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## Sex revolution in small-town

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Girls from Lucknow, Patna, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Ludhiana, according to a sex survey by a leading weekly magazine, have sex at a much younger age (15-18), as compared to their counterparts in big cities. Women in Ahmedabad and Jaipur stand out for demanding greater variety in sex. People from Patna have the highest tendency to watch pornography.

Stories about rural runaway lesbian brides, sex change of a village schoolteacher from West Bengal, groups of girls caught from internet cafés watching pornography...  
Has the sex revolution really touched small-town India?

"Today, though, check out Saturday night. In Bombay, sweaty, bare-chested men are dancing with each other at the Voodoo, the country's first openly gay hangout. In the southern city of Bangalore, as in many smaller centers, discreet spouse-swapping parties are getting under way among couples who have found one another through classified ads. More and more Indians have decided that they are unfulfilled by mere glimpses or dreams, and a kind of sexual revolution is stirring - an unavoidable adjunct to the other sweeping social changes taking place."

This is an excerpt from a Time report about India's sexual revolution, published in 1996. Clearly, we have come a long way in the past ten years. The small town has taken over from the metro. The Mafatlal sex change story doesn't amuse us anymore. The rich and the famous can afford to have such prerogatives. It is not made into a big deal when Mumbai metro announces a free and open space called the Drop-In Centre where the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community can spend time without being prosecuted or condemned.

It is the story of Unnimaya, 23, and Sheela, 21, two self-confessed lesbians from Kerala that interests us. After the International Lesbian and Gay Law Association meeting in Toronto last year, E J Graff, a scholar at the Brandeis Women's Studies Research Center wrote about runaway lesbian brides in India.

"In their late teens or early twenties, these women meet each other and fall in love; when threatened with arranged marriages, they run away from their parents and perform their own wedding ceremonies in Hindu temples, exchanging garlands and anointing each others' foreheads with red dots. In response, each set of parents charges the other woman with kidnapping their daughter, sending the police to bring back the women back by force. But here the story becomes different from the stories three years ago, which ended in suicides. Local women's groups or online lesbian groups are now backing the girls in court -- and local judges are, incredibly, siding with the women. When the families harass the women, judges actually order police protection. Indian newspapers, of course, love these juicy stories, replete with disobedience, romance, and illicit female sex (which is not illegal, since Section 377 applies only to men). And so each pair of runaway lesbian brides inspires more women across that vast nation."

So has the sexual revolution really touched small town India? Yes.

Sex change operations took place in a village in Gujarat, even in 1987. Tarulata/Tarun Kumar underwent a female to male sex change operation and married Lila in 1989. Lila's father filed a petition in the Gujarat High Court saying that it is a lesbian relationship and that the marriage be annulled. The petition contends that 'Tarun Kumar possesses neither the male organ nor any natural mechanism of cohabitation, sexual intercourse and procreation of children'. Adoption of any unnatural mechanisms does not create manhood and as such Tarun Kumar is not a male. The petition called for criminal action under Sec. 377 .

In a paper titled 'The Law and Homosexuality in India', Sherry Joseph from the Department of Social Work, Visva Bharati University, Sriniketan writes:

"The concept of family refers to a universal, permanent and pervasive institution characterised by socially approved sexual access and reproduction, common residence, domestic services

and economic co-operation. Let me quote two instances of alternate marriage system as existing in India. Amongst the Nayar community in South India, who followed the matrilineal system of descent, several men could have access to a woman through the tali rites and subsequent Sambandham unions.

The Tali chain and locket worn a round the neck was tied by a man of appropriate ritual status on behalf of his sub-caste collectively, which acquired sexual rights over the woman concerned. These rights were extended to any member of the higher caste usually Nambudiri who was attracted to and was found acceptable for the woman.

Men who had Sambandham relations did not have any exclusive rights as husband or as father; the woman could withdraw the sexual access allowed to them at any time if she so wished. The right over her progeny was vested in her Tarawad (household of matrilineal kin). In the NayarNambudiri Sambandham, the latter could not ever dine with his wife or children, not to speak of sharing any domestic chores or economic activity.

In a small village Angaar in Gujarat, among the Kutchi community a ritualistic transgender marriage is performed during the time of Holi festival. This wedding which is being celebrated every year, for the past 150 years is unusual because Ishaak, the bridegroom and Ishakali the bride are both men.”

So all these ‘explicit’ acts of sexuality have been taking place for decades, centuries. The Kamasutra has its origins in this country and all that ... but there is simply no denying that the taboo and restrictions about sex, sexual preferences and habits have eased out the most now. Now, even in small town India.

The sexual revolution of the West is believed to be ignited by a technological breakthrough - the Pill. India's has been possible because of the liberation of the mind.

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