heterosexual and patriarchal middle class family.

I included the question on political party affiliation in the survey to gain a sense of the political attitudes of the respondents, their preferences of national parties and their location on the political spectrum. This was because, through political attitudes, I wanted to learn whether the sample was liberal or conservative, its level of political awareness, and how the respondents prioritized their social and political beliefs. The results, as seen in Table 3 are as important as they are unsurprising. Both gay and straight women do not associate with the right wing Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP is considered responsible for the much of the backlash against queer politics as well as issues relating to rights of women and religious minorities in India.<sup>17</sup> About 40 percent of gay men associate with the BJP along with 36 percent bisexual men and 17 percent bisexual women.

The relatively higher numbers of men associating with the conservative party could be reflective of the right-wing leaning, more conservative gay men. These men have recently been under the critical eye of many queer scholars in India. The right-wing gays are strongly influenced by the fundamentalist Hindu propaganda and attempt to mainstream their queer lives in ways consistent with such ideology. They may also replay class and gender hierarchies within queer work – subjecting the *kothis*, *hijras* or lesbian

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<sup>17</sup> Examples of this backlash are the burning of the theaters that showed the first mainstream Indian lesbian film, the Hindu-Muslim riots and the propaganda relating to Hindutva (a Hindu way of life for everyone).

women to do the lower level outreach work while securing the higher-paying, administrative level positions for themselves.

The majority of the respondents associate with the Indian National Congress, a center-left coalition that in the 2004 elections, in a surprise result, returned to power. While it suffers from bureaucratic biases of its own, the INC has been dedicated to addressing issues of diversity, intersectionality and classism in Indian economic and public policies. It is involved in creating new jobs for those unemployed in the lower classes, anti-discrimination policies to protect the Muslim minority and establishing friendly relations with the Pakistani government. Most of the women of the sample affiliate themselves with the INC (67 percent lesbian and bisexual women, and 100 percent straight women). Approximately half the gay men and 25 percent straight men associate with the INC. The remaining one-third of the lesbians, a small number of bisexual women, a fourth of straight women, associate with the Communist Party of India which has recently developed a progressive new platform to seek women’s vote and the small but significant queer vote.<sup>18</sup>

Table 5: Percentage of Queer Population Out to Family & Friends

Out to one or more people*	Female	Male	Total
Lesbian/Gay	59%	57%	57%
Bisexual	32%	11%	17%
Total	91%**	68%	74%
Out to parents			
Lesbian/Gay	29%	16%	19%
Bisexual	23%	1%	7%
Total	52%**	17%	26%
	(n=31)	(n=82)	(n=113)

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

\* = Incidence different at the 95% confidence level ( $\chi^2$  test statistic)

\*\* = Incidence different at 99% confidence level ( $\chi^2$  test statistic)

<sup>18</sup> Though few in number, the queer votes are significant for the relatively small and aspiring-to-be progressive Communist Party.

Table 5 describes how many of the gay, lesbian and bisexual people in the sample are out. The table is divided into two sections to contrast the people who are out to anyone in general (as long as they are out to at least one person) with those who were out to their parents. We can see that the respondents are more likely to be out to siblings, gay or straight friends than to their parents: 74 percent of the population is out to at least one person, while only 26 percent people are out to their parents. It is not surprising that respondents are less likely to be out to their parents because of the strong influence of social norms, fear or rejection or fear of being ousted from the family support network. This raises questions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of using “out to parents” as a measure of bargaining power. While it allows us to capture, to an extent, the autonomy of the individual in being able to be open about her/his sexuality, it maybe restricted in its ability to explain other forms of bargaining. For future research in this field, an alternative way to measure bargaining power across both straight and queer youth could be there ability to resist the pressure to have an arranged marriage or their ability to move out of the family house and live independently.

Women are more likely than men to be out both in general and to parents. That about 91 percent of the women are out to at least one person is remarkable given the gendered constraints on women’s sexuality in India. This result could be attributed to the fact that in the tremendously patriarchal and patrilineal Indian society the gay male population could be under immense pressures to get married and/or to reproduce in order to carry on the family name, and to their better ability to be closeted. Not only do men have greater access to gay support networks, they also have greater mobility and access to resources that enable them to maintain a gay lifestyle of their choice without having to

come out. The dynamics of bargaining play out differently for women - in having to negotiate sexuality, they have to first counter the social stigmas surrounding gender roles and the corresponding notions of behavior, duty and mobility.

The next few sections explore the correlations between age, income, occupation, social activity and political participation on the ability to be out. The characteristics of the sample as discussed above are already intriguing. We know that the respondents are mainly young and come from middle class families. They work in a range of private sector jobs and likely to have been impacted, in some way, been impacted by the liberalization of the economy. Most of the women identify with the center-left political party, INC, while the men are spread through the INC and the right-wing BJP party. However, we do not know how each of these characteristics influences an individual's ability to be open about her/his sexuality. While the survey data may suggest that having a job in a multinational company might place the individual in a better position to have access to resources and greater bargaining power, the interviews might provide contradicting information. For example, female interviewees working for local media firms said they preferred working for national firms given their increased role in challenging the social influx caused by rapid liberalization. The following sections explore these complexities in greater detail to problematize the simple hypothetical relationship of income with ability to be out.

#### Status, Earned Income, and Autonomy

Does economic liberalization lead to more income for young adults, which in turn leads to more autonomy for the gay and lesbian youth? As I argued in the preceding

chapters, the link between income and bargaining power may not be straight-forward. In this section I will shed light on the complexities that surround parent-child bargaining over sexuality to bring out the problems in placing too much emphasis on income as the most suitable measure of bargaining power. Instead bargaining power is also a function of gender, sexuality, socio-economic class, age and social networks of support.

In order to explore the neoclassical hypothesis of income's relationship with bargaining power, I have relied on two different measures: household income and individual income. Reported household income categories are used as a measure of class, to determine the patterns of queer people who are out to their parents in different socio-economic groups. Household income was reported with greater frequency than individual income.<sup>19</sup> The test using individual income is not very strong because the data are missing in a fair number of responses. That more respondents provided information about household income instead of individual income is surprising. After all, it can be assumed that each individual would have a more accurate perception about her/his own income than that of the family. However, keen awareness of social status as a function of household income may make the youth aware of income (and possibly future inheritance). It is also possible that respondents are not earning income or are not comfortable disclosing it. Approximately 40 percent of the respondents did not report their individual monthly income. Women (lesbians, bisexuals and straight) were less likely to report their income than men. This could be attributed to their being a financial dependent, not being comfortable disclosing their income, or not being able to value their unpaid labor. A large number of students (both gay and lesbian) in the sample are financially dependent and did not report income. Furthermore, the lower and middle

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<sup>19</sup> Less than 10 percent of responses were missing.

classes were less likely to report their income than upper classes. This could be because of their embarrassment to disclose their poverty. I use the category of “out to parents” instead of “out to anyone in general” to focus in on the ways in which the gay and lesbian youth is negotiating sexuality at home.

**Table 6. Reported Monthly Household Income by Sex and 'Out to Parents'**

	Female		Male		Total
	Out	Not Out	Out	Not Out	
Up to Rs.10,000	13%	14%	5%	16%	12%
Between Rs.10,000-50,000	53%	64%	42%	53%	49%
More than Rs.50,000	33%	21%	53%	32%	39%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(n=15)	(n=14)	(n=19)	(n=57)	(n = 114)

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

Table 6 describes, by sex, the patterns of the queer youth being out to their parents, given their reported monthly household income as a proxy for their socio-economic class. Women are more likely than men to be out to their parents. One reason why more women are out than men could be the age composition of the sample; women are older than the men in the sample, thus may be better experienced with navigating through social norms against expression of sexuality. In addition to age, there also may be different social pressures facing women and men that may place men in a situation where by they have more “at stake” in coming out than women. Furthermore, the women interviewed were more inclined to view both their gender and sexuality in a political context which emphasized coming out and gaining social visibility. For women, social constraints around sexuality are closely linked with those surrounding gender; therefore, it may be that in resisting the restrictions levied by gender on their independence, they also openly resist compulsory heterosexuality. For men, in many cases, so long as they

were able to find a social niche that was progressive enough for their sexual preferences and lifestyles choices, political expression or need to come out was not of immense concern. Men did not have the same gendered constraints on their independence that women had.

In the case of gay men, while the majority of them are not out to parents, the likelihood of their being out increases as we climb up the monthly income/economic class ladder. This finding is consistent with the hypothesis that people in the higher classes with greater disposable income and access to resources are in a better position to be out. It is not surprising to see that only 5 percent of the men in the lower class are out, given the stigma around non-conformity in the lower classes and strong pressures to focus on issues of income, subsistence and household maintenance. As an activist in Bangalore pointed out to me, being out in India is a class privilege that the lower classes do not have and do not necessarily desire. While the *kothis*, *hijras*, or the gay male sex-workers are confronted with the consequences of the visibility of their sexuality in public spaces, they have also traditionally co-existed as those with a certain behavioral trait rather than an indigenous sexual identity. This is also the case with the straight youth which rarely organizes under a unified heterosexual identity. There is also the class critique of the so-called “western” phenomenon of “coming out,” and in some cases such outing is not considered to be empowering in the Indian context. Moreover, issues such as economic survivability are likely to take precedence over sexuality for many lower class gay men, who are unwilling to threaten their already limited access to resources.

In the case of queer women in the lower classes, approximately 13 percent of the respondents are out, significant more than gay men in this socio-economic class. This

contradicts the simple hypothesis that income is the most suitable measure of bargaining power. This result does not conform to the assumption that all individuals in the upper middle classes have greater freedom and autonomy. It appears that men in the upper income classes may have more freedom than women, but that women in the lower income classes may be better able to practice their sexuality (thus having more freedom than men). This finding necessitates a discussion of issues of class, agency, gender norms, and mobility. It is possible that as we go down the class strata, gender norms become weaker in that in lower classes women may be required by circumstances to work, and thus have greater autonomy. Ironically, women in the lower classes maybe less vulnerable because their parents may not impose severe pressures of marriage in order to save the money for dowry.

Ruth Vanita (2005) in her recent publication discusses cases of lesbian marriages and joint suicide attempts among lower class lesbians in different parts of India. Vanita describes the joint suicide attempt by two young women from South India who could not bear their imminent separation (Vanita, 2005, p.131). Even in my interviews with lesbian women I heard stories of lesbian couples from poor families who eloped despite their unstable financial situation and managed to find support from social networks to eventually gain access to means of survivability. These narratives highlight a distinct sense of agency: an agency that comes from a strong desire to transcend social barriers irrespective of gender or class and from courage that allows them to act without waiting for financial security. Such actions by women from lower classes counter Sen's perceptions hypothesis because they serve as examples of how women's perception of their fall-back position may not be the only way to capture their decision-making ability.



As Agarwal posits, their voice or exit options may come from their personal determination to exercise agency despite not being able to view their exit options accurately. Women may prefer to die together rather than living a life of subordination. For these lesbian women, income is not the sole measure of alternatives outside the household. Moreover, the complexity is not limited to sexual behavior or identity, but differs across socio-economic strata. It is the subordination created by their overall vulnerability as female, lesbian, young and dependent that provides the agency for some women to elope or commit suicide. Such agency is not class-sensitive and beyond the scope of simple linear relationships.

For many years, the ability to be out has been the privilege of the English-speaking, foreign-traveled, internet savvy, upper class men in urban India. In their access to tools for organizing and articulation from the West, the upper class gay men have been successful in gaining visibility. The social scenes in most Indian cities consist primarily of high income gay men. The data presented in Table 6 suggest that socio-economic status may affect the autonomy of men and women differently. However, it is often reported that the women who participate actively in the queer social scene are from higher status families. This also suggests that the parents in these classes are more likely to be educated, and exposed to the foreign influences that have sparked the gay movement in India. In such a context, it is not entirely surprising to see the high ratio of upper class women who are out to their parents. In gaining access to income, women are able to negotiate sexuality within the household on their own terms and in many cases are able to resist the pressure to get married. Given their financial independence, they are able to develop for themselves a safe space that could feature support from parents,

vulnerability of parents due to their financial dependence, or their bisexual/bi-safe fluid identity – all markers of the exclusive terms (in addition to disposable income) on which they are able to bargain.

That 32 percent of the gay men in the upper class are not out is suggestive of many possibilities. Gay men in this class, owing to their access to a socially-active gay lifestyle outside the house, are able to date, attend parties, or even move out of the house and live separately from parents. While being out marks a characteristic autonomy for the queer, it may not be the only indicator of autonomy – when identity can be performed through social means that do not require explicit outing, and when outing may be costly to reputation or access to resources, it is less likely that queer people would choose to come out. This is a limitation of using measuring bargaining power solely in terms of the ability to be out. This measure does not capture other means of bargaining that do not require explicit disclosure of sexuality to parents or family. Being out can be understood as a more political stance, when it involves parents and the close-knit family structure, and can draw significant backlash. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, being out for men in upper classes can also be difficult given what they might have at stake, in terms of the opportunity cost of losing a well-paying job, social status and access to resources.

The Indian middle class is in an extremely volatile moment given the fast-paced changes taking place in the society, economy and politics of the nation. Much is emergent at the nexus of such global forces as they meet with the cultural forces of the middle class. In this moment of social influx, there emerges a crucial critique of capitalism. The discourse about capitalism is decentralized by the gravitational pull of the family, the

cultural norms and fluid identities. This non essentialist approach to capitalism contests the simplistic conception about the power of markets and the virtues and evils of capitalism. Therefore, the hypothesis of income's role in determination of bargaining power does not hold given the significance of other factors. However, before rejecting the hypothesis completely, let us examine closely the extent to which income impacts the ability of the youth to be open about their sexuality.

Table 7. Reported Monthly Earnings by Sex and 'Out to Parents'

	Female		Male		Total
	Out	Not Out	Out	Not Out	
Upto Rs.10,000	14%	44%	20%	25%	25%
Between Rs.10,000-50,000	86%	56%	67%	67%	68%
More than Rs.50,000	~	~	13%	8%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(n=7)	(n=9)	(n=15)	(n=40)	(n=71)

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

The role of income in determining bargaining power is undermined by the following factors: insecurity of the middle class, right-back backlash, close ties among family members, as well as gender differences in viewing exit options. Let us consider these factors in some detail. Firstly, liberalization has most strongly impacted the middle class as it has widened income inequality and led the middle class to higher levels of vulnerability and insecurity. Moreover, the middle class is also struggling to filter out what the right-wing labels as “Western corruption of Indian culture.” With middle class parents dealing with such insecurities, many young gays and lesbians are tempted to go back into the closet so as to avoid heightening household tensions by throwing in the element of alternative sexuality. As one of my interviewees brilliantly articulated, liberalization has created a platform for both capitalist and right-wing conservatism

ideologies. These ideologies take form of gay-bashing, cyber-monitoring, as well as the arrests of same-sex couples under Section 377, that prevent gay and lesbian youth from being open about their sexuality.

The second factor that weakens the income hypothesis is the close knit family system. Many of the interviewees described strong connections with their family irrespective of their family's attitudes towards their sexuality. The gay and lesbian youth fear rejection or loss of support from their family members upon coming out. The cultural norms across socio-economic strata dictate that members of a family live together in the same household until marriage (and sometimes even after marriage). The family becomes the ultimate system of social security, support and love, and this connection creates barriers for outing oneself. In such a setting, people may choose to negotiate sexuality in different ways whereby income or being out may not be the sole indicators of an individual's bargaining power.

These findings challenge the assumption that individuals behave without consideration of others. The effort to capture the autonomy and freedom of sexual minorities is not straight forward, and the measure I have chosen is restrictive. One of my interviewees mentioned how he was comfortable in the duality of his lifestyle as long as he was able to make sure his family was not being subject to the consequences of his personal choices. His point highlights a powerful interpretation of priorities and negotiation in ways that work around the cultural norms so as to prevent families from the pressures and insecurities of dealing with a gay or lesbian child.

Another example of compromises made by queer individuals to maintain their close relationships with their family members is of one of my gay male interviewees,

Ram.<sup>20</sup> Ram, who has a well-paying job at an American-owned call-center in Mumbai, described his on-going negotiations with his father. Despite being financially independent Ram said he preferred staying at home even though his father did not approve of his lifestyle or his boyfriend. In fact, Ram consulted psychiatrists as well as local saints and witches who all attempted to “cure” him of his “homosexuality,” in order convince his father of its genuineness. Interestingly enough, the father reciprocated by attending gay group meetings to learn more about his son and others like his son. Here, liberalization benefited both the son and the father; the son was empowered through his job at the call center to be persistent about discussing his sexuality. The father on the other hand was able to draw on the resources provided by non-governmental organizations which themselves had benefited from liberalization. Such close ties between parents and young adults given the social and cultural constraints lead to creative ways of finding a common ground that may work for all involved. It can also ultimately lead to greater closeness and stronger family bonds.

Thirdly, women are more likely to face different struggles and constraints because of the inherent gendered conceptions that influence bargaining processes. For lesbian women working in this new post-industrial era, the terms of negotiation are different than those for men. Not only are women looking to stall the pressure to have an arranged marriage, they are also seeking mobility through their jobs (especially through night-jobs in call-centers). By using work as an alibi to get out of the house, lesbian women have greater access to queer socio-political networks, without having to continuously bargain over the permission to leave the house. Lesbian women in urban cities are also challenging the gendered hierarchies in queer organizing and in the political rights

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<sup>20</sup> Name changed in order to maintain confidentiality.

debates. However, women who challenge norms face tremendous resistance. Even though women are able to gain more independence through jobs and a regular income, they are still considered “loose” women for going out at night.

Along the lines of gender, there were two very interesting stories by gay men who had come out to their mothers. Both had, in different ways, underestimated their not-so-literate, non-English speaking mothers all along for their simplicity and naiveté. When they came out to their mothers, they were surprised and touched by their mothers’ brilliant articulation of their sons’ sexuality. Not only did these mothers understand their sons’ identities, they also came up with ways to take part in the household negotiations by standing up for their sons’ preferences. This led me to think about the “subversive mother” in the Indian middle class who is often considered ill-equipped to deal with such complexities whereas she often emerges as able to consolidate all these seemingly contradictory forces in simple, over-arching and extremely progressive ways. Moreover, empowerment of women in general may also affect ability to be out if mothers are more likely than fathers to accept their children’s sexuality.

In analyzing the role of gender norms as they counter the income hypothesis, the examples above highlight parents’ perspectives regarding bargaining over their child’s sexuality. Parents may also gain access to resources made available by liberalization and channel them to be more progressive. For example, middle class families may become more aware of issues surrounding homosexuality, through the internet, foreign television, media and international news. Even if some of them are not accepting of homosexuality at once, they may be able to seek support through social networks created to help parents

of gay children. Also, mothers, in their struggle to challenge gendered constraints during their lifetimes, may be more sensitive to the issues facing their gay or lesbian child.

In examining the gender and class related social structures of constraints on bargaining over sexuality, we can capture the influences of support networks, social and safe spaces, and the market. Just as the measure of bargaining power and fall-back position can be problematized, so can be the measures of autonomy, as each individual negotiates her/his sexuality differently (and usually in consideration of other members of family or kinship circles). On a closer look at these individualized means of bargaining, we can deepen our understanding by analyzing the role of age and occupation on autonomy. Age of an individual marks their likelihood of being dependent on their parents which in turn may impinge on their ability to be open about their sexuality. Occupation can tell us to what extent the individual has access to resources that might help enhance her/his autonomy, confidence and fall-back position.

#### Age, Occupation and Autonomy

Relationship between age, occupation and ability of individual to be out to parents helps to understand the extent to which older children are more autonomous. In introducing parent-adult child bargaining to the models of the household, this study considers children as autonomous, income-earning and decision-making members of the household. Young adults bargain over their independence, mobility, gender identity, sexuality and lifestyle choices, within the constraints levied by their access to resources. In this section, I look at the extent to which age influences the decision and ability of an

individual to be out to her/his parents and how perception of fall-back positions may vary given the kind of occupation this individual has.

Table 8. Age and Population Out to Parents

	Female		Male		Total
	Out	Not Out	Out	Not Out	
Between 18 and 25 years	30%	43%	24%	43%	39%
Between 26 and 30 years	40%	17%	47%	34%	34%
Between 30 and 40 years	30%	40%	29%	24%	27%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(n=17)	(n=23)	(n=17)	(n=89)	(n=146)

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

In Table 8 we can see that male and female young adults between the ages of 26 and 30 are most likely to be out, while those between 18 and 25 years are the least likely. Here again, women are more likely to be out than men, a consistent finding for reasons discussed above. For men 43 percent of those between the ages 18 and 25 are not out. This could be attributed to the fear of young men of losing the image and privilege that comes with their gender stereotypes associated with masculinity. It can also result in losing access to resources that young men may have on account of their being dependents on their family. For men between 26 and 30 years of age, there is higher likelihood of being out which could be because of their possible financial independence, greater comfort level with their own sexuality, or increased access and contact with gay support outside the household. In general, it may also be true that older adults may have more maturity and certainty about sexuality than those who are younger. Furthermore, there is also the likelihood that older adults have parents as dependents on them, thereby increasing their bargaining power.



For young women, while similar fears of rejection and losing access to resources exist, there is also the pressure to get married before they get “too old” to be a “desired catch.” In trying to counter the constraints that arise from gendered social norms, young women are sometimes able to channel their coming out as lesbian to enhance their independence and mobility. This is a strong reason why women between ages 18 and 30 are significantly more likely to be out than men. It is a strong political stance for young women to come out as being lesbian, as rejecting compulsory heterosexuality and as denying the need to have a man in their life. Coming out demands that these women now be considered as independent individuals rather than as dependents of men in their lives (father, brother, husband or son); most importantly, it problematizes sex/gender roles in a way that lesbian women can sometimes use to strengthen their fall-back position. Unlike men who are at a losing end when coming out as gay, women sometimes benefit from the “masculine” stereotypes associated with lesbian women, to the extent that some young lesbian women, particularly those more butch, are reclaimed by their parents as their “sons.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, in coming out as lesbian, women are able to prolong the negotiations over marriage, until they are independent and able to seek outside support.

Some of the young men and women I interviewed, who drew a monthly wage and who were primary bread-winners of the family, used their income to their advantage to come out; knowing that the financial dependence of the family will make it less likely for the family to want to shun the financier of the household. However, for young adults, financial dependence of family on their income can also result in their reluctance to be out given the existing insecurities of the middle class family. Families might become over

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<sup>21</sup> This information is anecdotal from interviews conducted with the co-directors of the Humjinsi Lesbian Helpline in Mumbai. Humjinsi is a lesbian support group in Mumbai, where I interned the summer of 2005.

protective about this only child and means of survivability and curb his/her freedoms in order to prevent any retaliations or deviations from the social norm. Such factors relating to age can then be analyzed in a slightly different light, as individuals out or not, seek an outlet for their

Table 9. Occupation and Population Out to Parents

	Female		Male		Total
	Out	Not Out	Out	Not Out	
Student	12%	11%	10%	18%	15%
Media	41%	34%	16%	3%	13%
Information Technology	18%	5%	26%	31%	26%
Marketing	~	11%	11%	9%	8%
Call Centers	~	~	11%	3%	4%
Others	29%	39%	26%	36%	34%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(n=17)	(n=18)	(n=19)	(n=87)	(n=141)

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

In Table 9 we can see that, approximately 41 percent of the lesbian women working in the media sector are out. This finding was clearly articulated by one of my lesbian interviewees, who is a journalist at a national newspaper. She explained that over the last ten years, with the liberalization of the economy, the Indian media had unprecedented contact with the West. Against this moment of increased access to information, when the first controversial Indian lesbian film was released, it attracted immense political attention from the activists, politicians and the larger public. The Indian media, for the first time was forced to pick a side and to make a statement about homosexuality in India. Support from organizations in the West played an important role as the media openly embraced the queer cause in India and became a crucial vehicle for queer visibility. Since then the media circles have developed an image as being progressive, diverse and accepting of difference of class, gender and sexual orientation.

As one of my interviewees said, "...it is considered *uncool* to be homophobic in media circles...if you have a problem with homosexuals you cannot say it aloud anymore...the queer are now the dominant sub-group."

A comparison of media related jobs with the call center jobs allows us to analyze the different national and multinational characteristics of the workplace that influence an individual's ability to be out. While the Indian media sector is considered progressive and attractive for young queer people, so are jobs in international call-centers where the queer feel safe in the non-discrimination policies that explicitly include language around gender and sexual orientation. In the field of information technology (IT) which has been most influenced as India's export of software and computer-based services are increased multifold, queer people are able to seek similar outlets for open expression of sexuality. As Table 9 shows, 18 percent of women and about 26 percent of men in the IT sector are out, along with 11 percent of men working in call centers.<sup>22</sup>

When the workplace provides an inclusive environment, young people are better positioned to be out given that they not only have access to monthly income; they do not have to fear losing their jobs.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, they have access to various resources that allow them to choose their lifestyles without social barriers. Such confidence has the trickle-down effect as it transforms into their ability to be out at home, using the refuge they receive from their income and work environment. However, while jobs may provide

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<sup>22</sup> The number of responses to the question on occupation was relatively small with very few women working in the call-centers and in the marketing sector to allow for a gender-based analysis. The analysis for more female students out as compared to male students stems back to the reasons behind why young women in general are more out than men, discussed in sections above.

The category of "other" jobs included medicine, finance, government and non-profit all of which individually drew few responses and did not offer a strong connection with liberalization of the economy.

<sup>23</sup> While not every job in the IT sector provides a liberal non-discrimination policy, most jobs provide their employees with access to the internet, to international news and media. Queer people are able to use these resources to find friends, partners and social networks either online, or in their own cities.

social empowerment, it is not necessary that social satisfaction translates into political action. A closer look at patterns of social activity and political participation allow us to critically analyze the (de) politicization of the middle class youth.

### Social Networks, Political Participation and Autonomy

In this section, I will explore the queer population's association with social networks and their tendency towards political participation to discuss whether and how performance of identity and political activism are related. I do this by examining the likelihood that an individual who is socially and/or politically active is out to her/his parents. In this section I will discuss the kinds of identities that income can buy and how they translate into fall-back positions. I will also consider the consequences of empowerment drawn from solely from the market to gain insight on how empowerment translates into political activism targeting the state. I use the data on men and women who are socially active to compare with how many of them are also politically active and to what extent. I measure varying degrees of political activism that take into account the individual's awareness of queer political issues such as the movement against Section 377 and participation in queer protests, rallies and campaigns against the state. Through the question on social activity I was able to gain a sense of the various social groups, across the country that queer women and men are a part of. The names of the social groups help identify the key characteristics of the group that draw queer membership.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Most of the people in the survey stated that they were members of mainly social groups such as GayBombay, Good As You (GAY), Symphony-in-Pink. This helped me understand what kind of social scene the queer were seeking and how depoliticized this scene was.

Table 10. Social Activity, Political Involvement and Population Out to Parents

	Female		Male		Total
	Out	Not Out	Out	Not Out	
Socially Active	82%	27%	68%	42%	50%
Politically Active	59%	27%	68%	38%	44%
Socially and Politically Active	53%	18%	42%	24%	30%
	(n=17)	(n=22)	(n=19)	(n=57)	(n=115)

Source: The Survey on Sexuality, Liberalization and Bargaining Power, 2005

Table 10 shows how many queer women and men, who are socially active, broadly socially satisfied, are out to their parents. It does the same with those who identify as being politically active.<sup>25</sup> The rationale behind the breakdown of data in this manner is gain insight into the extent to which social network and political spaces influence an individual's bargaining positions.<sup>26</sup> In the case of women, we see that 82 percent of the women who are socially active are out to their parents. Among men, 68 percent of those socially active are out. This could be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, in the sample, most of the female participants are out to parents while men, in general, are less likely to be out. Secondly, social support from the gay or lesbian community might reduce their fear of coming out to family. Thirdly, as a few interviewees informed me, some women and men who are socially active are able to access the social scene because their families live in another Indian city. Along with the freedom that comes from living away from family, also comes the empowerment to be out, because the family pressures are less apparent when the family is not close by.

<sup>25</sup> I used the phrase socially satisfied, to strengthen my argument regarding depoliticization that occurs out of lack of need to challenge the state, when the market is able to provide various outlets for queer life and expression. The socially active measure contains information not just on the queer sample's participation in social groups and meetings but also on their ability to date, go to clubs and so on.

<sup>26</sup> I acknowledge here that similar data on the straight respondents is missing from my study to enable me to conduct a comparative analysis between gay and straight young adults. However, from the few questions the survey asked of the straight people, I know that only 6 of them considered themselves to be politically active.

Approximately 59 percent of the women who are politically active are out to their parents along with 68 percent of the men. To be politically active can necessitate a public visibility which a queer individual can risk, usually only after being out at home. There are some people who believe that political transformations take place in small steps that begin by helping change the attitudes of close family members and friends. Also, those who may consider themselves politically active may not always be at protests or other public events. Their political contribution may be in form of political discussions, online forums, signature campaigns and the like, that may not draw attention to them as being gay or lesbian. It is also possible that those who are politically active belong to the lower or higher socio-economic classes; they may not be able to come out because of high opportunity costs associated with being open about their sexuality or may not feel the need to explicitly be out to their parents.

Of those respondents who are both socially as well as politically active, 53 percent of the women and 42 percent of the men are out to their parents. One reason could be that people who are able to participate both socially and politically might draw confidence in themselves and in their sexual preferences that enables them to open up to their parents. However, that men are less likely to be out than women could be because not everyone who is socially satisfied, maybe politically active. Relating back to the point I discussed in chapter three: income and internet are pushing primarily the gay men (and increasingly the lesbian women) into a giant closet inside which they are able to find friends, boyfriend and girlfriends, and other social networks, without feeling the need to be visible or to engage in political dialogue. As Gupta (2005) mentions in his example of

the protests against the Lucknow arrests, it is mainly the *kothis*, *hijras*, some lesbians and a few gay men who came out to protest.

As people gain access to the “pink rupee,” the role income plays in being able to perform a certain sexual identity becomes a prominent choice of lifestyle. People are able to “buy” a certain mainstream “gay” identity that is marked by consumerist ideas, and the need to conform and assimilate into the Indian culture. As my supervisor at Humjinsi commented, “...the SIP list is full of young lesbian women with well-paying jobs. They date, go out to clubs, shop and in the process everything about their life becomes completely mainstreamed – even their sexuality is mainstreamed to the extent they enact heterosexual dichotomies of butch-femme, kothi-panti and masculine/feminine.” Under liberalization, lesbians and gays engage first as consumers, and only secondarily as citizens.

Overall, both gays and lesbians are more likely to be socially active than politically active, although they may seek empowerment from either of these spheres when they decide to come to their parents. Social freedom may not always translate into political expression. When it does, it may not be representative of the issues faced by the entire community. Moreover, social freedom may not be entirely empowering when it is primarily a function of income and the market. With repressive policies such as Section 377 in place, the State can impose restrictions on the level of independence provided by the market.

There is a crucial lesbian critique of queer organizing in India in the way it is largely masculine and ridden with gender and class hierarchies to the extent that it alienates a large section of non-English-speaking men and women from lower class

backgrounds. Lesbian issues in India (or anywhere else for the matter) can hardly be discussed without bringing gender and class on the radar screen – a discussion around intersectionality that while the queer movement has acknowledged, it has not been able to implement. Many queer political groups themselves are largely patriarchal and do not cater to the needs of young lesbian women. Against such conflicting political stances, the lesbian women have been forceful in articulating the political implications of their gender and of their being out as lesbians.

### Concluding Remarks

The findings of the empirical analysis can be summarized as follows. While income maybe an important measure of fall-back position in bargaining over sexuality, it is not the only factor. Age, gender norms, social perceptions, individual perceptions, family ties, socio-economic class and social networks are also crucial determinants. Both gays and lesbians are more likely to be out as they grow older. Women, in general, are more likely than men to be out to their parents. For men, as their socio-economic status improves, so does their likelihood of being out. However, women's cases help dismiss the income hypothesis as their behavior necessitates a discussion around gender norms and agency irrespective of socio-economic class. For middle class gays and lesbians some of major factors influencing their decision to come out to parents are fear of gay-bashing, fear of emotionally hurting family members, or perceptions regarding the family's ability to understand their sexuality. Fall-back positions can be affected by an individual's participation in gay or lesbian social activities and political events to the extent that they may either be able to channel their socio- political agency both into their private lives (by coming out to parents) or by working towards changing state policies.



## CHAPTER V

### QUEERING POLICY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this concluding chapter, I tie together the critical theoretical contributions of the thesis, along with a brief recap of the major findings from the chapter on empirical analysis. I also discuss the policy implications of these findings and make some recommendations as a starting point to guide the process of both gendering and queering policy making.

Rubin (1975) describes the “sex/gender system” as the “set of arrangement by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (p.158). According to Rubin, women’s bodies are made to fit into the dynamics of an economic system that often subsists upon a heterosexual couple as the primary economic unit. Rubin draws on analogies with political economy to associate the universal presence of gender asymmetry with a system of compulsory heterosexuality, stating that political economy does not neatly map onto the actual political economy of the “sex/gender system.” Since the publication of Rubin’s work, feminist economists have elaborated upon this “sex/gender system” to articulate a feminist political economy. Folbre (1994) describes feminist political economy as an attempt to develop a general theory of collective identity, interests and actions. Feminist political economy places gender at the center of the hierarchical constraints that may not be limited to the family, but that remain largely invisible to those who consider the family as being outside the domain of political economy (Folbre, 1994).

In lieu of Folbre's notion of feminist political economy, this thesis has expanded the scope of household bargaining models to consider constraints imposed by norms related to sexuality and age. The neoclassical emphasis on income as a measure of bargaining power has been relaxed to give weight to the impact of gender norms, family ties, perceptions, agency and social networks of support. Using this theoretical framework, my empirical analysis has highlighted the various ways in which gay and lesbian youth in India have sought empowerment directly through their income, non-conformity to social norms, considerations of their family's well-being, as well as access to social networks of support. Indirectly, they have been empowered through the internet and international media (and other platforms enhanced as a result of economic liberalization). The thesis has maintained gender and sexuality as the central focus of the analysis to highlight the differences in experiences of men and women. I have also discussed the role of social activity and political participation in the ability of an individual to be out. Against the background of rise of the Indian queer movement, I provide a few suggestions for policy recommendations below.

What does a queer-friendly policy framework look like? What do the theoretical interventions and empirical analyses of this study contribute to the formation of a queer-friendly policy? Firstly, extending the scope of economic theory of the household to include gay and lesbian young adults brings them into the scope of policy making – they are rendered visible, as economic agents, engaging in bargaining over access and opportunity. Secondly, it calls for creation of policies of non-discrimination that include gender, gender identity as well as sexual orientation in both national and multinational sectors of the Indian economy so that people no longer have to fear losing their jobs upon

coming out. Thirdly, this analysis highlights the need for legal security for young men and women forced into arranged marriages, in that the State should be able to interfere on behalf of these young adults who to make illegal forced marriages. Fourthly, state-sanctioned violence against gays and lesbians, including arrests of gay outreach workers (involved in prevention of HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases), can be prevented through policy changes at the national level. Finally, in order to treat all its citizens equally, India needs to reconsider and revamp Section 377 of the Penal Code.

The public policy problems that result from Section 377 can be resolved through the implementation of the following recommendations. The repeal of Section 377 is crucial both for the well-being and legal protection of sexual minorities as well as for the maintenance of consistency in the Indian courts' outlook towards equal rights and non-discrimination. First, there is a need for the inclusion of the phrase "sexual orientation, gender identity and expression" in the State's non-discrimination policy to safeguard equal opportunity and treatment of gays, lesbians, and transsexuals in both public and private spheres. Another recommendation would be the creation and sanction of a child sexual abuse (CSA) law to separate the cases of sexual abuse of young children, in the hands of adult males from those of consenting adult same-sex males. Finally, there is need for a new law on rape based on the definition of sexual assault as oral, anal, vaginal and other forms of penetrative intercourse without consent between men and men, women, and women and men and women.

In addition to the recommendations for policy change at the national level, my data suggest strategy for queer organizations as well. The insights from theoretical and empirical analysis emphasize the empowerment of women, *hijras* and *kothis*, as a central

issue. On account of their severe marginalization, lesbian women, the *hijra* community along with the *kothis*, are most inclined to forward the cause for queer politics in India. They are most visible in public spheres of dissent against state practices, and providing them with access to resources and economic opportunity would strengthen their ability to pursue political change. This relates to Gupta's (2005) plea for intersectionality in queer organizing in India so that agency is channeled towards those most vulnerable to enable them to be active participants in contemporary politics. Through some of the interviews, I also highlighted the important role played by mothers in the middle classes in being supportive of their children's sexuality and in aiding them in bargaining with other family members. Owing to their own gendered subordination, mothers are more capable of articulating and accepting their children's sexuality, and capturing the complexities of the situation with immense accuracy and compassion. Therefore, empowerment of women in general may also affect the ability of gay and lesbian youth to be out, since mothers are more likely than fathers to accept their children's sexuality.

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