REPORT

OF THE

QUEER ARCHIVING WORKSHOP

Bengaluru, Aug 17-18, 2013

Workshop on
Queer Archiving in India

Aug 17-18, 2013
Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru

Written by :

    Niruj Mohan Ramanujam

Workshop organised by :

    Namita Malhotra, Amrita Chanda and Niruj Ramanujam

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1 Introduction

"Does every new generation of gays and lesbians need to start from scratch over and over just because there is virtually no information about previous generations because they have been too discreet ?"

(http://www.fondssuzandaniel.be/Newsiteen/index.php, an LGBT archive)

The "Queer Archiving in India" workshop was held at ISI, Bengaluru, on Aug 17th and 18th, and was attended by more than 70 people. The aim of the workshop was to bring together people and organisations, including allied groups, who have been, or are interested in queer archiving practices in India. This interest could stem from the need for documentation arising organically from activism, as well as an interest in capturing fast fading queer experiences, behaviour, and modes of interaction. The workshop was designed to lead towards collaborative effort in the future.

The first day saw presentations by around 20 panelists from across India, who ranged from activists to film makers to website creators to professional historians and archivists. It was clear at the end of the day that "archiving" meant many things to many people, and that there is both a thriving set of people already archiving what is around them, as well as a deeply felt need to both augment the necessary skills as well as coordinate across groups and regions in the future.

The second day had a set of three general discussion sessions amongst everyone present. These ranged from more pedagogical conversations around on archiving itself (who archives, what is to be archived etc), to more practical matters of the nature and scope of networking and future collaborations, including a more technical session on digital archives.

This is a report of this workshop, with detailed summaries of every session, as well as list of useful resources that were talked about in these two days.

1.1 How it all began

The last couple of years has seen many projects across the country, started by individuals and small groups, to archive the LGBT experiences around them. One might think that the LGBT movement in India is too young to archive, but that is arguably not so. Archives are not dead museums and libraries but living records of ongoing experiences, as well as an attempt to preserve the voices, smells, thoughts and tastes of what is changing maybe a bit too rapidly. They can also be a way to ensure the future can be read in perspective, and linked to what is past.

A number of us met a couple of years ago in Bengaluru to think about what a nation-wide archive

might look like, and what we could do as pilot projects. This included Arvind, Siddharth, Namita, and Danish from the Alternative Law Forum as well as Jayashree, Deepa Dhanraj and Niruj Mohan.

The consensus was that the archive should definitely be many, spatially dispersed, decentralised in terms of the archivists, highly nonuniform in what is archived, allow for any number of themes, and not have unity of form or content. We believe that this gives everyone the freedom to archive what they think is interesting, in the way they want to, and where they want to. The only constraint would be open access and open source in an appropriate manner. Subsequently we have had many discussions with people and groups in Bengaluru including members of Sangama and Aneka, as well as with Orinam, Chennai and others from around the country. We have also been joined by Amrita Chanda.

Apart from instigating people to start archiving what is around them, we also applied for funds to start some concrete pilot projects. We have subsequently received support from Institute of Development Studies in Brighton. With these funds, we have started two pilot projects – an online searchable archive of material (ArGaSMEI) and a catalogue of Indian queer short films.

Motivated by the response of people to all of this, Namita Malhotra, Niruj Ramanujam and Amrita Chanda decided to organise this workshop on Queer Archiving, in Bengaluru, on 17-18 August 2013, with help from IDS and ALF.

1.2 Aims of the workshop

We believe that this is an appropriate time to hold such a workshop, and this would serve the following aims :

- Bring together such people for the first time in the country
- Present our pilot projects to the community and have others share theirs too
- Enable a discussion on the nature of such LGBT archives - content, form, etc, and share experiences and ideas
- Start initiatives for future projects across the country
- Build a community of people who would nucleate such activities where they live

1.3 Summary of workshop sessions

- Shivaji wants to start a central queer archive in an academic setting

- Lakshmi spoke about how archiving womens experiences was neither understood nor given space or respect by mainstream historians. Unless we learn to laugh, we can never set up archives. The idea behind the archive was not just to redeem and preserve things but also to interact with it and make it possible to create a new kind of knowledge out of these

interactions. We are not looking for truth but we are looking for human experience.

- Saleem spoke about the necessity of having a safe, secure physical archival space, and the importance of preserving personal papers.

- Niruj introduced Argasmei.

- Sonu spoke about how the process of sifting patiently through the documentation was a learning experience. How do we reach out to other people who also seek out information who cannot access English or the internet

- Priya discussed a brief media analysis of the documentation.

- Amrita spoke about the keywording process

- Samidha spoke about how for queer archives, we need to learn how to record feelings, and help us remember differently.

- Ramki spoke about Orinam, the online space that has become a repository of not just events but also of documentation, presentations etc. This is bilingual, in English and Tamil, and one of the motivations was to provide a sense of history and reference for the generation that came out post the 2009 Naz judgement.

- Namita spoke about the pad.ma video archive, and how it aims to provide a social context to the footage in it, by using annotations, transcriptions, and external references. She also spoke about matters of confidentiality.

- Sridhar talked about the Bolo project, aimed at archiving the lives and experiences of out LGBT people, who are not necessarily activists. He also spoke about how hate comments under each video were answered by other people, leading to a conversation.

- Sunil spoke about his transgender oral history project, aimed mainly at capturing older and authentic ways of expressing ones gender identity, which are fast disappearing. He also spoke about the ways in which people opened up, and how he handled issues of confidentiality. He then spoke about his ideas of converting some of these interviews to theatre.

- Sumathy talked about some of the experiences during this oral project she did with Sunil. She spoked about some of the amazing links forged between the Hijras and the mainstream community in the quarters they lived in, as well as the ways in which they talked about sex, sex work and gender identity, that differed from a more NGO-ised language.

- Revathi spoke about her the many books she has written, her autobiography, as well as a documentation of Hijra lives, and the felt need to do so, and the difference this has made. She also said that, in order to document human experiences.

- Jayshree spoke about her dilemnas as a documentary film maker, and also of her experiences in making Many Peoples Many Desires. She then sounded a few notes of caution about the need to protect privacy, and the need to think carefully about how to use the immense

amount of video material produced so easily these days.

- Akanksha spoke about two archive projects she was a part of, involving suicides by women in love with other women. She also spoke about the process of archiving the experiences of the archivers themselves.

- Maya spoke about two incidents she had researched and documented in detail, involving women in relationships with other women.

- Owais talked about personal archives, and how to access, preserve and safeguard them. Many of his own archives are now lost, for example. He also pointed out the need to archive the experiences of our allies, and the diaspora.

- Anusha spoke about the Indian Memory Project, and how stories are reconstructed with the help of many people, through family photographs. She also emphasised the importance of sharing ones excitement about ones project with others, and how that in turn generates excitement and participation. She also mentioned the need for internet strategies in our times.

- Ekta spoke of her experiences of working with the material in the Indian Labour Archives, and how they used the archives imaginatively in their two films they made with the material. She also spoke about how preservation and access are linked, and how one can engage creatively with an archive.

- Namita spoke about cataloguing Indian queer short films, about the paucity of material, and the need to look at popular culture through a queer reading.

- Ajay spoke about his online archive of Indian classical music and how he collects material for sharing on his archive. He also spoke about providing a social context to music recordings.

- Niruj summarised the various international online LGBT archives and how the stable ones seem to be connected to physical archives.

- Discussion I : was about the many archives in multiple forms, crowdsource archival material, asking each queer group to archive themselves, privacy issues, training people in skills needed and queering existing archives. The discussion included differentiating between archiving, collecting documenting etc, the fear of vanishing past not being the only motivation but there being other emotional motivations like sense of justice, pride, love etc, archive as noun and archive as a verb, importance of linking online archives with physical archives, the category of LGBT and to what extent can we stretch back and impose these categories, decision making process of determining archival value, the ethics of archiving, learning how to document especially in times of crisis with respect, and how to recognise when to intervene and when not to, collecting and preserving private papers, using archiving as stragegy and a community consultation process, and lastly, funding, and national versus local archives.

- Discussion II : was about the importance of autonomy to the functioning of archives, not being possible to be clear about goals of the archive, not to have too much faith in digitisation, importance of physical or nodal archive, but also losing regional flavour if we

have a national archive, how what is important now is not knowable and should be set aside, how the physicality of where one accesses the archive is important, how NGO reports in the west are excellent archives of the Indian LGBT movement, standardised documents needed to leave ones personal collection to someone, skill training for archiving which also serves as community employment, helping organisations with archiving their material and fund raising through grants, NGOs, individuals and crowdfunding.

- Discussion III : was about technical issues, storage space, server space, hard disks, format compatibility, standards for connecting multiple archives etc.

The following sections summarise each talk in greater detail.

2 Archive fever in the age of digital reproduction

Lawrence Liang, who works at the Alternative Law Forum, set the tone for the workshop with his introductory talk on Archive Fever, on what drives the impulse to archive, and on the transformative potential of an archive.

What we see emerging these days is a whole cottage industry of archiving initiatives, and the rise of the amateur archives. The digital era we live in is a moment of imemnse temporal transformation. Archives can be see, just as the encyclopedia projects of old, as expressing a desire or an aspiration. Derrida termed this will to archive as 'archive fever', the fever not so much to use it as to have it, and the desire to return to origins. He linked the idea of the archive to a place as well as to state power. Carolyn Steedman had the last laugh when she unearthed that what was termed as 'the disease of literary men' was actually caused by anthrax breeding in the leather bindings of books in ancient archives, leading to a very real archive fever itself.

In India, there are two brilliant examples of amateur archives, that of Roja Muttiah and that of C. S. Lakshmi.

Thomas Osborne, on the ordinariness of the archive, says that the archive should indeed be concerned with the ordinary and the mundane. He also spoke about the activation of a form of public memory, by conversion of the ordinary into something of value by another public.Arjun Appadurai talks about the idealogy of the trace, and how archives are built on accidents that produces traces, and all intentionalities come from the uses we make of the archive, and not from the archive itself. The archive is a collective project, and is the product of the anticipation of collective memory. He also speaks of how technology and the internet can free the archive from the control of the state.

However, not all attempts to archive are attempts at supplementing the memory machine of the state. An archive should actively create new ways of thinking about how we access our individual and collective experiences. It is hence creative, and naming something as an archive is not the end, but the beginning of a debate.

Lastly, should archives be tied to a politics of redemption ? A large part of progressive impulses in historiography is influenced by a desire to redeem history through the logic of emancipation, and the amateur archive hopes to do this.

Hence, archival imagination will have to allow itself the possibility of surprise in the archive, and in the possibility that a descent into the ordinary suspends the urgent claims of emergencies.

3 Designing an Archive : a panel discussion

Panelists
1. Shivaji Panikkar : an art historian, and presently the Dean for the School of Culture and Creative Expressions at Ambedkar University, previously having worked for 25 years at the M.S. University of Baroda.
2. C. S. Lakshmi : who has worn multiple hats as a writer, an archivist, a feminist activist, and is presently the founder director of SPARROW, the sound and picture archive on women, in Mumbai.
3. Saleem Kidwai : has previously taught history at Delhi University and we have him to thank for his pioneering work on same-sex love in India: Readings from literature and history.

Moderator
Danish Sheikh, Alternative Law Forum

This panel was about ways of archiving what is current, as well as doing so in a form which is more permanent and physical. All three panelists are interested in archiving what is around us, in ways that are not just cataloguing, but also interpretative. However, the form of the archive is a physical space - Sparrow in the case of Lakshmi, and what is planned by Panikkar and Kidwai as well. The moderator explained the ambit of this dicsussion (1) how does one go about planning a physical space, and (2) how does one proceed to archive the present, while dealing with biases, limited perspectives and idealogical boundaries of interpretation and even what is defined as archivable material given the proximity of the material.

3.1 Shivaji Panikkar : The Queer Archive

" There is a need to link queer history, activism and cultural production"

He spoke about the concept behind the Queer Archive he has been planning. The idea started after the right wing attack on the project done by his student in Baroda in 2007. Following this, students, as a protest, opened up the archive of the Arts Department and displayed all material related to sexuality and art. The University ordered it shut, and Panikkar did not oblige. He was forced to leave the University, with little support from the art world.

In this context, while working on Queer Art, he then came up with the idea of a Queer Archive, an idea he has been exploring and sharing with people since. This archive has not taken off yet, and is currently in the stage of being an idea. This archive is for documenting histories of queer culture and practices and enabling queer creative professional practices. It is not meant to be merely a repository but will be living archive, to be used by historians, cultural practitioners etc to produce artistic critical historical knowledge. Queer activism in India has mainly focussed on physical and mental health, and jurisprudence. There is a need to link queer history, activism and cultural production, which will be the focus of his archive. Activism and cultural production exist in tandem with each other, with an underlying, and often unacknowledged connection. We need to think about bringing queer theory into queer practices. For example, we need more university departments to offer courses in queer studies. To aid this, his aim is to build a resource library which includes the

usual kind of material but also ephemeral documents like reviews, photographs, brochures, love letters and so on.

3.2 C.S. Lakshmi : Archiving in the time of development, the SPARROW story

"Unless we learn to laugh, we can never set up archives"

"We are not looking for truth but we are looking for human experience."

Lakshmi spoke about the SPARROW archive and lessons learned through it. When she was researching on social history of women in the Tamilnadu Archives, there was nothing specifically under W or G, etc. What was there was hidden under other headings. She then started asking women about their diaries, activities, concerts they attended, people they spoke to, etc. Her academic friends told her that what she is looking for is 'soft material' and does not constitute research; hard material are official documents and are kept in national archives, by definition. Her book on the social history of women was rejected by the Tamilnadu Archives since they claimed it was not historic enough and 'there are many places where humour is used, how can academic writing have humour?''. When she started SPARROW, the womens archive, she realised that unless we learn to laugh, we can never set up archives. It was a struggle to set up the archives, to find people for it, and retain them.

The idea behind the archive was not just to redeem and preserve things but also to interact with it and make it possible to create a new kind of knowledge out of these interactions. The anchor project for this archive is Oral History. They interviewed women from all walks of life and built up this oral history collection. But they were told that this was a shallow archive – 'what is the veracity of oral history ? What a woman says something, how can you take it as the truth?'. Lakshmi says that we now have to redefine history so as to redefine what is important. We are not looking for truth but we are looking for human experience. She gave a couple of examples from her mother's life of stories that get left out of official documentation but are nevertheless extremely relevant, and as her mother put it, 'ohh, these are not things you write about', but she had indeed spoken about it. This is why oral history is important. The veracity of such an archive depends on the fact that we are collecting experiences. Experiences will change, but a particular piece of experience that we have captured and archived will still be able to affect us, our world views and our view of history. Lastly, she expressed reservations of an open archive, not everything in a culture can be offered openly and some things have to be kept secret.

3.3 Saleem Kidwai – a historians journey

"We need a mechanism to safely store physical material"

Saleem Kidwai spoke, in personal terms, about what interests him about archives. Being a historian, he understands both the value and the problems of archives. While working on his book with Ruth Vanita, since they had problems in accessing some documents, they collected lots of material from various sources. It seemed a bit selfish, after the book's publication, to keep all this material to themselves. The problem is then of what to do with this material physically, where can one safely store them and make them accessible. He would prefer if his and Ruth's papers come back to India

for future generations to read, but the question is how to make this feasible. He spoke about various attempts by people and groups to collect material, but this is not an easy task to sustain. We do need a physical secure space. He spoke of examples of material he has collected, including private papers, letters, journals etc of people who have left them with him. He also used two particular photographs to illustrate the value of archiving and historical research. Lastly, he raised the issue of confidentiality agreements and other such logistics issues to be handled in the creation of a physical archive.

Discussion

Lakshmi commented on confidentiality agreements. SPARROW does get copyright permits from the people they interview. Sometimes, the interviewee would want parts of an interview to be kept secret till some time, or till they pass away and the archive has a system of respecting that, and making suitable annotations to their documents.

4 Presenting ArGaSMEI

Speakers

1. Amrita Chanda : a freelance software professional and an LGBT activist, has been working on developing the ArGaSMEI archive for a few months now

2. Priya Prabhu : an activist working in Aneka, has been responsible for keywording the documents for the archive

3. Sonu Niranjan : an activist working in Sangama, has been responsible for scanning and cataloguing the documents for the archive

4. Shubha Chacko : works in Aneka, has been involved in documentation for years, and was a part of this project

5. Niruj Ramanujam : has been involved in this project from the beginning

4.1 Niruj – ArGaSMEI, a new queer archive

Niruj introduced the Archive of Gender and Sexuality Minorities Experiences in India (ArGaSMEI), a project started in Bengaluru. This is a software framework, developed by Amrita Chanda, which is being designed to be flexible enough to accommodate any kind of digital material. Any digital file can be uploaded onto the archive, one can define categories with multiple keywords, and each file can then be keyworded. Users can then search through these keyword combinations through a website and download the results.

In conjunction with the development of the software, a pilot project was undertaken where newspaper articles, 640 in number and in four languages, about LBT women in the Sangama Archives were scanned, categorized and keyworded. These were then uploaded into the software for public access. We can add collections of letters, memos, flyers etc as well, to this platform and we invite everyone to share their material and ideas with us.

4.2 Sonu Niranjan – creating the ArGaSMEI collection

> *"How do we reach out to other people who also seek out*
>
> *information who cannot access English or the internet"*

Sonu talked about his experience in sifting through, cataloguing, and scanning these newspaper cuttings. He spoke about how this project made him read a lot more than usual and deal with problems of languages. Sangama has material from around 1990 on sexual minorities issues and reading these articles led him to think about various issues surrounding it. He had to make decisions on whether an article on LGBT issues in general were to be included in this LBT womens collection. He then described various technical issues which were resolved with time.

He also had to read through some extremely negative media coverage which pained him, and he

spoke about the media responses to stories of same sex love. Lastly, he said that this archiving process is a worthwhile effort, but is only accessible to people with internet access and adequate knowledge of English. How do we reach out to other people who also seek out information who cannot access English or the internet ?

4.3 Priya Prabhu – a media analysis of the ArGaSMEI collection

"The film 'Fire' seemed to have created a space not only to

discuss lesbian issues but also to discuss about sexual minorities"

Priya Prabhu worked on the scanned images that Sonu had produced and keyworded all of them. An initial set of categories and keyword schema were devised by the group, which were then modified by Priya based on her experience gathered in the process of her work. She spoke mainly about some preliminary media analysis of the collection. By going through the articles from 1990 to 2011, one can trace the changing perspective over the years.

From 1990 to 2000, 90% of the articles originated from outside India, except for three events (2 in Delhi in 1992 and the opening of Sangama in Bengaluru in 1995). The tone of the media coverage during this period was sensational and negative. However, that changed a bit after 1999 in Bengaluru. There were more articles reporting events like pride marches and meetings. Between 2000 and 2010, there were many articles reporting harassment of LGBT people, which were taken up by Sangama in Bengaluru.

A large part of the articles were about the film 'Fire', and included both positive and negative coverage. This film seemed to have created a space not only to discuss lesbian issues but also to discuss about sexual minorities in general. Another important observation was that post the middle of 2000s, the coverage in regional language papers increased dramatically.

4.4 Amrita Chanda – coding ArGaSMEI

"We end up archiving the archiver's subjectivity"

Amrita Chanda is in charge of the software for ArGaSMEI and has been developing it from scratch, in conjunction with the keywording process. Since scanned images were uploaded and the texts were not available, keywords are the only way to access these documents. Therefore the schema and method of keywording becomes quite important, though it is a subjective process. We end up archiving the archiver's subjectivity. A total of 198 unique keywords were used to describe all 640 documents. We are still in the process of figuring out how to do all of this in a consistent fashion.

Once the keywording is done, the scanned images and their keywords, each falling within a category, are uploaded into a database. This can then be searched through a web-based form, through these keywords. The documents which share the search criteria are then displayed and can be downloaded. The set of keywords used are described in the Appendix.

5 Online Queer Archives : a panel discussion

Panelists

1. Samidha : works with Orinam, an offline collective and an online resource space in Chennai
2. L. Ramakrishnan : works at Saathi and with Orinam
3. Namita Aavriti : works at Alternative Law Forum, and is a part of the Pad.ma collective
4. Amrita Chanda : is developing the ArGaSMEI website

Moderator

Nitya Vasudevan : works at the CSCS

5.1 Samidha – the nature of online archives

"For queer archives, the question of recording feelings is very important"

"We need strategies for how we might record and remember differently"

Samidha spoke about the nature of online archives based on her experiences with Orinam (www.orinam.net), which is an online resource space maintained primarily from Chennai. She explained how for queer archives, the question of recording feelings is very important, because it tells us much more than reports and documents. She gave two examples, one of which was a protest in Hyderabad University by students. A report would have just said that students from certain departments shouted slogans at a given time, but what gets left out is that all the slogans shouted by a diverse body of students were in Bengali since only the Bengali students present had any experience protesting. Similarly, at the end of a conference on caste equality, a Dalit student got up and asked why even in this conference, it were the Dalits who were washing the lunch plates, a point which was probably left out in the official report.

Queer experiences are rarely directly expressed but in an online archive, which is a public space, speaking requires coming out, and prior to that, being able to identify and express that feeling. Public records of coming out fix you and leave no room for mistakes. Anonymity is also an issue here.

Unlike material objects, virtual collections are not only the real thing, it makes it impossible to have one real thing. One way to capture real events is through other types of perspectives of remembering. All of us are living as temporary archives and this is where materiality matters. We need strategies for how we might record and remember differently.

5.2 L. Ramakrishnan – the Orinam website as an archive

"Motivation was to provide a sense of history and reference for

the generation that came out post the 2009 Naz judgement"

Ramki talked about the Orinam website as a questioning, curious ally of the archiving community. Orinam is more a resource centre than an archive. Online queer presence started around 1993-94 with the first email lists being set up. These have, over the years, led to even locality-specific e-groups and campus groups in cities. Orinam (www.orinam.net) website was started in 2006 to support a physical social support space for LGBT people in Chennai. Initial content included people posting their coming out stories, parents letters to their children, queries and responses to referrals etc. Using pseudonyms to provide anonymity was given care from the start. The website also served as a queer-media watch which morphed into twitter. This led people to be able to look for trends in reportage etc.

Since the website was an online avatar of an offline group, it also served to chronicle events. Slowly, it also started becoming a repository of documents and presentations which could used for future events, and are being used by people extensively these days. Another motivation was to provide a sense of history and reference for the generation that came out post the 2009 Naz judgement. The website also has an online record of queer film festivals and has multiple avatars of a mailing list, twitter page, many facebook groups, etc. This also helps link the Tamil queer community globally.

The site is bilingual in English and Tamil. Many FAQs, support stories and writings by parents have been translated from one to the other. For the future, Orinam is looking at bringing out some of its material in print and archive LGBT groups that no exist and be a source of information to archivists.

5.3 Namita Aavriti – pad.ma, a video archive

"An archive is a pledge to the future"

Namita spoke about the online video archive pad.ma (www.pad.ma). Pad.ma is not just a respository, but facilitates annotations, translations, transcriptions, notes, addendums etc to each part of a video. Pad.ma aims to create at each point, a social context in which people are interested in archiving, come together and contribute material. Archives runs the risk of being easily institutionalised. One cannot escape questions of longevity and stability, especially if it is a physical space but also if it is digital. An archive is a pledge to the future since one needs to plan not just the collection but also how to keep it in good shape for years to come. Archiving comes from many unnoticed irrelevant behaviour that people have, whether it is collecting newspaper cuttings or pamphlets or taking screenshots of facebook statuses. Archives seem to come from this habit of collecting and also from a habit of organising these collections.

She then spoke about the origin of pad.ma, from the Pirate Cinema in Berlin which multiplied itself into many hard drives, to open source footage on Gujarat during 2002-03, lack of testimonies from that era being available online, a tingle felt by Lawrence and the setting up of the website. Pad.ma is an open archive, since it is not enough to just have material but it has to be used as well. Lastly, she spoke of issues of confidentiality and how pad.ma handles it.

6 Archiving our experiences : a panel discussion

Panelists

1. Sridhar Rangayan : film maker, created the Bolo Project, and is a part of Humsafar, Mumbai

2. Sunil Mohan : independent activist, been interviewing transgender people in the South, is associated with LesBiT, Bengaluru

3. Sumathy Murthy : independent activist and singer, has been working along with Sunil on the oral interviews, is also associated with LesBiT, Bengaluru

4. A. Revathi : transgender activist and writer, has authored the first Hijra autobiography in India, along with other books, currently based in Namakkal

5. T. Jayashree : documentary film maker, 'Many Peoples Many Desires', from Bengaluru

6. Akanksha : activist and archivist from Sappho for Equality, Kolkata

Moderator

Saleem Kidwai, historian

6.1 Sridhar Rangayan – the BOLO project

"People from all walks of life are out as well, and how

do they blend their sexuality with the work they do"

Bolo Project is one of the first projects in the country to document oral histories of LGBT people in Mumbai, Delhi, Lucknow and Pune, on video. This was funded by UNDP.

Sridhar has been making films on LGBT themes, mainly in the drama genre. Bolo Project involved interviewing 20 people and conceptualising the project from an archiving point of view. The motivation was partly to explain to the younger generation the work done by, and the lives led by the older generation. People who are out are usually seen as activists but Bolo wanted to show that people from all walks of life are out as well, and how people blend their sexuality with the work they do. All the interviews on youtube got a huge viewership, along with lots of hate comments under each video. However, others then are seen to combat these comments themselves. Many people who saw these films were also able to connect back to the interviewees after many years. The project wanted to show the entire gamut of experiences of each person, which spanned a range of emotions. It shows that each of these people are courageous. The next step in the project is to go out and talk to younger voices as well, and integrating the content with wikipedia. There is not much information online on LGBT activists and personalities in India and one needs to look at this too.

6.2 Sunil Mohan – a transgender oral history project

"The older ways of expressing oneself, however limited, are rapidly being lost"

This was Sunil's first experience with a camera, when he took up a fellowship from Open Space Pune (CCDS) to start an oral history project. This was done along with Sumathi Murthy. He was wondering how exactly to document what people say and the way they speak. He felt that the language used by LGBT people to express themselves has changed over the years because of the influence of NGOs. The older ways of expressing oneself, however limited, are rapidly being lost and he felt the need to document this older way. He decided to collect stories of the past, reflecting back on it from where one is now. The interviews were done in South India, limited by logistics. This project was a year long one, coincident with a pad.ma fellowship and pad.ma is being used as a platform for the videos. The plan is to create plays out of these interviews, which may happen the following year. Many people whose videos were put on the blog or on pad.ma later asked for it to be removed, which was done. We are talking about an issue which has the word 'sex' in it, some videos can be misused later, and so on, and hence he shot the videos trying to anonymise the person being filmed, so that they would not be identified.

6.3 Sumathi Murthy – documenting authentic voices

"These oral interviews needs to be translated to legal advocacy"

"People have different ways of talking of their gender identity in regional languages"

The process of filming people was an amazing experience since they met many interesting people in the four southern states. They met some amazing Hijras in Tamilnadu, many of whom had no issues with being shown on video with their faces visible. They shot a lot in Tsunami quarters in Chennai, which has a few Hijras living there amongst the mainstream community. There they met, for example, Ponni and Anjali, who were Bharatanatyam dancers. Since they did not want the other children in the quarters to not have a chance to learn it, they started a school for the neighbouring children, for much lesser cost than mainstream schools. They said that Bharatanatyam is not for communities like them, but they learnt it with difficulty and wanted to share it. They would also cook everyday, mainly chicken rasam, which would get distributed to all the families in the quarters. Similarly, Dayamma takes care of Hijras pre- and post- surgery free of cost. She would keep saying that she has 'made an mistake' and giggle in her interview. After a while Sumathi realised that she is talking about sex. Another Aravani they filmed (but did not get permission to show it) said very clearly that it is time for the community to stop begging and doing sex work and send their chelas to schools and colleges.

Sumathi then said that these interviews needs to be translated to legal advocacy. Many Hijras used vocabulary which were kept as is, since these words in regional languages need to be documented. In Kannada, the word 'Bhavane' and the word 'Unarvu' in Tamil, which means 'feeling' was used to express their gender. These kinds of expressions are preserved since the interviews are retained in their original language.

6.4 A. Revathi – when transgenders document their own lives

"What happened to her, happened to many Revathis

and hence documenting this history is important"

"Formal education is not essential to write about or document human experiences."

Revathi joined Sangama in 1999, where she used to file newspaper reports in the required box. Since everything was in English, the box name would be written in for her. She then realised that there are almost no stories or books on experiences of working class LGBT people and hence decided to do so in Tamil. She then interviewed 40 Aravanis/Hijras in Tamilnadu and Karnataka, who were from 18 to 84 years old. She wanted to document the lives of the people in the community. Initially she would be asked a lot of questions by those she wanted to interview about her motivation, funding, usage of material etc. She would explain that the ill-treatment meted out by society was mainly due to lack of awareness of their culture, mores and lives and she wanted to change that. These interviews were published in Tamil as 'Unarvum Uruvamum' or 'Feelings/emotions and the Body', the two things about which they were discriminated. It is also out in English and Hindi now. Following this, preparing for media interviews gave her the idea of writing her autobiography, published by Penguin as 'Truth about me'. It came out first in English instead of Tamil. She wrote it as she would speak, without adhering to literay norms, not glossing over or censoring what people told her, and this was reviewed as new and unique in Tamil literature when it came out.

After the book came out, she was blamed by both people in her town as well as people in the community for writing about sex work, police torture etc so openly. She replied that others do not do so out of fear, and hence she needs to talk about her own life. What happened to her, happened to many Revathis and hence documenting this history is important. She has also worked with Sristi Madurai on an English and Tamil website which has stories and articles in Aravanis, which has been used extensively by students and faculty in academia. She is currently interviewing F2M people in Tamilnadu to document their life stories, since their situation is more precarious than Hijras, she feels.

All of this has made her realise that formal education is not essential to write about or document human experiences.

6.5 T. Jayashree – documenting the queer movement, with some notes of caution

"A middle class documentary maker, one only talks about the less privileged, and would not allow someone else to come into ones own house with a camera"

"Need to debate as to whether there is a reason to put something out there and if so, what is it ?"

"How do we deal with the glut of videos available online, how do we make sense of it, enable access to information that is needed etc while ensuring privacy ?"

Jayashree spoke about her experiences as a documentary film maker, trained to freely go into peoples houses and ask them questions, mainly about their miseries. She had stopped making films for a while when she realised that as a middle class documentary maker, one only talks about the

less privileged, and would not allow someone else to come into ones own house with a camera.

Initially, when she used to visit Sangama often, she used to help screen movies there on LGBT issues, which were primarily about western men coming out. Motivated by this, and the then ongoing police violence, she decided to make 'Many Peoples, Many Desires' over 2-3 years, so that LGBT people in Bangalore could talk about their own contexts. She also made a conscious decision not to film activists, but get people to tell their stories. The process of making it, and seeing it owned by the people themselves, was amazing. She then stopped making films for a while, and has started a new project again only in 2011 on the 377 case.

She also sounded a few notes of caution, or atleast some issues we need to think seriously about. First, the issue of privacy and confidentiality. How do we decide which interviews to put online ? What do we do when people initially want anonymity and later, during the interview, say they are okay with showing their face ? People also tend to talk about a lot of personal stuff during the interview and the onus is on the documenter to decide which parts need not be used. In this age of open source content, we do need to careful of what we share and need to debate as to whether there is a reason to put something out there and if so, what is it ?

Second, it is interesting to note that people change their positions and opinions over time, and to figure out how to capture that and deal with positive and negative reactions to it. In her own experience, she was able to show, or address the phobias within the communities itself. She also spoke about the experience of the 2010 Bengaluru Pride, where four teams, each consisting of people from various identities and backgrounds made a film each, for the first time. She then realised that this process of understanding each other and their positions and then making a film, was itself worthy of a film. These interactions usually do not get documented.

Third, in this age of technology, when we do not even know if we are being recorded through someone's cellphone, a huge amount of video footage gets created. However, putting it online needs a lot of work, including working with translations, multiple meanings, understanding contexts etc. How do we deal with the glut of videos available online, made by various people, how do we make sense of it, enable access to information that is needed etc while ensuring privacy ? We need people to sift through and work with these footage, which is not available. She ended by saying she is a bit wary of how, in the LGBT context, we will deal with all of this material in a useful fashion.

6.6 Akanksha – archiving the archivist

"How one could archive the experiences of the archivist"

"Preserving these letters was the only way her partner

could continue to live in her mind and in the world"

Akanksha started off by regretting that she has destroyed a potentially valuable archive, her love letters to her partner recorded in many audio cassetes. She then spoke about archiving through letters, using two incidents that she encountered while doing a bio-map of violence in LBT lives.

She first talked about a girl, an orphan who lived with her uncle and brother, and at 17, fell in love with another girl. She was then raped multiple times by her brother and cousin in an attempt to 'bring her back to heterosexuality'. She was dependent on her uncle and brother, and went into depression, and agreed to get married to a guy. Her girlfriend was not equipped to handle the situation, and never met her after her marriage. The girl then died by hanging herself, 4 months after her marriage. Both were Sappho members and the surviving girlfriend gave Sappho a huge pile of

love letters written to her, which included the stories of her rape. The Sappho team decided that the girlfriend was indeed the legitimate heir of these letters, and asked her if it was ok to archive them and use them for research. She said yes, and that preserving these letters was the only way her partner could continue to live in her mind and in the world.

She then spoke about how one could archive the experiences of the archivist, especially in situations like this.

The second incident was talked about through the screening of a film Sappho made, called 'The Unclaimed' They read about a suicide note left behind by a girl in a joint suicide with another girl, which they got to know through the papers, and went to the village. The film showed how they talked to people, gradually found out what happened etc. A discussion followed, addressed to all the panelists.

6.7 Discussion

"Recording should be via the heart"

"The worst reason to record something is because you can"

"Not just because I have a voice, but because I have a voice recorder!"

Q: The archivist becomes a part of the archive, too. Is there a cost, especially emotional, attached to archiving ?

Akanksha : Definitely. When coming back from the village at 6 pm, they discovered that the two bodies were lying unclaimed in the morgue. They did not have any way to claim the body and hence became a part of the larger society which did not claim it either. This was a haunting experience and prompted them to make this film.

Sridhar : The stories you hear impact you, a kind of emotional fatigue, especially when you are filming so much pain and trauma. Maybe film makers need to see counsellors too.

Akanksha : How does one document the emotions in the girl as she handed over the letters to us ? How does one document the emotions going through me when I received them ?

Lawrence : The worst reason to record something is because you can. However, in this case, the moment when the photo of the girls bodies was show, it became more than a suicide, it became a love story. Recording should be via the heart.

A motto for archivists, taking off from 'Because I have a voice', is probably 'Because I have a voice recorder!'

Jayashree : What does one do with all the unedited raw footage one acquires ? The concern is whether these should go online for the public or not ?

Vikram : Many Peoples Many Desires presents an extremely balanced viewpoint. How did you decide what to include and what not to ? And how did you negotiate various strong opinions in the activist community ?

Jayashree : The film was made prior to the development of an NGO inspired language. There was footage of activists, the police commissioner etc which were not used. The film is simple, and just wants to convey the stories of people, something the audience has always recognised and appreciated. It was also nice that the people filmed were open about telling their stories.

7 Resurrecting histories : a panel discussion

Panelists

1. Maya Sharma, LBT activist from Baroda, author of 'Loving Women'

2. Owais Khan, activist and archivist, started some of the first LGBT networks

3. Anusha Yadav, of the Indian Memory Project

4. Ekta Mittal, from Maraa, filmmaker, worked recently on the Indian Labour Archives

5. Namita, from ALF, works on pad.ma

Moderator

Arvind Narrain, Alternative Law Forum, Bengaluru,

Vikram Doctor, journalist and activist, Mumbai

7.1 Maya Sharma – the tale of two Hansas

"We need to ask why such a spectacle is made of same sex relationships"

Maya has worked for many years with LBT women in Gujarat, from Baroda. She talked about the women who do not appear in her book, 'Loving Women' and spoke about two particular people in detail. She also pointed out that women who love women are mainly to be found in religious spaces.

She had heard of Hansa Patel and Elwina Fernandes, who had undergone a Maithrikarar ceremony and lived together in the 80s as a couple. Hansa belonged to a rich politically extremely well connected family. Elwina refused to marry, and lived with Hansa, and performed gender publicly in an open defiant fashion, there are documents about how Hansa would drive a scooter, and Elwina played a more traditional womens part and so on. They lived together for 8 years and then Elwina disappeared. Maya met her brother, traced information through various local contacts, painstakingly dug out nuggets of stories and so on, but still does not know what happened. Hansa accused her family of killing Elwina. Her politically well connected family made it complicated. In 2002, Hansa was killed as well and payed the price of questioning her family, and the state.

When Varsha, the journalist who first wrote about the couple, interviewed Hansa, she was asked what they have done that was so special that brings Varsha to their doorstep, and we need to ask why such a spectacle is made of same sex relationships.

Maya then talked about another Hansa, of the Darbar community, in a village near Dandi. Every month, Hansa would put a red dupatta on her head and become Mataji and people would come to the temple for puja and pay obesiance to her. The remaining days, she would be in a shirt and pants. She lives with another woman, an adivasi and they openly talked about living together. The partner told her that she calls Hansa as Ajay, but is also the Mataji.

We need to archive such happier stories too. Maya then showed photos of the women, and of the newspaper cuttings. These two examples of painstaking research and documentation are important to learn from. She has a host of such stories with her but is at a loss as to how to use them or what to make of them.

The important lessons to be learnt were the importance of local informants to provide information.

7.2 Owais – archiving the community and safeguarding the archive

"The need to create, unearth and preserve herstories of the margins"

Owais started by talking of history and herstory, of how the state archive belongs to the former, and what we are doing now belongs to the latter and the need to create, unearth and preserve herstories of the margins.

Owais has been collecting archives for decades now, and had collected 5 different archives so far, of which only one is remaining. He does not know what happened to the other four. The first archive he made was the Gay Info Centre in 1992, which is now lost, including the archives of the original lgbtindia email list. Many people collect material and we do not know how to hand it over to someone for safekeeping.

Other events from the 90s which were documented were Project Mamta about the spate of lesbian couple suicides, Operation Sparsh to contact politicians, the first pride walk in India on 2nd July 1999 in Kolkata, and the first tv programmes mentioning LGBT issues between '97-'00. How do we retrieve material like this now ? We also need to document the experiences and memories of older activists, like some of whom have unfortunately passed away. We seem to have also forgotten some of them from our narratives, like Arvind Kumar, Ashok Jethanandani and Siddharth Gautam, and Rakesh Rathi who published 'Lotus of Another Colour'. Queer Ink is now publishing anthologies and has offered to help print or publish such older material.

Hence one of the main issues to be resolved is how to access personal archives that people have in their houses or have left with their friends, and how to safeguard them afterwards. We also need to document the experiences of our allies and the diaspora.

7.3 Anusha – the Indian Memory Project

"We need an internet strategy in this age, to market our ideas."

"If you reveal your life to people, they will reveal their back to you"

Anusha Yadav is the creator of the path breaking Indian Memory Project, which traces the visual and oral history of the Indian subcontinent through photographs from family archives (http://www.indianmemoryproject.com). Anusha is a photographer and a graphic designer who wanted to do a book on the various cultures and traditions in India through a collection of peoples' wedding photographs and she realised that each photograph would elicit information about many other things like polygamy, inter caste and religion marriages etc. Personal stories are hence linked to the nation's story and the idea for the project grew from there. This template is now used in 6 other countries as well. She then showed a presentation on the project.

She pointed out that if we do not document history, children will grow up thinking Akbar looks like Hrithik Roshan since history is getting increasingly changed through Bollywood.

She then explained the process of people commenting on a photograph, and the photo acquiring a context, through a couple of amazing examples, of how we collectively can recreate history. Earlier

for example, the photographer was the cultural police, he would tell families how to sit, how to pose, etc. For example, almost all family portraits from western India have the women sitting down, and from eastern India have them standing up.

The project has been very successful in attracting the attention of people as well as persuading them to contribute their family's stories. Using simple language helps, academic language puts off people, especially the youth. We need an internet strategy in this age, to market our ideas.

Vikram : archivists are often accused of being self-indulgent. How does one not do that and still get people interested ?

Anusha : If you are excited about a story, you have to show people that you are excited, and then they get interested, for example, the now famous photo of the last silk route trader from Kargil. Also, if you reveal your life to people, they will reveal their back to you.

7.4 Ekta Mittal – exploring the Indian Labour Archives

"Archives can also be a site for new imaginations"

" We need to think of how these archives get edited for access"

"It is limiting to think that archive is only a space to preserve"

Ekta works at Maraa, a media collective, and is also a film maker, currently working on migrant workers building the Bengaluru Metro. She collected a large amount footage in the process and was thinking of what to do with all of it. It seems like suddenly everyone is talking about archives these days and that is promising.

The IFA has funds now to encourage artists to look at state archives, pull stuff out and work with it, and release it into the public realm. This grant helped them to look at a relatively unknown goldmine, the Labour Archives in Noida, Delhi. It has more than 350 oral transcripts, audio tapes, images and letters. These tapes were largely inaudible, they were taken by activists at protests etc, not taken with a conscious intent to preserve, and so also photographs that weren't technically qood quality. But as they listened to these tapes, they started thinking about all the things that are not available as sound, or even accessible as interruptions, background noise and so on.

Archives are public institutions meant to disseminate information into the public realm but their material hasn't necessarily been preserved for public access. We need to look at how preservation and access are linked. Archives can also be a site for new imaginations, and conversational asides, interruptions, ambient sound etc can add new textures. We need to think of how these archives get edited for access.

She then described the ways in which her two recent films, 'Down the Rabbit Hole' on the metro workers, and the second one on comrade A.K. Rai's work with the Jharkhand miners mixes archival footage with contemporary recordings as well.

The whole point of working on the Labour Archives is to broaden the imagination of the archive itself, and it is limiting to think that archive is only a space to preserve.

Queer archives need not just create stories of queerness. One should think of how these archives can be used by other people in different ways, for example, Sumathi and Sunil's idea of recasting their oral interviews in the form of theatre. Let the possibilities of how to work with archives remain open. Simultaneously, we need to think of opportunities to engage with interdisciplinary artists, and

provide them access to these archives.

7.5 Namita – a queer short film archive

"Popular culture lends itself to queer reading"

Namita and Nitya Vasudevan have been working on documenting Indian queer short films. Namita showed clips from three of these. This was more a documentation than an archive project given the paucity of queer material. One is then forced to look at other themes like love, sex, porn and so on. Steadiness of category is, hence, not easy to assume. In addition to Indian films, many diasporic films also talk of LGBT issues.

The contemporary, with the proliferation of different forms and films, makes the present moment interesting. This is also a moment marked by piracy.

Even if there is no way to locate a queer short film in a period, popular culture lends itself to queer reading. To imagine a separate cinema that is queer may be counterproductive and maybe we should redefine the popular as queer.

7.6 Ajay Cadambi – the online music archive

"I just wanted to share my music with everybody"

Ajay spoke the next day about his Indian classical music archive, which runs exclusively online. Students do not have an opportunity to listen to musicians who are no more and he has been assiduously collecting recordings from all over the country, starting from 1902. He started putting them online, mainly on facebook, and now on soundcloud etc as well. These online recordings are annotated with comments on behaviour, public persona of the artist, the ways of performance and so on. They also have photographs of performances when available.

A large part of what he has uploaded is his own collection, but it also includes private collectors material too. These are uploaded after requisite permissions have been sought from the copyright holders.

8 Global LGBT Archives

"Is decriminalisation a necessary condition to run stable archives"

"In general, websites seem to be stronger when they are connected to a physical archive"

Niruj talked about global online LGBT archives and the lessons to learnt from them. There are more than 20 LGBT archives in the world which have an online presence. These are listed separately in the appendix. These online archives are of many types – some support physical archives, some are archives by themselves, some are specific research projects and some support campaigns or organisations. Each archive deals with a specific set of identities (LGBT, LGB, T, G etc). The scope of the archival material is also diverse, from those pertaining to a city, or a province, to an entire country or continent or a global archive.

Physical archives seem to be situated in a variety of places, namely universities, public libraries, special LGBT spaces, a part of governmental or non-state archives, history societies, museums, LGBT community centres etc.

They also contain a huge diversity of material, from books, magazines, audio and video tapes, to files, personal papers, flyers, pamphlets, posters, banners, newspaper articles, letters, secret diaries, T-shirts, buttons, uniforms, art work, badges etc and also catalogues of, and links to, other archives.

Physical archival spaces are good to have, it facilitates ease of storage in a safe manner, and establishes credibility in soliciting additional material. On the other hand, there is an issue of safety, for example, the New Zealand archive was set fire to.

One common characteristic of physical archives is that almost of them started after decriminalisation. Is decriminalisation a necessary condition to run stable archives ? Who starts these archives is also interesting, they range from queer librarians, queer journalists, queer museum curators and various LGBT groups themselves.

An important question is how long do online archives last. Some of them have disappeared even over the last one year, whereas some have become bigger and more well-defined. Archives started as a research project by students tend to disappear. In general, websites seem to be stronger when they are connected to a physical archive.

There does exist a queer archiving community in the world and they operate through a number of ways. There are queer archiving publications, and even queer archiving conferences. Hence there is a global community for us to tap into, and learn from.

9 What to archive, who archives, how to archive and fund ? : general discussion

9.1 Opening comments :

(By L. Ramakrishnan and Niruj Mohan, moderators)

"We need to queer existing archives"

Given the diversity of India, national initiatives like in other countries described above will not work and we need to look at not one national LGBT archive but at many archives, along with maybe a meta archive. We need multiple forms of the archives, physical, online etc, dealing with the very different things different people document, while being conscious of the linguistic diversity around us. We can also think of crowdsourcing archiving, for example, newspaper articles. Even if we have no designated authority or a central archive, can we arrive at a model whereby people still take responsibility for monitoring and collecting what is around them ? Can we ask each queer group to maintain their archives and share them, and can we offer support for such activities ? How do we deal with privacy and confidentiality issues while doing so ?

An issue with online archives is that of impermanence, URLs change and pages then cease to exist. We need to then archive the contents of each online page as well.

Archiving needs different sets of skills; we need people who know how to to oral history, people with research backgrounds for qualitative research and so on.

Lastly, we need to try and queer existing archives. We also need to think of whether we need to expose ourselves to the world by making everything public.

9.2 Archiving vs documenting, and a lesson in grammar

"Archive as a noun and Archive as a verb"

"We also need to question the decision making process of determining archiveable value"

"the category of LGBT and to what extent can we stretch back and impose these categories."

"Even among the thousands of contemporary images of pride marches, we may find that one image which communicates differently."

Saleem started this discussion with some comments based on the previous day's proceedings. He raised the issue of blurring the lines between documentation and archiving. Documentation can be about any material, by anyone at that moment, but archiving is about collecting and researching material that is on the verge of being lost, by someone not involved in creating that material. Copies of a readily available book belong in a library and not in an archive. People cannot archive the work they are doing, they can only document it and leave it to the future to archive it suitably; what is archivable is for the future generations to decide. We should also be careful not to have a disdain of

history.

The ensuing discussion made it clear that we do indeed need to separate collections, documentation, databases and archiving. On the other hand, it was felt that even in contemporary times, experiences may disappear and we would need to archive those. Even among the thousands of contemporary images of pride marches, we may find that one image which communicates differently. Also, the idea of the archive is motivated by an anxiety of the vanishing past. This anxiety of the historian is from using the 'archive' as a noun. However, amateurs use archiving as a verb, and we need to figure out a meeting point between the two. There exists a range of practices to deal with memory, with this verb.

Fear of the vanishing past, however, is not the only motivation to archive. There are a host of emotional motivations like love, pride, sense of justice etc, which also propel us to archive. Recording the contemporary as it unfolds, for example, is possible now with the internet. This even allows us to be a bit playful about it. In addition, how does the hyper availability of material online affect the way we choose to preserve them ?

If only material that is rare and is in danger of disappearing is to be archived, how does one predict this process ? The answer might be to link the library or collection with the archive, used as a noun. The problem arises when the physical archive and the act of archiving gets mixed up, it is ok for a group to document itself, but this has to be placed in a larger context for it to be a meaningful archive. From this perspective, it is important to link online archives to physical archives.

On the other hand, we clearly do not have resources to imagine a physical archive and a collection of smaller collecting processes may be optimal for now. We also need to question the decision making process of determining archiveable value. It may also be difficult to do any kind of collecting without ones own politics coming into the picture. An additional point is the category of LGBT and to what extent can we stretch back and impose these categories.

9.3 Ethics of documenting/archiving

"Archiving teaches us humility and to practice restraint"

" The camera can record anything, but the context in which you do so is what is important"

"How does one archive advocacy processes sensitively, and what moment one chooses to do so?"

One of the films shown previously, of the two women killing themselves in a village in Bengal, sparked a discussion on the role of the archiver. Lakshmi started by saying that her experience of archiving has primarily taught her humility and to practice restraint. We need to learn how to document, especially in times of crisis, without trampling on peoples feelings. Every person on the street carries a history with them, but we should learn to recognise when we can intervene. Also, not everything that happens needs to be made public in the form of images and videos. The camera can record anything, but the context in which you do so is what is important.

There are also issues about advocacy and archiving. The work done as advocacy can be archived, but how one does it sensitively, and what moment one chooses to do so, are important. The ethics of what to document and what not to, and what moment need to be thought about carefully. When documenting, especially when there are differences in class etc, we do intrude on cultural practices. There is a certain level of discomfort at the how much we intrude, and how objective one can be in those contexts. We also need to acknowledge the power of the camera, understand how it makes people censor themselves. How then do we judge the authenticity of what is captured ?

Another concern raised was about private papers, which form the backbone of archives. What does one do when someones leaves their private papers behind ? Sometimes these papers are left in someones possession with time-bound confidentiality clauses. We also need to figure out ways of dealing with passing on of our papers, dealing with private papers of friends we may happen to be in possession of, and so on.

9.4 Archiving as activism

"Can we look at the process of archiving as strategy"

Sumathi raised the issue of whether we can use the process of archiving as strategy, to talk about LGBT rights, and as a community consultation process. She was motivated by the 53 oral interviews done along with Sunil, where the transgender people spoke on political issues as well as their personal stories. Archiving can be used as tool to bridge the discussions in organisations, and feedback and concerns raised in the community, especially for legal strategy.

The community needs to decide what has archival value. Mainstream historians, for example, routinely dismissed the value of the material collected at Sparrow. We need to archive as a strategy, namely, active archiving. Doing archiving itself is an activist activity and this is what makes things worth archiving.

10 Future projects, networking, building archival practices : general discussion

10.1 Opening comments :

(By Shivaji Panikkar and Namita, moderators)

Can a digital archive be described as an archive ? There is scope for many smaller archives. Need they be affiliated to a larger physical one ? There is clearly not much money for archiving and hence collaboration is important. Can a zero budget archive be possible ? Can queer archives be placed under, for example, gender studies ? It is probably still worth pushing for the creation of a national level archive.

Institutions in India do not have a queer studies programme. Cultural queer production by people like Khakar, Sunil Gupta or Jehangir Jani was out of the activist sphere though they might have been activists themselves. There is no access to queer productions for students, from the context of art history, libraries need to be made more inclusive.

10.2 Building archives

"One should never be clear on what the purpose of the archiving work is"

"What is significant at this moment is not something we know now,

and hence the idea of what is important now should be set aside"

Lakshmi started by saying that one should never be clear on what the purpose of the archiving work is; it is not possible to very clear about the goals of an archive. Autonomy is important to the functioning of an archive, and affiliation with universities and institutions often entangle the organisation with unhelpful bureaucracy.

Placing too much faith in digitisation is risky, formats change, backward compatibility is not always assured. Physical archives are indeed important. Atleast a nodal archive would be useful, not as a monitoring body but as a collaborative or supportive one. Amateur archives are limited in scope. In addition, online archives are restricted to those who are conversant with using technology. However, physical archives are also not accessible unless you are able to travel.

Regional flavours will be lost if we have a single space of any sort and a national archive seems utopian. What may constitute a national archive may have to be separated from state level archives. Lakshmi questioned the credibility of large institutions to recognise, collect and maintain archival material. Shivaji reiterated the need to push for a national platform of some sort and that we need to help make public institutions work for us.

Lata pointed out that what is significant at this moment is not something we know now, and hence the idea of what is important now should be set aside. Lastly, Gautam emphasised that the process of accessing the archive is important and the physicality of where one accesses the system from should be a part of the discussion.

10.3   Collecting material

Vikram started with the example of the sec 377 case where people had to run around collecting relevant material at the last minute, and hence we do really need some centralised collections as well. He also pointed out that one of the largest archives of a part of the LGBT movement in India resides in the west in the form of funder reports from NGOs over the years.

One thing we could do is to apply for funds to buy a few scanners, which are sent out through the country to scan whatever is available in cupboards and trunks in peoples houses and smaller organisations.

Archivists do not often take precautions about their own collections. Some sort of standardised will which describes what should happen to our papers and collections may be good to draw up. Many such collections of papers belonging to friends are now with some of us, and we would need to evolve protocols on how to deal with them.

10.4   Archiving as community support

"Can this archiving process be made a source of employment for the community ?"

Various modes of archiving may need some skills training and we could organise training workshops for these, e.g. oral interviews. Can this archiving process be made a source of employment for the community ? We could apply for funds to train people and enable them to collect and document around their locality.

Many organisations have a lot of material in their offices, and years of experience of working with the community. Their members may not have the time or the technical expertise to document their work. Can a group of people take responsibility for helping such organisations document themselves ?

10.5   Funding

People who are running archival projects spoke about their sources of funding. Some of it came from grants and endowments from funder NGOs, and some of it came from individual donors. Lakshmi pointed out that corporates would usually want to identify the stakeholders involved and this is not possible for archiving. There are also issues of control and interference. Anusha spoke of how some of the support for her project comes from her regular job and how, for crowdfunding, marketing of your project is crucial.

Namita pointed out that BQFF is entirely crowdfunded and so are many other projects in the LGBT community. It would be useful to identify what is being archived, match them with people who would be interested and ask for funds from such individuals. Ensuring a diverse set of people's involvement in the project, breaking up the projects into smaller pieces and phases, etc all help.

11 Technical issues : general discussion

(By T. Jayashree and Sandeep Krishna, moderators)

"Do not throw anything away!"

We would need to discuss and explore options regarding software, hardware, storage, linking to physical spaces, coordinating multiple archives, access, security and so on. These are issues that arise repeatedly.

Storage is also a problem, both in terms of server space, which is expensive, and in terms of buying, storing and maintaining hard disks for backup of data. Amrita pointed out that certain websites do give free server space but the restrictions on size, downloads etc make it unfeasible. ArGaSMEI has now moved to pad.ma, for example. Sbe also clarified that ArGaSMEI can be used by any group, that it is free software and can be installed locally as well, and hence we can have multiple ArGaSMEIs, in fact. It can also store any software file, as long as it is keyworded according to some protocol.

There are also issues of format compatibilities, longevity of media, stealing of data, and disk crashes of various severity.

Sandeep brought up the issue of networking between multiple archives and how to set standards for this to be possible, especially for metadata and tags. Gautam responded that this has been solved partially already and we can use readymade solutions and that a few archives in Delhi also use them. We should also look at the Dublin Protocols for Metadata.

Oral history exists in several languages, in India. Lakshmi stressed that it is important to keep the original safely, and make the translations available. Translations are another area of difficulty. Most translations done so far in many archives have been relying on friends and this is something crowdsourcing can again be used for effectively. Not everything can be translated, though, and what cannot be translated can be annotated, like in pad.ma.

Lastly, it was agreed that a core group of people who would look into all of these areas and come up with guidelines is indeed needed. And that the message to everyone is − do not throw anything away !

12   Summary of the workshop

The workshop was summarised by Arvind Narrain of the ALF.

There is some clarity at the end of two days. Importantly, it is clear as to why we ned to archive at all, from all the presentations. Lakshmi's point about archiving human experience, Lawrence's point that the archive is a big gesture to future potentiality, and Namita's point about an archive being a pledge to the future, for example.

The archive needs to be useful for the future. In the queer context, it is, as Samidha says, also about fragments and feelings of remembering. Akanksha's film, with the letter and the picture of the girls tells us why it is so important to archive the queer experience. Owais's letter, the Declaration of Independence, is such a powerful document to archive and remember.

There was some creative disagreement about why we archive, which led to an interesting debate. What to archive was dealt with in many ways in the presentations. Is the archive about the contemporary or the past ? Is archive a noun or a verb ? There is also a tension between professional vesus amateur archiving.

Ethics of archiving was something that was talked about too. When do we intervene and who intervenes ?

Who uses the archive ? An archive in English alone will not reach large sections of society, a point raised by Sonu and Revathi.

Who archives ? Archives start by us remembering our own memories. Newspaper cuttings then come into play as concrete records. Sumathi and Revathi interviewed many people from the community and this is valuable material.

What motivates the archive ? It is the fear of disappearance, but it is also love, joy and playfulness.

Archiving is linked to activism as well, and this link needs to be explored further. Lata mentioned the concept of a thoughtful archive.

Funding is an issue, as always. Can we explore crowdfunding ?

What do we digitise and make public, and what do we keep secret ? Does everything need to be shared with everyone ?

There were some concrete suggestions that came up, as well.

- Organise a oral history training workshop
- Put together material to help groups document their own work
- Buy scanners and send them around the country
- Set up a core group of people atleast for the technical part of the work
- Set up protocols for dealing with your own and your friends personal papers after you have passed on
- Explore archiving research programmes, e.g. Srishti in Bengaluru
- Coordinate with nascent activities in Nepal and Sri Lanka
- Identify collections to add to ArGaSMEI

- Apply for fellowships for archival work, e.g. IFA

13   Displays at the workshop

There were three kinds of displays of archival material at the workshop itself, which were solicited beforehand from the participants.

One was of magazines, books and reports published by various groups and organisations.

The second was Owais's collection of photographs and documents from the 90s, one of which included the Declaration of Independence ! These will be archived on ArGaSMEI, but the declaration is reproduced below.

The third were a collection of T-shirts from various pride marches, festivals and other events. These were then 'archived' by photographing participants wearing them !

14   Acknowledgements

Lastly, to everyone who was there – it was an amazing workshop, now let a thousand archives bloom !

15 Appendices

15.1 Appendix I – workshop schedule

Start time	Title	Speakers	Moderator
DAY 1	17/08/13		
9.30 am	Welcome	Niruj	
9.45 am	Archive fever in the age of Digital Reproduction	Lawrence Liang	
10.10 am	Designing an archive : a panel discussion	Shivaji Panikkar, C. S. Lakshmi, Saleem Kidwai	Danish Sheikh
11.10 am	Tea		
11.30 am	Presenting ArGaSMEI	Niruj/Sonu Niranjan/Priya Prabhu/Amrita Chanda/Shubha Chacko	
12.15 pm	Online Queer Archives : a panel discussion	L Ramakrishnan, Samidha, Namita Aavriti, Amrita Chanda	Nitya Vasudevan
1.00 pm	Lunch		
2.15 pm	Screening : Bolo movie		
2.30 pm	Archiving our experiences : a panel discussion	Sridhar Rangayan, Sunil Mohan, Sumathy Murthy, A. Revathi, T. Jayashree, Shubhagata Ghosh	Saleem Kidwai
4.00 pm	Tea		
4.30 pm	Resurrecting histories	Owais Khan, Anusha Yadav, Ekta Mittal, Maya Sharma, Nitya V./Namita Aavriti	Arvind Narrain + Vikram Doctor
DAY 2	18/08/13		
10.00 am	Global LGBT archives	Niruj	

Start time	Title	Speakers	Moderator
10.15 am	What to archive, Who archives, How to archive ? How to fund ?	General discussion	Niruj Mohan + Ramkrishnan
11.15 am	Tea		
11.45 am	Future projects, networking, building archival practices	General discussion	Namita Aavriti + Shivaji Panikkar
12.45 pm	Lunch		
2.00 pm	Screening : Ayisha Abrahams movie on Ram Gopal		
2.15 pm	Technical issues	General discussion	Sandeep Krishna + T. Jayashree
3.15 pm	Feedback and summary	Arvind Narrain	

15.2   Appendix II – ArGaSMEI

ArGaSMEI

(Archive of Gender and Sexuality Minorities Experiences in India)

What is ArGaSMEI ?

ArGaSMEI is a free, open-source software platform which can archive collections of documents, keyword them (using a set of words which describe the contents), and let the user search and download subsets of these documents based on these keywords. This platform has been built by Amrita Chanda, as a part of a pilot project on queer archiving, funded by the IDS, Brighton and is available for anyone to use and adapt. The document collections can be of any media – newspaper articles, photographs, flyers, posters, book reports, catalogues, etc, and is hence incredibly flexible. ArGaSMEI is built using Python on top of Django.

What does ArGaSMEI contain at present ?

The pilot project involved building the ArGaSMEI software. The database we have used, which is now inside ArGaSMEI, are newspaper article clippings of Sangama, Bengaluru, for over a decade. We have specifically chosen those dealing with female born sexual and gender minorities. Sonu Niranjan (from Aneka, an NGO in Bengaluru) went through the entire Sangama (an NGO in Bengaluru) newspaper archive and chose those which are about female born people, and scanned them to disk as images. These are 640 in number, and date from 1984 to 2011.

How were the current contents put into ArGaSMEI ?

Priya Prabhu (from Aneka) then devised a comprehensive system of categories of keywords, along with the rest of the team, and proceeded to keyword each scanned image. These keyword categories are, for example, date of publication, newspaper name, language, author, identities involved, nature of reporting, issue keywords, etc. Some of these categories have only a specified set of keywords (e.g. Nature of reporting can be factual, informative or sensational), whereas some, like issue keywords can be anything (medical, legal, family, violence, marriage etc). Priya Prabhu keyworded all the scanned articles, which included ones in Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam in addition to English. These were then rationalised and read in to ArGaSMEI. This can now be used to search through keyword categories (for example, to show all sensational articles published in The Hindu between 2002 and 2004 dealing with marriage and the law) and the results downloaded.

Can anyone use ArGaSMEI ?

What is in the archive is public, can be searched and downloaded by anyone, and has an easy interface. If you would like to upload content (images, scanned copied etc), keyword them, modify keywords etc, you can get do so by getting a user account for the system, again through a simple easy-to-use interface.

How can you use ArGaSMEI for your archiving needs ?

The code for ArGaSMEI is freely available under a Creative Commons License. If you have a collection of images representing anything – photos, articles, flyers, posters, etc, you can use ArGaSMEI. You are welcome to use our archive to store your material. You can also use our software on your server and set up your own archive if you need do. All you need to do is to identify server space, upload your images, and keyword each image as you upload them. This dataset can then be made public and anyone can use ArGaSMEI in turn to search through them using a combination of keywords and download them.

What can be stored in ArGaSMEI ?

Anything which is scanned into images, and can be described in keywords can be archived. This is not restricted to books, magazine, newspaper articles or photos, but can be used for archiving collections of letters, poems, flyers, pictures of T-shirts, private photo albums, film catalogues, etc, which can be of a personal nature.

We would encourage you to look through any LGBT archival material you have access to, and invite you to use ArGaSMEI to archive them for the public to use.

Contact details :
- Amrita Chanda (amrita.chanda@gmail.com)
- Niruj Mohan Ramanujam (nirujmohanr@gmail.com)
- Namita Aavriti (continuity.girl@gmail.com)

15.3   Appendix III – online resource material

Some queer and non-queer archives in India

*   SPARROW (Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women), an archive in Mumbai about women
    (http://www.sparrowonline.org/)

*   Pad.ma (Public Access Digital Media Archive), an archive of text-annotated video material, primary footage and unfinished films
    (https://pad.ma/)

*   Orinam, a bilingual (English and Tamil) website with information and archives on alternate sexualities and gender identities
    (http://www.http://orinam.net/)

*   Archives of Indian Labour, an archive of the history of labour in India, in Delhi
    (http://www.indialabourarchives.org/)

*   Bolo, an Indian LGBT oral history project
    (http://www.projectbolo.com/)

*   Indian Memory Project, a visual and oral history of the subcontinent through family archives
    (http://www.indianmemoryproject.com/)

*   Expressions of Suppressed Voices, an archive of some of the videos of interviews by Sunil and Sumathi
    (http://expressionsofsupressedvoices.blogspot.in/)

Some global LGBT archives

*   GALA, in South Africa
    (http://www.gala.co.za/)

*   IHLIA, in Amsterdam
    (http://www.ihlia.nl/)

*   One Archives, for Univ of Southern California archives
    (http://www.onearchives.org/)

*   Out There, London Metropolitan archives
    (www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma)

- LAGANZ, LG Archives of New Zealand (LAGANZ)
  (http://www.laganz.org.nz/

- National archive of LGBT history, New York
  (http://www.gaycenter.org/community/archive)

- Hall-Carpenter Archive, UK
  (http://hallcarpenter.tripod.com/)

- WRHS, LGBT archive of NE Ohio
  (http://www.wrhs.org/research/category-4d9c17ff-a7ae-4497-af3f-025650e2fe08.aspx)

- Lesbian Herstory Archives
  (http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/)

- GLAMA, GL archive of mid-america, in Kansas
  (http://library.umkc.edu/spec-col/glama/index.htm)

- Calgary Lesbian History project
  (http://calgaryqueerhistory.ca/)

- LGBT archive in Philadephia
  (http://www.waygay.org/)

- GLBT historical society in San Francisco
  (http://www.glbthistory.org/)

- Transgender collection at Univ Michigan
  (http://guides.lib.umich.edu/content.php?pid=29017&sid=253054)

- Fonds Suzan Daniel, Belgium
  (http://www.fondssuzandaniel.be/Newsiteen/index.php)

- Archive in Western Univ, Canada
  (http://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/)

- Canadian Lesbian Gay Archives
  (http://www.clga.ca/)

- Transgender archives, Univ Victoria
  (http://transgenderarchives.uvic.ca/)

- Religious Archive Network
  (http://www.lgbtran.org)

15.4   Appendix IV – Panelists

- Akanksha : activist and archivist from Sappho for Equality, Kolkata

- Amrita Chanda : a freelance software professional and an LGBT activist, has been working on developing the ArGaSMEI archive for a few months now

- Anusha Yadav, of the Indian Memory Project

- Ekta Mittal, from Maraa, filmmaker, worked recently on the Indian Labour Archives

- T. Jayashree : documentary film maker, made 'Many Peoples Many Desires', based in Bengaluru

- C. S. Lakshmi : who has worn multiple hats as a writer, an archivist, a feminist activist, and is presently the founder director of SPARROW, the sound and picture archive on women, in Mumbai.

- Maya Sharma, LBT activist from Baroda, author of 'Loving Women'

- Namita Aavriti : works at Alternative Law Forum, and is a part of the Pad.ma collective

- Niruj Ramanujam : has been involved in this project from the beginning

- Owais Khan, activist and archivist, started some of the first LGBT networks

- Priya Prabhu : an activist working in Aneka, has been responsible for keywording the documents for the archive

- L. Ramakrishnan : works at Saathi and with Orinam

- A. Revathi : transgender activist and writer, has authored the first Hijra autobiography in India, along with other books, currently based in Namakkal

- Saleem Kidwai : has previously taught history at Delhi University and we have him to thank for his pioneering work on same-sex love in India: Readings from literature and history.

- Samidha : works with Orinam, an offline collective and an online resource space in Chennai

- Shivaji Panikkar : an art historian, and presently the Dean for the School of Culture and Creative Expressions at Ambedkar University, previously having worked for 25 years at the M.S. University of Baroda.

- Shubha Chacko : works in Aneka, has been involved in documentation for years, and was a part of this project

- Sonu Niranjan : an activist working in Sangama, has been responsible for scanning and cataloguing the documents for the archive

- Sridhar Rangayan : film maker, created the Bolo Project, and is a part of Humsafar, Mumbai

- Sumathy Murthy : independent activist and singer, has been working along with Sunil on the oral interviews, is also associated with LesBiT, Bengaluru

- Sunil Mohan : independent activist, been interviewing transgender people in the South, is associated with LesBiT, Bengaluru

15.5   Appendix IV – From the archives

DECLARATION OF FREEDOM

On this, the 28th Day of May, 1995,
We, The GAY People,
having solemnly resolved
formally to GIVE to Ourselves
Our BIRTHRIGHT —
The RIGHT to BE, who we are
The RIGHT to LOVE, whom we do
The RIGHT to LIVE, as we choose
all the time accepting
and respecting these SAME rights of our fellow beings
DECLARE OURSELVES FREE
of all forces which do not allow us THESE
SELF-EVIDENT RIGHTS;
And DEMAND
from our FELLOW CITIZENS
of The SOVEREIGN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC of INDIA
and this, OUR Beautiful and Beloved
ONE EARTH
to STAND WITH US and REJOICE
in the CELEBRATION of BEING
of LOVING
and of being able to continue LIVING,
and grant us WHOLE-HEARTEDLY
these OURS TOO
SELF-EVIDENT RIGHTS.
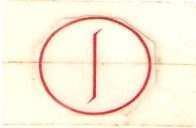
Resolved and passed at weekly
meeting of SAATHI, Hyderabad, India
with the whole-hearted support
of the following—