

The Qamra Newsletter

Queer Archive for Memory Reflection and Activism

Bengaluru

What is QAMRA?

The Queer Archive for Memory, Reflection and Activism (QAMRA) is a physical multimedia archival project which aims to chronicle the genesis and growth of the struggle for the rights of sexuality and gender minorities in India. QAMRA's objective is to bring together and provide access to the stories of individuals, communities, organisations, lawyers, and activists who have lived through and played a part in the queer rights movement of the last few decades.

The Archive So Far

At present, QAMRA is in its pilot stage. It is run out of a temporary space in central Bengaluru, and has a limited storage capacity, as well as minimal storage infrastructure. The current collection consists of over a decade's worth of newspaper and magazine clippings in multiple languages donated by the Bangalore-based group Sangama; notes and

official documents from various legal battles, all donated by queer rights lawyers; documentation of crisis intervention efforts; diaries and personal memorabilia; books and reports produced on the subject of queer life and rights; as well as photographs and raw footage that are visual testaments to the many moments of rage, sorrow, joy and determination that have defined the queer rights movement in India.



Source: QAMRA

In This Issue

In this first issue of our newsletter, historian, activist, and translator Saleem Kidwai writes on the importance of archiving queer history. Drawing on decades of research, writing, personal experience, activism, and observation, Saleem tells us why queer archives in India are the need of the hour.

On Queer Archiving

by Saleem Kidwai

Because of a colonial law and the resultant homophobia, queer people have been deprived of their history. Our existence wasn't even acknowledged, and when mentioned it was loaded with distortion and prejudice. We need our history because it helps us understand who we are and gives us a sense of identity. It tells us about others like us, their achievements, their problems and how they faced them. Without our history we cannot assert our rightful place in society. History is our collective memory and without it we are lost, unmindful of the problems that face us, clueless about our future as a community.

Records are an extension of memory. No history can be reconstructed without records. Ruth Vanita and I faced the problem of absent, missing and irrecoverable records when we attempted to write our *Same Sex Love in India: A Literary History*, over two decades ago. It was not as if records did not exist, but rather than in many cases, they were buried, altered or erased. A silence had been imposed on us and our history.

This must not happen again and the silence has to be broken. Access to our history has to be made easier and hence the need for a queer archive. In this archive we need to put together the documents relevant to our history that are still available—bibliographies, books, and memories of individuals who had to live their lives in silence. These need to be recorded and preserved, in a concerted manner on an urgent basis because it is individual memory that forms the collective memory. All loss of individual memories is going to leave gaps in our collective memory. Records are invaluable so that biases against us can be removed.

In the last three decades, the silence has slowly been broken and our presence and our life experiences have come to the fore particularly in the media and on the internet. These need to be put together before they become dispersed. Attempts have to be made to acquire letters, diaries, and other forms of personal records that individuals have written for themselves or to share with someone who is special to them. We all know that these invaluable expressions of love, frustration, pain and longing have existed and when they have survived the authors, are usually destroyed by families out of embarrassment or shame. To show people that these personal records are of immense value to society as whole, would be one duty of the archive so that no such records are destroyed; the same goes for photographs and other memorabilia. A concerted effort has to be made to recover these and encourage people to donate their private papers and photographs, albeit with whatever caveat regarding privacy they would like to impose.

Connect, Contribute

QAMRA is an independent archive. We are not affiliated to any institution or organisation. We welcome contributions to the archive in the form of material, labour, or funds. We also have a wishlist of books and equipment. If you would like to offer help in any way, or get in touch with us with queries, suggestions, or just good wishes, you can:

Write to us at qamraarchive@gmail.com

OR

Call us at [9513353046](tel:9513353046) / [9886207557](tel:9886207557)



Photo credit: Marc Ohrem-Leclef @marcleclaf

**QUEER ARCHIVE
FOR MEMORY,
REFLECTION
AND ACTIVISM**

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